

Enjoy God Forever**Introduction**

Is pursuing joy high on your priority list? While obedience and duty is necessary **in the believers life, the pursuit of joy, gladness, and delight in God should be our prime duty** using obedience to help get us to that point.

“Instead, turn to the place the Lord your God chooses from all your tribes to put his name for his dwelling and go there. You are to bring there your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tenths and personal contributions, your vow offerings and freewill offerings, and the first-born of your herds and flocks. You will eat there in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice with your household in everything you do, because the Lord your God has blessed you.”
Deut. 12:5-7, CSB

If, as John Piper says, “**God is most glorified in me when I am most satisfied in Him.**” is true, then it stands to reason that finding joy and satisfaction in God must be our deliberate, lifelong, consuming pursuit. (Deut. 12:5-7)

The consequences of not pursuing joy with a glad heart in service to Him will ultimately blowback in our face and we will end up, begrudgingly, serving our enemies. (Deut. 28:47-48)

“Because you didn't serve the Lord your God with joy and a cheerful heart, even though you had an abundance of everything, you will serve your enemies the Lord will send against you, in famine, thirst, nakedness, and a lack of everything. He will place an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you.”
Deut. 28:47-48, CSB

All over the psalms and the new testament, we are reminded to pursue joy by shouting “joyfully”, “taking refuge”. “be in His presence” by enduring as Christ did, unto the cross and even suffering for His Names' sake. (Psalm 100, 51, 16; Heb. 12:2, John 16:24, 1 Pet. 4:13)

We do all this to join with saints who've gone before us singing,

Then I heard something like the voice of a vast multitude, like the sound of cascading waters, and like the rumbling of loud thunder, saying,
“Hallelujah, because our Lord God, the Almighty reigns! Let us be glad, rejoice, and give him glory, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has prepared herself.”
Rev. 19:6-7 CSB

Let's look into our passage and see how we can fight for joy.

1. God wants us to know the joy of His providential care for us in the long-term.

Verse 1-2: Tattenai was probably expecting the king to shut down the project but God had other intentions. Darius had a search done and found the decree by Cyrus some 18 years before in the summer residence for Babylonian Kings, Ecbatana. That decree not only released the captives but also:

- Allowed the rebuilding of the temple (**v. 3**)
- Allowed the rebuilding of the walls (**v. 4a**) & paid for it (**v. 4b**)
- Returned all the sacred vessels used for worship in the temple (**v. 5**)

God's providential care is also seen in the king's decree against Tattenai & others in his command too, "Keep away!" in **verse 6**. Not only does God provide what we need he is also providing the "room" to function in worship to Him with those provisions by:

- Protecting us
- Going before us and destroying our enemies
- Commanding evil to stay away

We have no power to do these things on our own. Yet another reason to find our joy in Him and Him alone! It's too easy to fall into the lie that things or relationships will bring us joy, but they end up only providing temporary happiness because **God is literally all that will fulfill that void in our life.**

In **v. 8-9**, Tattenai is also commanded to pay for everything out of his tax revenues. God used the degree of a pagan king to provide the materials for rebuilding and animals for sacrifices. Darius was superstitious and wanted all the peoples of his lands to pray to their god's for him and his sons. (**v. 10**) This shows he didn't believe in the God of Israel but it shows us that we can even have joy in the decrees of our pagan rulers because God uses their decrees for His glory! We need but to **trust and obey** and we will see the hand of God in the rulings of those in authority over us.

2. God wants us to know the joy of His provisions for us in the day-to-day.

Part of pursuing joy requires us to **see and rejoice in all the little and major things that happen to us**. He knows when even a sparrow falls to the ground and the number of hairs on our heads! If we serve a God that is concerned with small details like these, we shouldn't have fear that He won't take care of the bigger details in our lives. Start with taking the time to see the little blessings and follow through with rejoicing in praise to Him. That praise can look like:

- Worshiping Him in **song**.
- Going to Him first in **prayer** before indulging in other things that used to comfort us.
- Taking time out of your day to get into the **Word**, reading and praying for the Holy Spirit to reveal the things of God to us.

