

LEARN TO LIVE A LIFE OF JOY

The headline read: **"Gallup calls religion the new frontier of social sciences"**. The article appeared in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, Saturday March 21, 1992. George Gallup Jr. says, "Modern times have confronted Americans with a bewildering array of problems, including disappointment with materialism as a measure of success. It is the failure of the American Dream, if you will."

For years, people have tried to find true happiness in the accumulation of things. Believing that those things, "the American Dream", if you will, would bring fulfillment in their life.

Now those who have not only achieved the American Dream, but have accumulated more "things", have lost marriages and families. Now after they have the "things", they are still living unhappy lives. The quest for just a little bit more, has left many people feeling empty inside.

Now the bigger house, newer car, better paying job, and bigger bank account have not satisfied the longing in their life for true contentment. You could say that the happiness they dreamed of is not a reality in their life.

All the things in this world
will not bring you true joy!

People everywhere are trying to find something that will fill the emptiness and void they feel deep down inside. That quest leads people in many different directions. They try alcohol, sex, drugs, religion but seem to come up empty in their search.

The world will try to satisfy the longing deep down inside of you. You may search and search but you'll never find true contentment. You may find happiness, but not true joy.

HAPPINESS IS AN EXTERNAL FEELING

If you ask a young person in high school what they want most in life...most of them are going to answer, "I just want to be happy!"

Happiness is an emotion that is based on the happenings or the circumstances around you. These happenings can cause feelings to be as up and down as a bouncing ball. If things in our life are good, we are happy; if they are bad, then we are sad. Happiness is based upon what and how our life is at the moment.

What in your life brings you happiness?

Is it...

- *A funny movie?*
- *Making cookies with the family?*
- *Giving a gift to someone?*
- *Finishing a project?*
- *Going fishing?*
- *The American Dream?*
- *Having lots of money?*
- *Other things?*

Happiness is very much a relative thing. To a two year old, happiness can be something as simple as a lollipop. To a ten-year-old, that same feeling might be a new bike for their birthday. For a fifteen-year-old, it could be getting off their braces. For Mom, it may be the single rose that Dad brought home. For Dad, it may be getting a new car.

All of these can bring this emotional response of happiness, but it is just a temporary feeling.

What happens when the lollipop is gone? After the bike has a few scratches? I know that after you have had your braces off it almost seems like you never wore them. Do you understand what I am trying to communicate? Happiness is just a momentary thing that can go as fast as it came.

When my daughter comes home from school, the first thing that she will ask for is a snack. Often the snack that she will ask for is ice cream. When we tell her that she can have ice cream, she will light up like a light bulb. It doesn't take much to make her happy, but it doesn't take very long and the ice cream is gone.

Happiness is something that people strive for, yet often the realities of life seemingly bring heartache, pain, misery, worries, fears and tears. They experience the opposite: unhappiness. For many people their life is shallow and empty.

A little boy was asked to give his description of salt. He said, **"Salt is what spoils the potatoes when you leave it out!"**

In our quest for happiness many lives seem to feel like something has been left out. After the goals have been reached and the toys accumulated, they still feel like something is still missing.

What is missing?**JOY IS INTERNAL CONTENTMENT**

Joy is not an external feeling, but true joy is an internal contentment. When King David needed God's forgiveness for his sin with Bathsheba he writes:

Psalms 51:10-12

"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence; and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of my salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit."

What do you think David meant when he writes, "restore to me the joy of thy salvation?"

As you look at David's life, what do you think restored his joy?

Joy doesn't depend on whether or not you got the promotion. It doesn't even hinge on whether or not you have problems in your life. It isn't determined by the kind of week, month or year you are having. If you are going to have real joy, it is a result of inner peace, that only comes through having a growing personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

When the Apostle Paul was in a Roman prison how could he pen the words from Philippians 4:4 that says, **"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!"**

In the book of Philippians, the Apostle Paul talks much about **joy** to the church in Phillipi, teaching them and us that our relationship with God doesn't depend on how we feel. Paul tells us that joy is more than just an emotional feeling we have in our lives, but it is a personal inner contentment.

In Galatians 5, Paul tells us that the fruit of the spirit is... "love, **joy**, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." That is why, as a Roman prisoner, Paul could still have the **joy** of the Lord. Paul realized that the joy of the Lord was his strength.

Is joy an outflow of a committed life?

Satan will do everything that he can to steal what God wants you to have. Joy is to be a natural outflow of a committed life in constant pursuit of God.

