

## Joy Killers

*As Presented by Lisa Bishop*

Air Dates: June 19 - 23, 2023

### Day One

There are joy killers in life and I want to talk about the keys to cultivating greater joy. Who doesn't want more joy? And here is what is true: You were created to experience joy. So why can it feel so fleeting at times? The first joy killer is putting your joy in the wrong things.

Several years ago I read a book, "*Man's Search for Meaning*," by Viktor Frankl. One of the themes of the book is the idea that as human beings, we think we are in search of pleasure in life but what we really seek, what our hearts truly long for is purpose. We want our lives to have meaning but we can get sidetracked in the pursuit of pleasure. While life does bring pleasure and God designed us to experience it, when we chase it or base our ultimate joy and satisfaction on it, we will be depressed and sorely disappointed.

The Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes has the well-known verse, "meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless." Ecclesiastes describes King Solomon's account of the suffering, misery, and emptiness that came from seeking after foolishness, meaninglessness, and materialistic pursuit; and that ultimate hope and meaning is in discovering truth and seeking after God. Solomon tried the world's brand of happiness and found it to be lacking as we hear his words in Ecclesiastes 2:1-2. "I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.' But that also proved to be meaningless. 'Laughter,' I said, 'is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?'"

As a King, he had all of life's pleasures at his fingertips. Although he could have anything his heart desired, nothing he found satisfied him for the long term. Even the work of his hands, although a good and meaningful aspect of human existence, led to frustration, failure, grief, and pain. While there is an overall depressing tone to the book, Solomon's conclusion points us to look beyond this life for our ultimate hope and that no amount of wealth, power, prestige, success, relationships or even wisdom will fully satisfy the longing of the human heart. Only Jesus can provide what nothing on this earth can deliver.

Life remains toilsome and frustrating at times, but Jesus gives meaning, purpose, and mission to those who believe and trust in him for their salvation. We do not have to follow the path of the world and seek fulfillment in things that will ultimately leave us craving for more. The joy of the world is hollow, but the joy of the Lord which comes from knowing God, abiding in Christ, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, is rich and abundant. The world's happiness will fade but the key to cultivating true joy is to be deeply rooted in a relationship with our Savior and find our meaning in him.

### Day Two

Have you ever heard the saying "Comparison is the thief of joy?" We're talking about joy killers and a sure-fire killjoy is comparison.

Have you ever been scrolling through LinkedIn when you see someone posting about a new job or promotion and you think, "Their life looks ideal. They're probably rolling in the dough and loving life." Or

maybe you find yourself swept up in social media, stumbling upon pictures of seemingly perfect families. The kids are smiling, dressed perfectly, even the dog is smiling, and the husband and wife look so in love. You look at other people's lives and think you got the short end of the stick.

When you survey other people's lives and surmise that theirs is way better than yours, you set yourself up to be disgruntled and you can be tempted to lament yours. Comparison can make you anxious and depressed and lure you into believing you are missing out on life. We all do it. It's part of being human, but if we aren't careful we can find ourselves down the rabbit hole of discontentment.

The other day I came across an article on Michelangelo, perhaps the most celebrated Renaissance artist of all time. The article talked about a poem Michelangelo wrote describing how much he hated painting the Sistine Chapel! He famously worked 65 feet in the air on custom scaffolding and wrote about the four years of physical toil. "I've already grown a goiter from this torture, hunched up there like a cat.... My stomach's squashed under my skin,....my brain's crushed in a casket....My brush, above me all the time, dribbles paint so my face makes a fine floor for droppings." Who knew Michelangelo was so disgruntled when everything looked so picture-perfect?

We can often look into people's lives and think everything is going swimmingly when in fact they are experiencing their own version of despising life. Not everything is as it seems. And comparing your life to others can provoke you to think and maybe even do some crazy things. It reminds me of the story of brothers Cain and Abel in Genesis chapter four. The account tells us that God was pleased with Abel's offering and not Cain's. Abel seemed to have a better life, more favor from God, and that caused resentment and envy to begin to build up in his brother. Cain resented God for blessing his brother and began despising Abel, which eventually led Cain to murder him. Now I know that is an extreme example but comparison can kill your joy and it is a slippery slope.

Who are you comparing yourself to? Whose life may look more pleasing than yours? How are you letting other people's seemingly perfect life steal your joy?

### Day Three

Do you remember the catchy tune, "I've got the joy, joy, joy, deep in my heart?" The song often referred to as "I've Got the Joy," is often sung at Sunday school and around the campfire and is a reminder that joy is an essential part of the Christian life. The song's chorus is:

"And I'm so happy, so very happy  
I've got the love of Jesus in my heart  
Down in my heart."

It reminds us as followers of Jesus that it is important to know that the source of true joy is in our relationship with God. Joy is not just a fleeting feeling. It's a steadfast and enduring state of *being* that can be experienced even in the midst of trials and challenges because of its source, Jesus.

