

What Steals Your Joy

Air Dates: June 12 - 16, 2023

Day One

If you could measure joy—how joyful you are—any guess what score you would get? Have you been joyful much lately?

Well, there is no way to measure just how joyful you are, but you surely know when you're not joyful, right? So, my question is, "What is stealing your joy?" We know from Galatians 5 that joy is part of the fruit of the Spirit—evidence that the Spirit of God indwells you. So, as Christ-followers, joy should be our trademark. But too often it seems like joy is very elusive. One day we get a flash of joy, but life seems to steal our joy so easily, and it can seem pretty bleak.

Could it be that guilt or shame is stealing your joy? Do you beat yourself up a lot because you keep dwelling on how you don't measure up? Maybe you are ashamed of something in your past, or feeling guilty because you blew it yesterday? Well, here's some good news for you, as someone has said, Jesus doesn't follow you around with a scorecard. He's not making a list and checking it twice—no way. Jesus wants you to live in freedom from your past, freedom for sins that have been forgiven.

I love this verse from Isaiah 61:7: "Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance. And so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours." Of course, this was written to the people of Israel, but it applies to us as well. Jesus is your friend as well as your Savior, and he wants to give you a double portion of his grace and replace that disgrace, that shame you're carrying around with his everlasting joy.

In Hebrews we read that Jesus endured the cross and scorned its shame for the joy that was set before him. He scorned the shame of the cross—he rejected that scorn, he refused it—so that you as his child can refuse the shame that is stealing your joy.

I just want to encourage you to refuse to let the enemy steal your joy. That is his modus operandi—he's a thief and a robber. What can you do? Sing songs of praise; recite all you have to be thankful for; tell someone about Jesus. Stand up to the enemy and resist him by faith; he'll give up pretty quickly in the face of praise, and the joy of the Lord can again be your strength.

Day Two

Do you ever wake up some days and just feel like everything's wrong and nothing is right? I have those days. The joy of the Lord that we often sing about or talk about just seems to be absent. You know, when that happens, it's a good time to just stop and ask yourself, "What is stealing my joy?"

Sometimes we let people steal our joy, don't we? It could be that person you work with that just pushes your buttons, or makes your job more difficult, or disrespects you in some way. It could be someone you live with—a mate or family member—just people. Our lives are full of people and they often cause us lots of stress, frustrate us, and steal our joy.

What can you do when someone steals your joy—a lot? First, learn to put a shield up against their criticism or negativity or whatever it is they do or say that steals your joy. Pray in advance that God will help you shield your mind and emotions from their joy-stealing tactics. As my friend, Jan Silvius, says, picture yourself in a castle with a moat around you, and just pull up the bridge when the joy-stealer comes your way. You may not be able to avoid them, but you can shield your mind from them.

Also, don't spend any more time than you have to with joy-stealers. Proverbs 13:20 says, "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm." Choose your companions carefully. Certainly we never treat anyone unkindly or arrogantly, but it is important that we avoid people who continually try to steal our joy.

It's important to pray for those people in your life who are difficult. Ask God to help you understand why they are the way they are—to see them as God sees them. When you can look beyond their behavior and have some understanding of what lies behind it, you may be amazed at how that changes your feelings and actually gives you compassion so that they just can't steal your joy any longer, even if they never change.

Day Three

We know that joy should be the trademark of a Christian. But the thing is, there is so much negativity and bad news in our world today that if you're not careful, the enemy will steal your joy. That's one of his favorite tactics. So, what or who has been stealing your joy?

Whatever or whoever it is, realize that it is a satanic flaming arrow coming your way, so put on your full armor and refuse to lose your joy. How? First, resist the devil as the Bible says, out loud if possible; just resist him verbally. Let him know you're on to him, and you are not subject to his joy-stealing ways, resist his onslaught, and the Bible says he will flee from you. So, that's step one.

Maybe you're thinking that there really isn't much to be joyful about: You've got money problems, or health issues, or there's a relationship that's going sour—or on and on and on. We live in a world packed full of stress and worry and trauma and discord. So, there's plenty of joy-stealers hanging around these days.

But as Christ-followers, we are supposed to rejoice always, right? That's what the Apostle Paul told us over and over, and believe me, he had plenty of joy-stealers in his life, too. So, being joyful has to rise above our circumstances, doesn't it?

If you want joy in your life, first pray Psalm 51:12: "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." Remember the joy of your salvation? Remember the joy, the amazing peace, the freedom from sin that received from Jesus? Ask God to restore that joy to you.

Then, do something positive to get the joy going. Sing or hum a praise song. Just sing to yourself. I mean, actually sing good songs to yourself. Sing words into your ears and into your heart. Find the humor in your day. Laugh a lot. Then, make a list of answered prayer. Or make a list of what you have to be thankful for. Make yourself focus on the good reports instead of on the joy-stealers.

Day Four

Sometimes our joy is lost because of where we allow our minds and thoughts to go.

For example, are you harboring any bitterness? Maybe it's just a wee bit, but there it sits in your mind: that resentment and anger and self-pity that you've never really given over to Jesus. You try to erase it from your memory but it just keeps coming back, bringing with it all that hurt from who knows how long ago. And that bitterness starts to eat away at you again.

Maybe you thought you had forgiven them but it just keeps creeping back into your mind. Well, that's because sometimes you have to forgive the same thing many times. When Peter asked how many times he should forgive, and suggested seven should be very generous, Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:22). In other words, just forgive again, but above all else, don't let that bitter root stay there because it will grow and cause you to be cynical and unloving. It is a major joy-stealer.

And did you realize that envy can steal your joy—the act of comparing yourself to others? When compare yourself to others and feel envious of who they are or what they have, you are opening your door for Satan to come in and steal your joy—guaranteed. Someone has said that envy makes us root against the well-being of other people, and you can be sure that envy will leave no room for joy in your heart.

So, if bitterness or envy has found a place in your mind, you can do something about that today, this minute. By God's grace, refuse to let those envious thoughts dwell in your mind—run them out, replace them with good thoughts, and when you get rid of them, joy will return.

Day Five

There is no more effective testimony that you can have as a Christ-follower than to consistently be a joyful person. Someone has said, "Joy is the flag flying high above the castle of the heart, announcing that the King is in residence there." How's your flag doing? Is it flying high these days, or are you allowing something or someone to steal your joy?

Well, what can you do to get that joy flag flying high over your heart again, so people will see that Jesus lives there? Here are three verses from Psalms that tell us how:

Psalm 16:11: "You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Joy comes the more you are in his presence—finding joy in knowing God through Jesus and spending time each day with him—just you and God. Are you doing that? When you do, you will be filled with joy.

Psalm 19:8a: "The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart." God's word gives joy. It's just that simple. Reading God's word, memorizing it, studying it—I promise, it brings joy to your heart, no matter what's going on. So, is Bible reading a high priority on your to-do list each day? It will put joy in your heart.

Psalm 5:11: "But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you." Do you know what it means to take refuge in the Lord? It just means you run to him first when you need comfort or help or strength. He will spread his protection over you and shield you from those joy-stealers. Do you love the name of Jesus? Is it the sweetest name you know? Do you love to talk about him, sing about him; is Jesus everything to you? You will rejoice and be joyful when that is true.

It's time to unwrap that flag of joy, raise it to the top of the mast, and fly it high!