



James, the brother of Jesus, tells us, *"<sup>2</sup> Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance."* (James 1:2-3 NIV)

James is writing this because we are going to encounter various trials as believers and our joy will be at risk. What is joy? Why do we lose our joy? How can we get our joy back when we've lost it. For me, joy seems to be when I know God has me in the palm of His hand and I know that He's taking care of me. When I lose my joy, I feel abandoned by God. I feel alone and out on my own. I feel like God isn't even aware of my condition. When I feel joyless I can get deeply discouraged or depressed and wonder how in the world I lost my joy to begin with, and then I wonder how in the world can I ever get it back. I'm sure I'm not alone in this cycle of joy.

This past week I've thought on this deeply as I've prepared this sermon. And I think we can lose our joy in a zillion different ways. But, I want to look at 4-5 instances in scripture, and analyze what happened. What went wrong in these people's lives. Most of the instances we find in scripture of people losing their joy usually is at no fault of their own. I think that's interesting. In some cases, a person may have contributed to the loss of joy and then in other cases, a person can be pretty much responsible for the joyless condition in which they find themselves.

### **SATANIC ATTACK - NO FAULT OF YOUR OWN AT ALL - JOB**

Many of the times that we lose our joy, frankly it isn't our fault or something we did. We do not think about Spiritual Warfare much because it's easy to get caught up in blaming Satan for any and all little hardships that we encounter, but Satan definitely is in the business of stealing our joy. Believer, if Satan can't have your soul, he wants to kill and destroy all important to you, and he wants to steal your joy. Most of us are familiar with the story of Job. Job was a righteous man that loved God. In the Biblical account, Satan (the accuser) came to God and asked permission to destroy Job's life. God gave him permission to do anything and everything to Job except take his life. As we read the Book of Job we painfully see Job lose his possessions, his animals, his servants, and then all of his children are killed in a windstorm that destroyed his house. Job did nothing to cause what came upon him. The text tells us that he was a righteous man that loved God. Satan came to God and asked for permission to sift Job. God allowed it, but told Satan he could do anything to Job except take his life.

Job's friends asked him what sin he had committed to anger God so. In other words, they blamed him. His own wife told him "Curse God and die." Instead of listening to the noise of his wife and friends, Job refused to believe that God was anything but good. In a moment of final spiritual reality and surrender Job said, "even if He kills me, I will still keep loving Him."

(paraphrased). In fact, Job believed that he would someday have a chance to see God face to face to ask Him why these things had been done to him. You can read Job's declaration of trust in Chapter nineteen when he says, *"I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. <sup>26</sup> And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; <sup>27</sup> I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:25-27 NIV)* Job found joy in the midst of his misery believing that God was good and he would have a better day, and that someday His redeemer would explain it all.

### **SATANIC ATTACK – LITTLE FAULT OF HIS OWN – THE DISCIPLE PETER**

Likewise, Peter was sifted by Satan. Very few of us are familiar with an interesting passage in Luke 22. In that account, Jesus tells Peter that Satan has come and asked permission to sift him. *"<sup>31</sup> 'Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.'"* (Luke 22:31 NIV) Did Peter possibly contribute to his sifting and loss of joy? Perhaps. Remember it was Peter who on the very night of this account took a sword and cut off the ear of someone coming to arrest Jesus. Peter was so confident in his own spiritual strength that when Jesus talked about being crucified, Peter tells Jesus that he will NEVER turn on him EVER. You can almost hear Jesus saying, "really Peter? You've got to be kidding. This very night in a couple of hours you'll claim that you don't even know me." So perhaps Peter's contribution to his misery and loss of joy was his own self-righteousness and spiritual arrogance. He didn't think he could fall. Quickly we know, he denied he even knew Jesus, the cock crowed three times (Peter ate crow), and Peter's joy was gone. Satan sifted him. He turned Peter upside down and inside out, and took the hide off of him, but Peter recovered to ask for forgiveness and Jesus restored him. Peter is one of the great pillars of the new church that we read about in the Book of Acts.

