

Joy

by George Verwer

George Verwer's sermon emphasizes the importance of rejoicing in the Lord as a source of strength and community amidst life's challenges.

Duration: 38:28

Scripture: Psalm 16:11, Psalm 51:12, Habakkuk 3:17-18, Matthew 6:33, Philippians 2:2, Philippians 2:16

Topics: "Joy"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of rejoicing in the Lord always, even in difficult circumstances. He acknowledges that life can be challenging and filled with irritations, but encourages listeners to find joy in their hearts and express it wisely. The speaker shares a personal story of a team member who was angry with their leader for a mistake that almost cost their lives, but the leader responded with praise to the Lord, diffusing the situation. The sermon concludes with the reminder that when we reach the end of ourselves and our own strength, that is when God wants to meet us.

Transcript

It's Philippians, and I'd like to just consider a little bit, as the Lord continues to prepare our hearts for prayer, and I know we've been praying throughout the day, just to think a little bit about this whole area of rejoicing. And Philippians sometimes is referred to as the Epistle of Joy, with a great emphasis on joy. I tell you, it was a great joy when I got this Bible back.

Some of you know the story of this Bible. I left my other Bible with Bob Rose in Florida. By the way, the Lord opened the door for Bob today to meet with Dr. James Kennedy of the Coral Ridge Church and the founder of Evangelism Explosion.

What he decides, Dr. Kennedy and a few other people in that area, in some ways will determine whether the ship Lagos goes to Fort Lauderdale or not. And that's one of the reasons Bob is staying behind. I was also a little bit involved in that, and maybe that's something else we should be praying for.

This is the Bible that was lost for over 20 years in Europe. First Bible I ever really seriously studied, first year at college, where I got the messages that are on the orientation tapes, and I lost it around 1963 in Europe. And last year at the Easter European Evangelistic thrust, a German young man came up and asked me if I'd be interested in having this Bible.

He got it from someone else who found it somewhere. So I've been getting a lot of extra vibrations with this old Bible, first Bible I ever marked. And it's interesting that in the very front I pasted a little poem, there is an eternal hell.

Hell, what is it? And it gives all the Bible references on the subject of hell, something that had so gripped my heart. I wrote these words, in 1961, 140,000 souls a day pass away into eternity. Well, the book of Philippians has always been one of my favorite books, and perhaps we could just turn to chapter 3 for a moment.

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. It's interesting after this positive note, we have beware of dogs.

I brought a gift back to my daughter. Whenever I make a journey, I like to bring a gift back. So I bought her a big American beware of dog sign.

I got it at a discount. But this is speaking about another kind of dog. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

For we are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh. Some of you who have been around O.M. for one year are probably making your lifetime evaluations of this movement. And probably if this is a normal O.M. crowd, some of you have decided that in September you're leaving.

Some of us have been around making evaluations for 25 years and we're staying, at least some of us. But you know, it's so easy when we join a fellowship to really somehow expect that our joy is going to come out of that fellowship. Or if we get in a real visionary work and when you first heard about O.M., I'm sure it challenged you as a visionary on the move missionary fellowship.

We thought, you know, boy, if we get in that, you know, we're really going to get challenged and we're going to be excited and we're going to have a lot of spiritual energy flowing through us. There's certainly nothing wrong with getting joy in the work that we're doing. I think one of the reasons that I can work long hours is because I get some degree of joy out of what I am doing.

But the bottom line of living the Christian life is found in this whole thing of learning to rejoice in the Lord. You know, a lot of Christians right now are going through pretty miserable times. So many of the people who come up to me for counseling after my meetings, I will tell you, they are in serious situations.

What do you say to these people? You can't rejoice. You're not allowed to rejoice until you get this sorted out. No, to the contrary.

We challenge people to rejoice in the Lord. Recently a Christian leader sent out a newsletter. The whole newsletter was about joy and how that spoke to my heart.

That the Christian is joyful. You know, one of the things that has really plagued me at times, and I'm not saying that from anything I've seen here in the last week because I just got here. I haven't seen anything here much.