Why? Because **God inhabits the praises of His people!** We can't sin when we are praising Him because He wins in our praises! The very breath that forms our words, the brain waves that form our thoughts, the electrical impulses that move our muscles to do anything is literally Him! (Gen. 2:7) **So we have a responsibility to respond by using them for His Glory!**

In **Verse 13**, Tattenai and his colleagues followed the orders not because they were in support of the returnees but because they didn't care for the alternatives in **verses 11-12** if anyone did try to stop them. God doesn't always use pagan governments to provide but however He provides, whether through things like tax breaks or the generous giving of the Lord's people; it is God who does the providing. Therefore, **be filled with joy when you see His provisions**, big and small, and **REMEMBER** them like Paul, in 2 Corinthians 8 & 9, consumed with the joy of the generous gift of the Macedonians for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. He points out how God is glorified when our generous giving meets the needs of others. (2 Cor. 9:12-13)

What personal needs has God met in your own life?

Do you still complain because it isn't quite the way you wanted Him to provide?

Or are you content with the little needs met & willing to wait on the Lord for however long He keeps you here?

~ While you wait on Him, use the time you have to worship God by giving back to God in service to Him! ~

3. God wants us to know the joy of productivity in service for Him.

Verses 14-15: The temple was finally finished 20 years after the foundation was laid and about 4 years after the rebuilding began under the ministry of Haggai & Zechariah. 20 years is a long time but keep in mind our bodies are now the temple of the Holy Spirit. Pursuing joy in God Himself is another step in our sanctification as God takes time to build a lasting foundation in us, if we let Him. Let's take time to rejoice as He lays that foundation in us through many experiences that give us practice in trusting Him, building our faith up!

Physical buildings and even our own bodies are nothing compared to the work God wants to do in us. **The work of reconciliation through our sanctification takes time, money, pain, tears, energy.** When you look back on your life, do you see hope? Do you see how God kept you safe through tough times? Do you see how God used the good times to bless you and encourage you to continue on trusting, obeying and worshiping Him? We have to be careful not to get caught up in our American culture that says, "Do you." Or "Find what makes you happy and pursue it." If what you pursue isn't based on who God is in your life, like exercising talent given to you to bring Him glory, for example, go to the Lord in prayer asking Him to change your desires to conform to His. Ask for a heart that longs for the things of God and eyes to see what He sees and a will to obey Him.

Remember God will do these things in us so that we extend ourselves in ministry (service) to others. There is great joy in heaven when even one sinner repents! (Lk. 15:7, 10) The process of discipling that person is another service joy. While there is much frustration in that the 'project' is never finished when we look at ourselves or someone being discipled because of the setbacks and such; we can still rejoice in that process because that process is how God works out our salvation and theirs. (Phil. 1:6)

Our work for Him is never in vain (1 Cor. 15:58) and when we glorify God by bearing much fruit, our joy will be full! (John 15:8, 17)

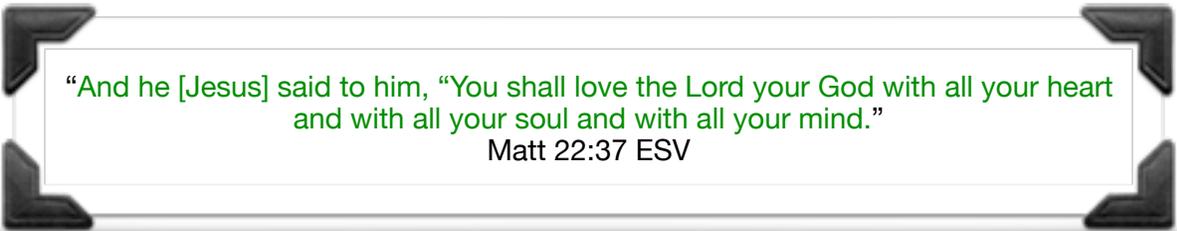
4. God wants us to know the joy of praising Him corporately.