### **LITTLE FAULT OF HIS OWN – JOSEPH, PRINCE OF EGYPT**

Most of us are familiar with the story of Joseph. He was one of 12 sons born to Jacob, and the text in Genesis 37 tells us that he was Jacob's favorite. Jacob made a coat of many colors for Joseph and Jacob doted on Joseph. Joseph began to have dreams of sheaves of wheat bowing down to him and stars bowing down to him, and instead of treasuring the intimate things that God had put into his heart, he became a blabber mouth. Can you imagine how the conversation must have gone at the breakfast table? "Wow. I had this cool dream last night and all of you all were bowing down to me and serving me. God is telling me that I'm going to rule over you all someday." Mic drop. The text tells us that even Jacob his father rebuked Joseph. (that's a nice way of saying that his dad told him to shut up). Some of us have been spoken to by God or had God put deep secrets into our hearts. We should guard those carefully. They are given to us and if God had wanted Joseph's brothers in on the secret He would have put the dream in their minds. Joseph created chaos in sharing the intimate things that God had showed to him. Well, the story is long but Jacob ends up being sold by his envious brothers into slavery to Egypt where he is falsely accused of adultery with the wife of a government official, and poor old Joseph ends up in prison. In time, and through a remarkable chain of events, God elevates

Joseph to be president of the land of Egypt. His brothers came to the land to buy food to survive, and Joseph had a chance to pay them back for the wrong that they had done. Instead, he chose to see how God worked their evil intentions for good. In the end he told them, “*what you meant for evil God used for good so that His people would be preserved*” (author’s paraphrase). Joseph looked beyond a situation that he really didn’t cause and realized God had a greater spiritual purpose for all that had happened.

## **EXHAUSTION CAN STEAL OUR JOY – ELIJAH**

Elijah was a prophet that was doing EXACTLY what God wanted him to do. In 1 Kings chapter 18 we read that he was engaged in a great spiritual battle with the prophets of Baal in the land. The God of Israel showed up, and in the end the text tells us that Elijah was victorious and killed every one of the prophets of Baal. Can you imagine the joy you would feel if God showed up in a miraculous way and defeated all of your enemies. So what happened to Elijah? The Bible tells us he lost all of his joy and he went into a great depression. Why? He was EXHAUSTED. He was exhausted physically, spiritually, emotionally, and in every other way.

Elijah then got into a fight with Jezebel who was queen in the land. After his great spiritual victory, he ran out of fear from the wicked queen, and chapter 19 tells us Elijah gave up and just wanted to die. He basically wanted to commit suicide.

*<sup>4</sup> Then Elijah walked for a whole day into the desert. He sat down under a bush and asked to die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he prayed. “Let me die. I am no better than my ancestors.” <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the tree and slept. Suddenly an angel came to him and touched him. “Get up and eat,” the angel said. <sup>6</sup> Elijah saw near his head a loaf baked over coals and a jar of water, so he ate and drank. Then he went back to sleep.*

The Bible goes on to tell us that God ministered to him in his exhaustion until his joy returned. Sometimes, we’re just worn out and we need to turn off the phone, get off of Facebook, stop listening to the news, stop talking to others, and we just need to sleep, eat, and sleep some more.

## **LOSING OUR JOY AS WE SIN - DAVID**

The Bible tells us that David was a man after God’s own heart. God delighted in David and David delighted in God. Even today, David is a hero in present day Israel. Why? Because there’s a whole lot of David in each of us. We can be so desirous to follow the Lord and rejoice in Him and then we do something sinful against God.

David couldn’t keep his eyes off of his gorgeous neighbor Bathsheba. He kept watching her bathe up on the roof, and he decided that he had to have her. So the Bible tells us he just went and took her. And to make matters worse, after he had committed adultery with her, he tried to cover up his sin by having her husband killed so he wouldn’t find out that David had gotten his wife pregnant. Sounds like a “man after God’s own heart, doesn’t it?” David’s joy was gone. He was broken. Psalm 51 is one of the sweetest confessions and restorations that we can find in

the Bible. It's a good prayer to pray when we feel that we've done something to grieve the heart of God, and when we've done something to throw our joy and the joy of others out the window.