But one of the things that has greatly disturbed me about the OM Fellowship is sometimes the joylessness. The joylessness that exists. Instead of finding people working filled with joy at the privilege of

working for the King of Kings.

If I believed I worked for OM or STL or EBE, I'd quit tomorrow. I'm going to have a board meeting tomorrow. I'll give in my resignation.

I'm working for King Jesus. And that's what's kept me going when I found OM a bit of a pain in the neck. And when I found my fellow OMers a bit of a joyless crowd.

And when I looked into the mirror and discovered I wasn't exactly a watchman knee. Rejoice in the Lord. One of the things when I first started to mark my Bibles, I didn't prepare this for tonight by the way.

This was prepared 27 years ago. I drew all these lines around to tie in the related verses. So just look at some of these verses in chapter 2. Verse 2. Fulfill ye my joy.

Fulfill ye my joy that you'd be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord and of one mind. Is it possible for us to bring joy to God? Now there is a sense in which God needs nothing. He is almighty.

He is omnipresent. But there is another sense where because of the very attributes of God, it is possible for us to realize that as believers we can bring joy to the heart of God. Fulfill ye my joy that you'd be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one heart.

This is one of the things we know brings joy to God. Look over in chapter 1, verse 25. And having this confidence I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith.

The Apostle Paul wanted to be a blessing to these people. This is incredibly important each time we have one of these prayer emphasis days or nights of prayer. To realize that this should be a joyful occasion.

That doesn't mean there's no weeping, no sorrow as we have to face heavy reality. You know when I heard on the radio today that they'd opened fire on little children down there in South Africa, number one I wanted to believe it was a mistake. I always like to wait until I hear the other side of the story.

I don't have overwhelming confidence in all that I get on the news media. But just the thought of anybody opening fire on children and the number of them are dead is something that just brings deep sorrow. And yesterday on the news I heard this man that climbed through some 78-year-old woman's window and raped her.

And you know things like this, if there's any sort of superficial joy at that moment it just goes. And praise God, the whole challenge of the Christian life is that we have to be a paradox. We are sorrowful it says in Corinthians.

We are sorrowful yet always rejoicing. I hardly now have a day because of the large amount of mail and posts I get and the large number of people I'm involved in. I hardly now have a day when there isn't something heavy that comes into my ears or on my desk.

And yet I know that it's God's will that I live a life of rejoicing. And I know not only that but God wants me to bring joy to his people. Verse 26, that your rejoicing may be more abundant.

They were already rejoicing. That your joy may be more abundant. Last week was my 31st spiritual birthday.

That should encourage the weakest problem-struggling Christian in the world. That a character like me, of course if they don't know anything about me it doesn't mean anything, but that a character like me who thought I wouldn't last even one year living the Christian life, much less two, somehow 31 years later is still rejoicing. And you know that moment of conversion is still so vivid.

Going down the aisles there in that huge Madison Square Garden, standing there weeping, receiving Christ as my Savior. And I can honestly say as far as I know that joy bell has been ringing in my heart every day for these 31 years. There's certainly been hours of the day when it sort of stopped, at least I didn't hear it, by bitterness, by depression, by some other difficulty, or a lapse, an ego trip, or some other sin.

But isn't it wonderful that when we repent and we go back to the cross, the joy comes back. David prayed after his great sin, God restore unto me the joy of my salvation. And that's something I think some of us know something about, the joylessness of walking in sin, the joylessness of walking in bitterness, or in lust, or in pride, or in spiritual arrogance.

Notice all the times joy is mentioned over there in the middle of chapter 2, verse 6, holding forth the word of life. This was one of the key texts for me as a young Christian, holding forth the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labor in vain. There's another whole side of joy and rejoicing, isn't it? We run the race, we press on, that I may rejoice, not just now, we don't want to just rejoice today, we want to be able to rejoice at the end of the race.

Now in order to rejoice at the end of the race, one thing is fairly sure, you've got to go to the end. And that's to me a great challenge. I've been getting so many encouraging letters lately from my books that I'm beginning to get convinced about them myself.

