

# 1 John 1:4 Commentary

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FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN  
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Another Overview Chart - [1 John](#) - Charles Swindoll

BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP		BEHAVIOR OF FELLOWSHIP	
Conditions of Fellowship	Cautions of Fellowship	Fellowship Characteristics	Fellowship Consequences
Meaning of Fellowship 1 Jn 1:1-2:27		Manifestations of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:28-5:21	
Abiding in God's Light		Abiding in God's Love	
Written in Ephesus			
circa 90 AD			

From Talk Thru the Bible

1 John 1:4 These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [kai tauta graphomen \(1PPAI\)](#) [hemeis hina e chara humon e pepleromene \(RPPFSN\)](#)

**Amplified:** And we are now writing these things to you so that our joy [in seeing you included] may be full [and your joy may be complete]. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**ESV:** And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. ([ESVBible.org](#))

**KJV:** And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

**NLT:** We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** We must write and tell you about it, because the more that fellowship extends the greater the joy it brings to us who are already in it. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** And these things, as for us, we are writing in order that our joy, having been filled completely full in times past may persist in that state of fullness through present time.

**Young's Literal:** and these things we write to you, that your joy may be full.

THESE THINGS WE WRITE, SO THAT OUR JOY MAY BE MADE COMPLETE:kai tauta graphomen (1PPAI) hemeis hina e

- **that:** Isa 61:10 Hab 3:17, 3:18 Jn 15:11 16:24 2Co 1:24 Eph 3:19 Php 1:25,26 2Jn 1:12
- [1 John 1 Resources](#)

## JOHN'S PRESCRIPTION FOR JOY

**These things** - **What things?** Mortimer Adler among others helped me develop a questioning mindset as I read, seeking to read actively rather than passively. Adler wrote...

Strictly, all reading is active. What we call passive is simply less active. Reading is better or worse according as it is more or less active. And one reader is better than another in proportion as he is capable of a greater range of activity in reading. ([How to Read a Book - online](#))

**Comment:** Dear Christian reader let me encourage you to strongly consider learning the skills of **inductive Bible study** and spending the rest of your life practicing them on the Scriptures. I can assure you of two things (among many other things I will not mention): (1) It will take diligence and effort to develop an "inductive" (especially an "observational") mindset as you read God's Word **but** (2) The benefits in this life and the rewards in the next will make it more than worth the effort you invest!

**These things we write** - **What things?** (Try to develop the "**discipline of dialoguing**" with the Biblical text, maintaining an inquisitive, questioning mindset with the assurance that your Instructor, the Spirit of Christ [Jn 14:26, 16:13, 14, 15, 1Jn 2:20, 27 where "anointing" refers to the Spirit] will never be "stumped" by your inquisitive questions!) You may have arrived at two answers - (1) The truths John has just recorded in the prologue (1Jn 1:1-4) or (2) All that John has written in his epistle.

Notice how John's words parallel those of **Jesus** in His "**Upper Room Discourse**" to His disciples the night before His crucifixion...

**These things I have spoken** to you (compare John's phrase "these things we write"), that (*hina* - introducing a purpose clause just as John does in 1Jn 1:4 - see discussion of terms of conclusion) **My joy** may be (Verb = **meno** = more literally "may abide") in you, and that **your joy** may be made full (Jesus uses the same verb as John - **pleroo**). (John 15:11)

**Comment:** What are "**these things**" to which Jesus refers (Remember to **interrogate the text with the 5W/H'S**)? Clearly we must read the preceding **context** of John 15:1-10 which gives part of the answer. Ten times in those verses Jesus used the same verb "**meno**" which He uses in Jn 15:11 to describe His joy abiding in His disciples. It follows as we **abide** in Him, His joy **abides** in us. In identifying "these things" it is not unreasonable to expand the context to include chapters 13 and 14, considering that Jesus' private discourse to His disciples begins in John 13 and includes His promises to them in John 14 (not the least of which was "another Helper", the Holy Spirit, the Source of supernatural joy - cp Jn 14:16, 26, 27, et al).

John repeatedly refers to **writing** in First John. Read each of these uses below observing who is addressed, what is the truth stated and why is it given. As you work through these passages, you will begin to gain insight in the purpose (purposes) for John's epistle. At the end of this list of passage is an "answer key" for you to compare your observations. **Enjoy!**

1 John 1:4 And these things we **write**, so that our joy may be made complete.

1 John 2:1 My little children, I am **writing** these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

1 John 2:7 Beloved, I am not **writing** a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard.

1 John 2:8 On the other hand, I am **writing** a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

1 John 2:12 I am **writing** to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

1 John 2:13 I am **writing** to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.

1 John 2:14 I have **written** to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have

overcome the evil one.