In his repentance David cried out, <sup>10</sup> *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.* <sup>11</sup> *Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.* <sup>12</sup> *Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*” (Psalm 51:10-12 NIV) David admitted to God that he had sinned against Him, and he prayed that God would grant him the willingness to just get back in line with God's will for his life. When he said, grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me', he was telling God, "I am so rebellious Lord, make me a willing servant so that the joy I have in you will be restored".

## **THE AMAZING EXAMPLE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL**

The apostle Paul probably spoke more about joy than anyone else in the Bible. Paul shouts to us in scripture. <sup>16</sup> *Rejoice always,* <sup>17</sup> *pray continually,* <sup>18</sup> *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-17 NIV)

Paul is telling each of us that in the end JOY is a choice. When it is lost, for whatever reason it is lost, the answer to get it back is the game. CHOOSE JOY - PRAY CONTINUOUSLY - ENTER INTO A SPIRIT OF GRATITUDE [THIS SEQUENCE IS GOD'S WILL FOR THE BELIEVER] Joy cannot be kept and joy cannot come back without prayer and thanksgiving. That is the formula. The restoration of joy is often not an immediate thing. Job had to wait a long time to be restored. Peter had to wait a few days or weeks. Elijah probably had to wait a couple of months or so as God ministered to him. But one thing is for sure, it won't return without continual prayer, and it won't return without thankfulness. Paul is saying we have to turn our minds and intellects over to Him to where we are praying, "God, I will give you thanks in all of my circumstances because this is your will for me. God I choose to believe you're good and you know what is best for me. God restore to me the joy of my salvation." Scripture is telling us that if we exercise those disciplines of surrender joy will return. It may be a wait of hours, days, weeks, months, or years, but joy will return. That is a promise of God.

Paul who wrote this had no human reason to rejoice. He tells us, *"I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.* <sup>24</sup> *Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.* <sup>25</sup> *Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,* <sup>26</sup> *I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.* <sup>27</sup> *I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.* <sup>28</sup> *Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.* <sup>29</sup> *Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?"*

In spite of all of that hardship Paul tells us to choose joy. For Paul there was no physical reason at all to rejoice. He was in prison. He was dying. So, in his heart of thankfulness he just began

praising God that the gospel was being spread. He rejoiced that the Gentiles had been grafted into the branch of Abraham.

For us, joy is not an option. Regardless of your past and the traumas of your past; and regardless of your present and the present suffering and hurt you may feel, we are commanded to be joyful .

The Bible says, “This is the day the Lord has made. Let us be joyful and be glad in it”. (Psalm 118:24) Scripture also tells us, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice!”(Philippians 4:4) It does not say rejoice that things are going your way, or rejoice that your life has no turmoil. It says REJOICE IN THE LORD, and in Him alone.

We may end up without joy due to no fault of our own, a little fault of our own, or a whole lot of fault of our own, but we are told to ask for the filling of God’s Holy Spirit, and we are to get our minds off of those negatives and focus on positive things. (Philippians 4:8) When the Holy Spirit fills us, fruit pours out of our souls and our lives. We plant, water, and fertilize the tree when we pray without ceasing, and when we begin to give thanks in everything. The fruit of the work, God’s work in us, is beautiful *“<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23 NIV)*

So, in these examples we see that sometimes we lose our joy through something we’ve done or an attitude we’ve had, but not always. The key in every case is to trust God that He is good and say “God if it’s something I’ve done, convict me of it and make me clean, give me a willing spirit to sustain me, and Lord, if it’s nothing I’ve done, help me to pass through the fire with thanksgiving and restore to me my joy in you. It is my joy in you that is my only strength. At the very end of Paul’s life he tells us how to do it.

*“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:11b-13 NIV)*

Let us Pray.

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