I may even start distributing some of them a little more overtly. But that little book I wrote, No Turning Back, seemingly has touched a lot of needy people in this area of perseverance. So because I was getting so many letters from Hunger for Reality, I didn't put any open invitation in No Turning Back to write, as I thought.

In the introduction it mentions Hunger for Reality in the letters, so I thought let them take the hint, but I'm not going to put any open invitation to write because we can't keep up with answering the letters. And they're actually due to these magazine books which have literally gone all over the world. The letters are still coming.

One lady who heard me on the 700 Club on television in the States wrote me this heavy letter, claiming that I surely must be exaggerating. How could anyone get 14,000 letters? If that's true, it must be the greatest book in the world. Please send me a copy.

But she didn't really believe it was true and she didn't believe I read all the letters. But what she didn't realize, which I didn't have time to say on the TV, of course, these letters had come over a period of 20 years. So it's not so many letters, it's just perseverance.

And the fact that people like all of you in STL keep distributing the book. Look at verse 17, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all for the same cause also do you joy and rejoice with me. If you go to chapter 4, therefore my brethren, dearly beloved, and long for, that speaks to me, my joy and crown.

You know, one of the greatest joys we have in our Christian life is one another. Now that's not easy for some of us. And we live in the age in which there has been this great triumph of individualism.

And I'm not sure if we can grasp what people in the Middle East experienced anew in terms of relationship, because the Middle East people are far more conscious of family relationships and the church became a family relationship than we often are in the Western culture. But you know, when we hear of people coming to know Christ, and through our feeble fellowship people are coming to Christ every single day. I've just even read of a couple more Muslims that have come to Christ.

That is our rejoicing. When we get letters back, as we do regularly, I get more than most perhaps, as a so-called author, of people coming to Christ through these books, through these tracts. That is a cause of great joy and rejoicing.

And what a challenge that is. Let's just read that again. Therefore my brethren, dearly beloved and long for, my joy and my crown.

So stand fast in the Lord. He always liked to mix that type of thing. Verse 4. Rejoice in the Lord always.

And again I say, rejoice. I just find that such a great challenge. Such a practical challenge.

Things are going wrong. It's too cold. The heat's not functioning in your bedroom.

People are smoking. Tomorrow is no smoking day. Just remember that, all of you.

But there's so many things that can irritate you as you go through life. I think it's a powerful reminder to us. It's so simple, so practical.

Rejoice. Rejoice in the Lord always. That doesn't mean we outwardly just always express our rejoicing.

I think we need wisdom in our verbal rejoicing. I think the first joy is in the heart. You know, one of our early teams had a terrible experience in Turkey.

And it was obvious the leader had made a massive blunder that almost got somebody killed. And one of the team members, who was obviously gripped by fear and in the flesh, he was flipping out. I mean, he was ready to just, I think, hit the team leader and when he approached the team leader and confirmed it, because the leader had made a mistake, that it almost cost them their lives, something like that, the leader said, well, praise the Lord, brother, and added some other little sentence.

And that was the end, I will tell you. This guy wound up and I think he did hit him. And he was later, he later for some reason, I don't know why, left the team and never came back in OM since.

And so, you know, let all of our words be seasoned with salt. And I don't think that as those people, the Christians, for example, watch the American space shuttle go out into space and explode, that it would be very wise to say, you know, even if you were British, oh, praise the Lord. Anyway, I know there was immediately a joke in Britain about, you know, needing seven more astronauts.

I forget the exact way that it was expressed, using the word NASA. But there's a time when our rejoicing is strictly an inward thing. Because somehow we believe, though it's a horrible, painful, terrible experience, God is going to overrule.

God is still on the throne. God is still God. And one of the things that backs that up, there's hundreds of verses in the Old Testament that backs it up.

But very, very clearly that passage that some of you have heard me speak from a number of times in the book of Habakkuk. Just turn there very, very quickly if you can find it. I have trouble finding it in this Bible.

There it is. Habakkuk, forgive the pronunciation. What's the British pronunciation for that? I've been working on that for a long time.

Habakkuk. Maybe that's the way to remember it. Habakkuk.