We need to learn to live a life of joy through the ups and downs, the victories and defeats and the trials and temptations of life. James 1:2 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds". We learn that through the most difficult situations of life, we can grow in our relationship with God.

This statement that James writes is for the brethren, that is...us, the Church. Along life's journey we will all have many trials, but consider it pure joy whenever you face them head on. The testing of your faith will develop perseverance in your life.

There is a difference between happiness and true joy! Happiness is determined by what happens in your life. Joy is what you experience when you know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.

Matthew 6:19-21

"Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourself treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there will your heart be also."

THE ENEMY

The Christian life is filled with battles. Paul tells us that there is a continuous battle going on between your flesh and your spirit. In **Ephesians 6:10**, Paul says,

"Finally be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."

We are aware of Satan's tactics. That is why it is important that you put on the full armor of God, daily! Satan will do everything he possibly can to tempt and sidetrack you and then to ultimately destroy you.

In **Ephesians 6:12**, Paul goes on to tell us about the battle that we are fighting. He says,

"For your struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against powers of this dark world, and against spiritual forces in the heavenly realms."

What Paul is saying is that we need to wake up and realize that we are in a spiritual battle. All the powers of darkness are fighting against you. Every-day Satan has designed a strategy to defeat you,

but...**I John 4:4** says,

"Greater is He that is in you than He that is in the world."

Whether we like it or not, we are in a war and have been placed in the front lines of the battle. If Christ is in you and you are abiding in Him, you have been given power to overcome any challenge that Satan will hurl your way. **JUST REMEMBER THE BATTLE IS NOT YOURS, BUT THE LORD'S!**

We know that the forces of hell are out to steal, kill and ultimately destroy you. Let's look at three areas of life that Satan will use to attempt to defeat you and steal your joy.

CIRCUMSTANCES

Many times Satan will use **circumstances** that are totally out of your control to try to steal your joy. The weather can cause you to become gloomy. The backed up traffic on your way to an appointment can cause you to become frustrated. Car trouble can cause you to become upset. The Enemy will use all of these circumstances to try to steal your joy. We know that God has given to us authority in our lives over the circumstances that the Enemy would use to try to defeat us.

An eight year old girl was standing at the front door with her friend. Her daddy has just come home from work. The two little girls were talking and the one little girl said to her friend, "Daddy must have had a good day at the office. He didn't squeal the tires or slam the door and he even gave mommy a kiss."

Satan would like nothing more than for your life to be run by your emotions, letting the circumstances that happen in your life control and rule your life.

PEOPLE

As soon as you get serious about God, Satan will use **people** to try to snatch away what God is wanting to do in your life. It may be the hypocrisy that you see in someone at church. Someone may call you a fanatic. One of your heroes in the faith may fail. Satan would like for you to get your eyes on people and to take them off of Jesus. You must be ready because the enemy will use anyone that he can to try to rob your joy.

THINGS

The enemy may try to use **things** to plunder your joy. It may be that you are so busy making money to buy things that you don't have time for God. It may be that you have so many "toys" that you are so busy playing that you don't have time for God. There is nothing wrong with hard work or "toys" so that you can relax and play, but do not let the enemy use them to get your eyes off of God.

A wealthy man moving into a new house, was being watched by a neighbor (*who believed in the simplicity of life*). This neighbor watched as the movers carefully carried in the chairs, tables, bedroom suites, boxes and more furniture. He went over to his new neighbor and said, "Neighbor, if you need anything come see me and I will teach you how to get along without it."

Keep Your Eyes On Jesus!

Hebrews 12:1-2

"Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author and finisher of our faith."

How can you apply this verse to your life?

THE EQUIPMENT

We know that we are in a battle because we are instructed to put on our armor. Paul tells us, "Therefore put on the **whole armor of God** so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground." If you don't take time to put on the armor of God, in the day of evil...you will fall!

Do you like to get pushed around?

If someone comes up to you and gives you a push, what is your natural reaction? You may size up the pusher, then if that person isn't too much bigger than you, you may react by pushing back. Nobody likes to get pushed around.

Put on the Full Armor!

When Satan comes around to attack you, Paul tells us to put on the full armor of God. Why? So that the enemy cannot push you around. With all the authority and power that God has given us...**Why do we let the enemy push us around?**

Each one of us has been given the equipment that we have need of for the war. Paul tells us to put it on!