The Bible provides numerous examples to help us experience joy. Whether it is through seeking God's presence, trusting in his promises, or cultivating a heart of gratitude, Scripture tells us that joy is attainable and can bring a sense of peace and contentment to your daily life.

But there are things that can kill your joy and one of those things is putting confidence in your flesh! Why? Because your flesh will fail and you will make mistakes in life. So misplacing your joy and confidence by placing it in yourself and what you do—what you are capable of—will lead to disastrous results.

When it comes to putting your confidence and joy in the Lord and not in yourself, the Apostle Paul gives us a solid example. In chapter 3 of his letter to the Philippians Paul says:

*“Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more”* (Philippians 3:1-4).

Paul then goes on to list over seven reasons for fleshy confidence. And then he says, *“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith”* (Philippians 3:7-9).

Paul shows us to not think so highly of ourselves but to rejoice in Jesus. Reminding us that gaining Christ and being found in him are the true keys to your joy.

## Day Four

Do you let other people steal your joy?

We all know people who walk through life acting like victims of their circumstances. They blame the weather, traffic, their job, or other life situations for being miserable. They look for any reason to complain, to be downcast and grumpy. When something does not go their way they find a way to complain and grumble. They are people who allow others to impact their joy and ones who can suck the joy right out of the air.

Several years ago I would ride the elevator with the same guy every week. In an attempt to make small talk, I would ask him how he was doing. His response was, “Okay for a Monday.” What a downer! How many times have we caught ourselves thinking that or even saying that out loud? If Mondays dictate that your life will be dull and less than desirable, you have just squandered 1/7th of your life. Think about it. When you put it that way it’s certainly motivation to change your tune.

You and I have the power to choose our attitude. You are ultimately in charge of the way you respond to life’s circumstances, the people around you and even Mondays. You have the power to control how you react to life. No one or nothing can make you feel or act a certain way. And nothing can steal your joy unless you give it permission. And here’s the deal: As a follower of Jesus, you have a holy advantage on happiness in life. My friend, you have the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you and you know what? The Holy Spirit produces all sorts of amazing things in your life and one of them is joy.

Galatians 5:22-23a says, “The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (NLT).

When the Holy Spirit produces joy he is producing cheerfulness, delight, and gladness in you. If you are not experiencing joy take some time to get curious and seek why. I’m not saying you will experience joy 24/7/365, but if your life is marred more by gloominess, despair, or unhappiness it’s time to do some self-reflection. Maybe you are more focused on what is not going the way you want in life and you need to put some effort into dwelling on the things to be grateful for. Maybe you are blaming others and outside circumstances for your outlook and disposition rather than owning your power to choose how you will respond to life’s circumstances.

If you want to live the spirit-filled, holy spirit-empowered life and experience the fullness of the fruit of joy, don’t let outside circumstances dictate your happiness. Ditch the critical spirit and ask Jesus to help you count your blessings.

## Day Five

How joyful are you? Here are a few more ways to cultivate a more cheerful and glad spirit. And the first way is to:

### **Practice Patience and Pray**

We have all experienced impatience in our lives. That irritability and dis-ease when you're waiting for something and it feels like it's taking forever to materialize. When something does not happen on your timeline you can lose hope and it can mess with your joy. When it comes down to it, impatience is really an indicator that you do not trust God and his timing. It's a signal that you lack faith that God is working things out on your behalf and as a result, you can become heavy-hearted. To cultivate joy in the waiting, Romans 12:12 is a call to action: "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."

Another way to intentionally cultivate joy in your life is to:

### **Mind Your Mind**

According to Proverbs 17:22: "A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (ESV).

A joyful, positive mindset is key to experiencing a healthy and fulfilling life. The heart is your inner self, thoughts, emotions, and will. Good medicine refers to something that treats or alleviates the symptoms of disease. One translation of this verse says, "A cheerful heart causes good healing."

All throughout Scripture we see the potent effects of the mind on the body. A joyful heart is good because it generates health and healing in your inner being. In contrast a crushed spirit dries up the bones or as Proverbs 12:25 explains, "anxiety in the heart of a person causes depression." Interestingly these nuggets of wisdom are backed up by scientific studies that demonstrate the mind's powerful influence over the body. A cheerful, contented temperament not only fortifies your mental health but enables your body to resist the attacks of physical disease.

That's another reason to be enamored with God and how he created our minds and bodies. And, why he created you to experience joy! So if good medicine is a joyful heart, how can you foster and promote internal joy? Scripture says that God's laws, precepts, and statutes refresh the soul and gladden the heart.

Psalm 19:7a says, "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul." And the prophet Jeremiah testified, "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight" (Jeremiah 15:16a).

Setting apart intentional time to be with God, meditating on his Word, his character, and his promises, is a guaranteed way to do your heart some good.