Anyway, turn to Habakkuk. Chapter 3, verse 18. Imagine 23 years and I still don't know the language.

Verse 17, although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive shall fail. The field shall yield no meat. The flock shall be cut off from the flocks.

There shall be no herd in the stalls. I want to challenge you to write your own paraphrase. Some of you from ICT, some of you from SDL, some of you in the garage, some in the warehouse, some in the tape duplication department, some in the book shop.

You write your paraphrase of verse 17 and submit it to me. I'd like to read it. Taking it into contemporary society.

Most of you aren't into farming, so you have to write a paraphrase. But you can see from that verse, that was as difficult, as miserable as any situation could be. And yet, what does it say? And this is the word of God.

Let's not play with the word of God. You can play with verbal cliches. Do whatever you want with them.

But let's not play with the word of God. Because otherwise it makes everything else we're trying to do in this movement seem ridiculous. Especially distributing Bibles to Hindus and Muslims, you know, throughout the entire world.

If we as Christians are playing with the word of God. Verse 18. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Can you say that with all your heart tonight? I will joy in the God of my salvation. You know, even in Christian work, it's possible to get so caught up with the work, as important as it is, that somehow God just is out of focus. He's out of focus.

19. The Lord God is my strength. This is practical.

This isn't just a matter of sitting back and gazing upon God in an emotional experience of worship. It's a matter of God giving strength. He will make my feet like hind's feet.

He will make me to walk upon mine high places to the chief singer of my stringed instruments. I don't know about here, but surely somewhere where someone is listening to this tape, on some little OM team out in the Middle East, down in the subcontinent, surely there's probably someone right now that's very close to throwing in the towel. I had another letter from a brother, an outstanding brother.

He's been out there many years. He knows the language. He said this past year, he's been so close to just throwing it in.

You know, the way people examine his ministry, it all looks great. He's doing one of these kind of missionary tasks that they write up in the books. And yet, he said in his letter, you know, he just felt so close to just throwing it all in.

And so often when we get to the end of ourselves and our own sort of small horsepower engine begins to conk out and the joy is no longer there, that's when God wants to meet us. That's what it's all about. It's when that married couple stands at the graveside of their little child that's just died of a cot death or of something else similar to that and are somehow able to worship, somehow able to experience God's presence, God's joy.

Remember clearly from Galatians and other passages, joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Look at Galatians, chapter 5. We all know this by heart, most of us, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy. Interesting because probably in OM there's been ten times more emphasis on love than on joy.

You know, revolution of love. I don't think I've ever written anything on the subject much of joy. I haven't even preached that much on the subject of joy.

Never denied it. Tried to demonstrate it and brought it into different sermons, but it's interesting here in this list of the fruit of the Spirit, joy is second. Maybe that's of no significance.

Just being in the list is important enough. This is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance, against such, there is no law.

Perhaps the greatest mistake some of us make when we think about joy is that we somehow think if it isn't something that God is doing in me, then if I'm joyful I'm probably faking it. And the last thing many of us want to do is fake anything. Perhaps your generation more than mine is the honesty generation.

We want to be real. We don't want to pretend. And I don't have a total final answer to this, but I know the Lord Jesus brings this statement into balance when he said, if any man come after me, let him deny himself.

Take up the cross and follow me. And something I've been emphasizing with God's people and I saw a very encouraging response to it in the past weeks, is that there's a lot of people praying today, Lord touch me, Lord do something new in my life. Do something special.

You know a lot of the people that respond to my invitations, and I don't always give invitations, to be filled with the Spirit or to make Christ Lord, some of them have already been through something similar just a few months before. In fact some of the young people have had a dozen or two dozen crisis experiences, where they've been zapped by the Holy Spirit or where they've had hands laid on them. Some of these kids have had their hands laid on them so much their heads are flat.

And they go to another meeting, really, they go to another meeting, they hear another speaker, the invitation is given, the special formula is given out, and they go forward and they ask their special prayer. And of course sometimes God in his graciousness blesses those people again. And they get filled again.