1 John 2:21 I have not **written** to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth.

1 John 2:26 These things I have **written** to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.

1 John 5:13 These things I have **written** to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.

**"Answer Key"** - From these verses we see John wrote this epistle so that

- (1) their joy would be complete (1Jn 1:4),
- (2) that we might not live habitually in sin (1Jn 2:1),
- (3) that we might not be deceived (1Jn 2:26) and
- (4) that we might be assured of our salvation in Christ. (1Jn 5:13)

Note especially...

**These things I have written** to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. (1Jn 2:26, cp 2Jn 1:7)

**Comment:** Does this passage not give you a clue as to one of John's purposes for writing this letter? Could this have anything to do with John desiring for their (and his) joy to be made complete? Was something or someone disturbing their joy? Obviously, the answer is "yes" for John is aware of the fact that false teachers are trying to deceive the believers, trying to lead them astray from the Truth and into error. Will that result in "disturbance" of their joy? If you have even fallen prey to a false teacher, you know by experience what happened to your "joy"! And so John is writing truth to counter the deception.

**Spurgeon** (in his expository remarks) writes...

Hear ye this, ye people of God! The object of the revelation of Jesus Christ is that you may have joy, — yea, that you may have a heart full of joy, and that you may know what full joy means; for, here below, we get but drops and dashes of joy, unless we are brought into fellowship with God through Jesus Christ; and, then, we have the very joy of God in our souls. Oh, the delight of it! Oh, that you could all know it to the full!

#### **4. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.**

I infer from this that everything which is revealed to us in Scripture has for its intention the filling up of the Christian's joy

"There," the apostle seems to say, "if you have doubts, they will kill your joy. Doubt is a great joy-killer; but we have seen him, we have heard him, we have handled him who is the fountain of all true joy. Let no doubts come into your hearts, for these are well-attested facts of which we speak. We live still," saith John, though, perhaps, when he wrote, he may have been the last survivor of the eleven,—"we live still, by our testimony concerning Christ, to confirm your faith, that your joy may be full."

Some Christians have joy, but there are only a few drops in the bottom of their cup; but the Scriptures were written, and more especially the doctrine of an Incarnate God is revealed to us, that our joy may be full. Why, if you have nothing else to make you glad the fact that Jesus has become brother to you, arrayed in your flesh, should make your joy full.

**N. Hardy** writes that...

there are but two ways of declaring the Gospel, to wit, *sermo* and *scriptio*, word and writing, by the tongue and the pen, this latter is that which the apostle principally intends.

**True fellowship with one another and with God  
is the basis for true joy.**

Notice that the recipients of this letter are believers ("you who believe" 1Jn 5:13). Dear reader, if you are a believer, then you can know that this letter is also written to you. It therefore behooves all of us as believers to read and re-read this short letter, not mechanically, but as an act of devotion, reading it as we would a love letter, and as we do, we can be assured that it will literally transform our life! Do you believe this? If not, I dare you to take the "First John Challenge" and spend a month (or longer) reading, memorizing, meditating, discussing, teaching the words of this short and simple yet deep and profound letter. **Your life, your "zoe", will never be the same!**

Although this is repetition, let me ask you again "Why did John write this letter according to 1John 1:4?" Notice the conjunction **so that**". Whenever you encounter a "**so that**" take a moment to ask "so what?" -- try to discern what the writer is concluding or what is his purpose. In this verse John's desire for his readers is that their "**joy may be made complete.**" Actually, he writes "**our joy**" implying that his joy would be made complete only when his readers experienced that same joy. As one who discipled men, I know that my joy is always impacted when I hear about one of my young disciples straying from the flock, turning to the left and/or the right, rather than walking straight ahead in God's Word of Truth (Dt 5:32, 28:14, read especially Josh 1:7, 23:6, 7, 8, godly King Josiah = 2Ki 22:2, Pr 4:27).

**Wayne Barber** comments on "**our joy may be made complete**" noting that...

If something is disturbing these people and their joy is not being made complete, then obviously John's joy is not going to be made complete. He is writing it to them so they can understand the truth. Once their joy is complete, his joy could be complete. The idea is the people to whom he is writing seem to have lost their joy.

**We write** (1125) (**grapho** from root **graph-** = primarily means to scratch on or engrave as on an ornament, reports, letters, etc; **English** = graph, graphic, etc) means to engrave or inscribe with a pen or stylus characters or letters on a surface which can be wood, wax, metal, leather, stone, parchment, dirt (John ), paper, etc.

**So that (hina)** expresses purpose (See **term of conclusion**), result or intent of what has been previously stated (so always go back and read what has just been stated!)

## **FELLOWSHIP BEGETS JOY**

**So that our joy may be made complete** - Fullness of joy is certainly possible for the Christian, but it is by no means guaranteed as this phrase indicates. If joy was easy or inevitable for every believer, John would not have written this statement.