*What pieces of armor are we to put on?
(Fill in the Boxes)*

The first piece of armor that Paul tells us to put on is the belt of truth. The second piece of armor that we need to put on, is the breastplate of righteousness. After that, we must have our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. Then Paul tells us that we must take the shield, which is faith. Then we need the helmet of salvation. The last piece of equipment is the sword of the spirit.

Paul knew about the armor that Roman soldiers wore. He knew the importance of every piece. He tells us to make sure we have on the **full armor** of God.

Understand there is an enemy that is out to steal what God has for you. That is why you must get yourself equipped, trained and ready for the battle and the attacks of the enemy. When you have the full armor of God on, you are ready for whatever the enemy will throw at you.

Let's take a little closer look at the armor. If the battle is going to be won, we need to put it on, but what does it mean? In your own words, what do you think is the importance of the pieces of the armor.

This may require some study for you to understand about the armor. You may find that a Bible dictionary would be helpful for you to better understand what Paul is saying about the armor.

What is the "belt of truth"?

Scripture Verses

Psalms 51:6

Jeremiah 31:33

John 14:6

What is the "breastplate of righteousness"?

Scripture Verses

I Thessalonians 5:8

I Corinthians 1:30

What does it mean to "have your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace"?

Scripture Verses

Ephesians 6:15 (Amp)

"And having shod your feet in preparation (to face the enemy with the firm-footed stability, the promptness and the readiness produced by the good news) of the Gospel of peace."

Psalms 66:8-9

Psalms 18:33

Ephesians 2:3

What is the "Shield of Faith"?

Scripture Verses

I Samuel 22:31

Proverbs 30:5

Psalms 3:3

Psalms 7:10

What is the "Helmet of Salvation"?

Scripture Verses

Psalms 140:7

II Corinthians 10:3-6

I Thessalonians 5:8

What is "The Sword of the Spirit"?

Scripture Verses

Psalms 149:6

Hebrews 4:12

Do you remember the story of
David and Goliath?

In **I Samuel 17:38** David has gone down to see his brothers on the battlefield. As he was greeting his brothers, Goliath (the giant from Gath), stepped out and shouted his usual defiance and David heard it. When the soldiers of the Israelite army saw the giant, they all ran in fear.

In **verse 32** David said,

"Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him."

Then little David goes on to give King Saul his credentials for being able to defeat Goliath. David told the King, "I have fought and killed lions and bears while tending my father's sheep. This Philistine will be like them because he has defied the armies of the living God."

In **verse 37** David declares, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

I Samuel 17:38-40 (KJV)

"Then Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a helmet of bronze on his head, and clothed him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword over his armor, and he tried in vain to go, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, 'I cannot go with these; for I am not used to them.' And David put them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in his shepherd's bag or wallet; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine."

When Saul realized that David was serious about fighting Goliath, what did Saul give David?

Just like David couldn't wear Saul's armor, neither can you try to wear someone else's armor. You have to have your own belt of truth. You have to wear your own breastplate of righteousness. You have to have your feet shod. You have to pick up your shield of faith. You must put on your helmet of salvation and make sure you have your sword of the spirit.

Don't you try to use
someone else's armor.

THE ENERGY

After Paul tells the church of Ephesus to put on the full armor he says, "And pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." **Prayer is what gives us energy for the battle.**

After we put on the armor, then we need to rely on the power of God to help us in the battle. There is tremendous power in prayer. Prayer changes things. Prayer changes people. Prayer changes life's circumstances. The energy for the battle comes only through prayer.

Isaiah 40:31 gives us insight into what happens when we pray.

"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings of eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint."

WHAT DOES PRAYER DO IN YOUR LIFE?

James 5:16 says,

"The prayer of a righteous man is effective and powerful."

- Prayer will cause you to get your focus off the battle and on to the One that can give victory in the midst of the battle.
- Prayer will make you wait for God.
- Prayer gives you strength.
- Prayer causes you to mount up so that you can fearlessly stand against the enemy.

CONCLUSION

As we pray, God gives us great power to fearlessly stand against any scheme that the devil would use to entrap us. When we pray, we can stand with all confidence against the enemy.

We learn to live a life of joy by understanding our enemy and his schemes. We learn to live a life of joy when we learn that we don't wage war in the way that the world wages war. You see...the weapons we use have divine power to pull down any strategy that the enemy uses against you.

We learn to live a life of joy when we learn to wait on God and let him renew our strength. We learn to live a life of joy by understanding that joy is found in His presence.

**Joy is an inner contentment that
only comes through a growing
relationship with Jesus Christ.**