And they may get delivered, they may get help. But it seems to me that so often today people are asking God to do something that they must do themselves. I know when you even talk like this with some people who have a very, in my view, super spiritual approach to things, it gives the idea, that's self-effort.

You're trying to live the Christian life in your own effort. Lloyd-Jones, more than any other preacher, nailed that down. I don't know if he ever had a conversation with some of the ones that just over-emphasize what Christ is doing in you.

And young people especially, not reading the next book or getting to know that person and his temperament, pick up these little formulas that, you know, it's just Christ in you and if it isn't Christ in you, it's wood, hay and stubble. I mean, some of the messages we can hear, no one can stand up against these messages. We're all intimidated.

And I think it may be time for you to reread little Dr. Lloyd-Jones' book, *Spiritual Depression, Its Cause and Cure*. It's the easiest almost to sell book in the world. I cannot keep it in stock.

Just the fact that I tell people it's the very best Christian book out of 1,000 books I've previewed in 31 years, seems to start a few people to purchase copies. And how God is using that book. You know, if our whole operation here were committed just to the Bible and distributing that one book, it would be worth it.

Because it's 250 pages of dynamite. I don't know if it's just in that book or one or two other books of his I've read where he nails it down that living the Christian life is your responsibility. It's not your leader's, it's not O.M., it's not some mystical force that's come in.

If you're a believer, Christ is in you, the Holy Spirit is in you, of course he is the only one that can live this life. But you determine whether he does it or not. You can grieve the Holy Spirit, you can disobey the Holy Spirit, you can walk away from Christ.

And Jesus again and again made it clear, if any man come after me. And we know that they want to change and make that passage, any person come after me, because we don't want the women to be left out of that passage. So if any man or if any woman come after me, the Lord Jesus said, he or she must deny self.

And I believe it's at that moment that we deny self that we open the floodgate of joy. I'm not saying we should never pray, God touch me. You can pray whatever you want.

God touch me, God kick me, God roll me. But often times we are asking God to do something that which we have to do. We need to stir ourselves up a bit through repentance, through song and prayer, through worship.

I think we should practice more verbal praise with one another, even around the warehouse. Better to be classified as superficial than to be classified as dead. And I know when I lived out with the Buxing people in India, I felt they were overdoing the praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord brother, you couldn't even walk, you know, twenty-five you praise the Lord brother, praise the Lord brother, praise the Lord brother. And I thought these people, this is a record something going around here. And lo and behold after living among those people, I started that.

And it's helped. And I think that sometimes when we verbalize a word of praise when we don't feel like it, that actually turns the key. It actually opens up something in our minds, just like worship.

Often we don't feel like worshipping, but as we worship, something does happen. And our hearts, that when we came into the meeting we're cold or upset or focused on something else, suddenly change. Our hearts actually change in these meetings.

Many of you know a meeting I've come into with such a poor disposition. I don't know if any of you have any trouble with your disposition. I am somewhat of a moody person in a number of ways, and it has nothing to do with going to Moody Bible Institute.

I don't know if he had problems in that area. But so often I can go into a meeting or go to my office or go to my desk or get up even to preach with something not right in my disposition. But as I take that step of faith, as I begin to rejoice, Lloyd-Jones spoke to himself.

Are any of you into that? Great. By the way, a friend of mine just told me that his son got up sleepwalking and walked right out a second or third story window. So I don't know if any of you are into that.

It would be good if you could live on the ground floor. But Lloyd-Jones wasn't speaking about spiritual talking in your sleep, but throughout the day. And I find that sometimes my mind, and I'm sure you've had this experience, my emotion is going one way, and by speaking to it verbally, I can turn it around.

Other times I just sort of praise the Lord and let him turn it around. I really have this burden for the fellowship, our own fellowship and for all of God's people, that we would know more of the joy of God. In the last couple of years, finance has taken too much of our attention in OM.

We know that. We're human beings. God understands that.

What we have gone through, very few people can grasp. We have a lot to praise God for, in terms of his supply in the past few months. But the greatest need and the greatest burden all of us should have for OM is not, I'm sure you agree with this, is not firstly more money.

That isn't OM's greatest need. OM's greatest need is more of Jesus. More of Jesus reigning and ruling in our hearts.