Verses 16-18: When the temple was completed, the people gathered to celebrate the dedication of God's house and to offer up sacrifices, as a sin offering for all Israel. Their offering in **v. 17**, while not as grandiose as Solomons from the 1st temple (1 Kings 8:63), was a sincere offering of what they had and it was pleasing to God because not only was it a confession of failure but also of faith. As God makes headway in our sanctification and we come out the other end through the suffering, whether self-inflicted or externally inflicted; it is good to go back to Him in praise, admitting our sin and rejoicing how He brought us through along with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

James tells us that it is better to share the experience with others, admitting our sin (James 5:16) to each other, to value everything God has done with others not only because it keeps us all accountable but praise to Him together **completes the enjoyment of God!** Pursuing joy and praising God are not separate acts. John Piper said of C.S. Lewis' statement "*Praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment.*" Worshiping is the valuing of God and when it becomes intense it turns into joy. **Therefore worship is delight in God, which displays His all-satisfying value.** **Verse 18** shows the commitment of the Israelites worship of God's value by putting things back in place by appointing the priest and Levites to their divisions and orders.

Do we commit ourselves to valuing God this much? Putting things in place to worship Him the way He asks of us?

Our obedience, service, confession, accountability, praise, fellowship etc. are actions we can take to show we have faith in God and His promises. **How can we have true joy in God, who after all is the source of joy, if we won't worship Him the way He asks?**



“And he [Jesus] said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”
Matt 22:37 ESV

5. Lastly, God wants us to know the joy of purity and obedience to Him.

Lastly, lets look at how the returnees did this and learn from their example.

1. They rebuilt the temple “according to the command of God” (**v. 14**)
2. They organized their worship “as it is written in the book of Moses” (**v. 18**)
3. They purified themselves together (**v. 20**) along with others who separated themselves from the impurities of the nations of the land to “seek the Lord God of Israel” by celebrating the Passover (**v. 21**)

The observation of the Passover was a celebration of God's salvation, remembering their deliverance from slavery. For us, these feasts are consolidated into the Lords Supper, where we remember that Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed for us. (1 Cor. 5:7)

“Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new unleavened batch, as indeed you are. For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed.”
1 Corinthians 5:7

For their to be **true joy** in our worship, their must be **holiness** in our lives. We can't be like the Pharisees who publicly worshiped and even kept the law but were full of dead man's bones on the inside. Hypocrisy keeps us from being Holy (separated from the world) in our actions, words and in heart. Even though there were Pharisees that kept the whole law, they became so legalistic that they didn't carry through with love. Even they weren't holy because they broke a commandment, they put the act of pride in their legalistic ways above God and didn't love others the way Jesus showed while on earth.

~ **Purity and obedience are at the heart of true joy** ~

If you haven't noticed this yet, in your walk with the Lord, *ask Him to make the absence of joy in your life when you don't obey, abundantly clear to you.* You will start to notice the lack of joy in whatever you do. The peace you have as you go on about your daily routines or through tough times just won't be there like it was until you **confess your sin, praising God for His forgiveness and begin once again obeying His Word.** That obedience can and will look different in everyone's lives but the common thread is that it isn't easy because sin brings momentary satisfaction that can create addictions if we aren't quick to repent. Addictions develop when we continue to give into things that aren't good for us, mainly sinful things. They create biological dependencies on them instead of Christ.

Why do you think Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will not go hungry and whoever believes in me will never go thirsty.” (John 6:35) **Making Jesus the Lord of our lives in the good times and bad, when we obey and when we fall short is the key to being satisfied in this life on earth!** Ask Him what that looks like in your life with sincerity of heart and He will blow your mind with satisfaction you never knew you could have. But you have to be willing to go through the refining process He will take you through, not put you through. Jesus will walk alongside you as He teaches through your pain and suffering. ‘Trust and obey for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.’

Contrary to public opinion, purity in life and obedience to God and His Word do not rob us of joy, but when we do because of God's discipline through the consequences of sin it yields the fruit of righteousness.

“No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”
Hebrews 12:11