When the problems come, when things go wrong, when our hearts get broken, when we disappoint one another, when we go to preach at a meeting and there's no response, even worse, you go to preach at a meeting and no one's even there. When things just go wrong, little things with our dear vehicles. I had a guest the other day with me, a dear brother.

I hadn't seen him in 25 years since we were together at Moody, a very well-known evangelist from Australia. And I said, why don't we talk as I go to take my car for a car wash. And so we went over to the car wash place.

An old man, a dear old man in front of me was all confused, so he was blocking the way and I helped him out. He left his token in the garage. We got him through.

Then I got through and into the car wash. Big line by then, people really starting to get uptight. And as the thing went back and forward and was ready to go, I turned the ignition.

Absolutely zilch. So here we are, this Australian evangelist and myself, pushing the car, the water dripping around. As soon as we got out, as soon as we got out, and I was still rejoicing in a mild way, I turned the key and the car started right up and away we went.

But it's amazing how little things, little things go wrong and the enemy tries to use it to literally rob our joy for a whole day, whole week, maybe even a whole year. I don't know what's been happening in your lives since I've been away. But I will tell you, if you've lost your joy, if somehow you don't have that, as Billy Graham talks about it, that spring in your step, that joy in your heart, you know, it's nobody's fault but your own, if you're a believer.

If you're not a believer, we'll be really happy to talk to you about how you can find Christ as your Savior, Savior and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in your heart. But if you're a believer, it's nobody's fault but your own. And you look at that verse in Habakkuk, we always think it's a team member or it's the leaders.

The leaders are usually the guys to blame, right? These guys, when are they going to get their act together and really start taking care of us, the sheep? We want to start a sheep protest movement. And of course, I get the letters, who's taking care of the leaders? What I'm saying is no excuse for any of us not to do our job, teaching, pastoring, counseling, all of which most of us are committed to 15 hours a day, 7 days a week. But ultimately, the joy comes from God Himself.

And most of the people that leave OM tell me that after they leave, even when OM has been a hard experience, that when they leave OM, it gets harder. And in many cases, they get less attention and less outward blessing. And I will tell you, many ex-OMers are in very tough secular work right now where they don't get a word of commendation or praise or anything but swear words from one week to the next.

And I don't make any excuses for any of the things we at times do wrong in OM, leadership-wise in whatever way. But I know that for myself and in terms of basic spirituality, our joy has got to come from God Himself. If OM brings you a little joy along the way, the way things happen, the answers to prayer, the books that go out, the souls that are saved, the ships that leap from port to port.

I don't know how Mike Pointer is getting his joy. I called him two days ago. I said, is the generator in? The generator is still in the factory in Germany.

And the ship finally had to sail from Italy. It's now in Malta. The generator is tested and ready.

Praise God. But it can't go to Malta. It's too expensive.

The generator will not be delivered until Gibraltar. I will tell you just the one story of that generator and you know when it gets there. That's one thing.

Getting it back in is a repeat of that whole Norwegian thing all over again. And I know one thing. If I were an engineer on that ship, I would want to be getting my joy from the Lord, not from the generator.

Ultimately, we believe that it will be in and functioning. Let's just pray. Lord, we pray for revival among your people.

We pray that people will not sort of sit back waiting for you to bless them in a special way, waiting for you to do something that you did in their life last summer, but that they will appropriate by faith. That which is theirs by inheritance. That which is there by the indwelling person of the Holy Spirit.

That which is there by the fruit of the Spirit and the truth and the power of your Holy Word. Father, we want to know what it is to rejoice. Even if not a single book is sold.

Even if not a single soul is saved. Even if not a single church is planted. Even if no one shows up on the summer crusade and not a single vehicle in all of O.M. will even move.

We want to rejoice in you, our God. And we know that's what's holding those people in those communist prisons right now. We know that's what's holding people in beds of affliction.

We know that's what's holding wives whose husbands have run out on them. Or children who have just seen their parents split. We know that's what's holding people lying somewhere with terminal cancer.

Your joy. Your fountain.

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