**Vine...**

There is a **joy** which is only fulfilled when we enter into practical fellowship with the Father and with the Son. (1Jn 1:3-note)

**Guy King...**

There was so much in the conditions and circumstances of the Early Church - persecution, loneliness, atmosphere, martyrdom - which might be supposed to depress those first Christians; but there were overriding blessings that would minister to "your joy". Do you recall the circumstances of the occasion when our LORD JESUS spoke of "**my joy**", (John 15:11 - **Ed comment**: The night before His crucifixion! cp Heb 12:2)? This passage, then, has things to say to its readers, and to us, that will conduce to real joy of heart. ([The Pleasure of the Fellowship](#))

**John Phillips** notes that...

To be brought into fellowship with the various members of the Godhead, and with true believers everywhere, was not only *good news*, it was *glad news* (**Ed**: News that brought "joy").

**David Guzik** discusses some "joy stealers" and our great need to continually "fight for joy"...

The Christian's joy is important, and assaulted on many fronts.

**External circumstances, moods and emotions, or sin  
can all take away our joy.**

Yet the Christian's joy is not found in the things of this world, as good as they might be. When John wrote about these things, he wrote about this relationship of fellowship and love we can share in with God the Father and the Son Jesus Christ (1Jn 1:3-note). Too many Christians are passive in their loss of joy. **They need to realize it is a great loss and do everything they can to draw close to God and reclaim that fullness of joy.** (**Ed**: **A good "antidote" for a low "joy quotient" would be to take time to prayerfully pondering the truth in this epistle, not reading some "self help" book that claims to be able to rejuvenate your joy!**) ([1 John 1 Commentary](#))

**J Ligon Duncan** calls our attention to the intimate relationship of what John has just stated to what he states in verse 4...

Notice the order. Verse 1—message; verse 3—shared life; verse 4—joy. Gospel proclamation leads to true

fellowship, leads to true joy. Gospel proclamation, true fellowship, true joy. True joy comes in shared life with Christians rooted in the shared life of God. This is the life that is the life of joy. This is how the proclamation issues forth in a life of joy. The life of faith is the life of joy, and is experienced only by those who respond to the proclamation of the Word... Notice the order. Verse 1—message; verse 3—shared life; verse 4—joy. Gospel proclamation leads to true fellowship, leads to true joy. Gospel proclamation, true fellowship, true joy. True joy comes in shared life with Christians rooted in the shared life of God. This is the life that is the life of joy. This is how the proclamation issues forth in a life of joy. The life of faith is the life of joy, and is experienced only by those who respond to the proclamation of the Word. ([1 John 1:1-4 The Word of Life Appeared to Us](#))

**Steven Cole** writes that...

When a sinner comes to Christ, it brings great joy to those who already know Christ (cp Lk 15:7, 32), but it also brings great joy to the sinner who is saved. And as our **fellowship** with God and with one another deepens, the joy deepens. In commenting on the fact that God has given us eternal life, Calvin exclaims (ibid., p. 157), "But if we consider how miserable and horrible a condition death is, and also what is the kingdom and the glory of immortality, we shall perceive that there is something here more magnificent than what can be expressed in any words." And so as God's children we are obligated to seek our greatest joy in Him. If we seek joy in lesser things, we miss the greatest joy of all and we do not glorify the God who rescued us from the ravages of sin and death.

Fellowship with God and with one another really are just the two Great Commandments, to love God with all your being, and to love your neighbor as yourself (see Matt. 22:37-40). The aim of the entire Bible is to help us glorify God as we experience the deep joy of a close relationship with Him and close relationships with one another. As grow in obedience to these two Great Commandments, we will grow in great joy, not only in this life, but also for all eternity!

I encourage you, work on your relationship with God. Don't settle for occasional, distant fellowship. Make time daily to spend with Him in His Word and in prayer. Read books that help you to know Him better. Cut out of your life anything that hinders fellowship with Him.

And, work on your relationships with other believers. In this sinful world, such relationships will never be perfect, but they can be good. But they won't be good without effort! The payoff is that true fellowship with one another and true fellowship with God will bring you true joy. ([1 John 1:3-4 True Fellowship](#))

**Charles Spurgeon** reminds us that supernatural **joy** does not come naturally writing that...

The Christian's joy wants looking to. If any of you have lost the joy of the Lord. I pray you do not think it a small loss.

In His "**Upper Room Discourse**" the day before He was crucified, Jesus knowing that disciples' world would soon be "turned upside down", repeatedly spoke of His desire for them to experience **joy** (which is still our Lord's desire for all His disciples!)

These things I have spoken to you, that **My joy** may be in you (literally "may abide in you"), and that **your joy** may be made full (Same verb *pleroo* used here in 1Jn 1:4). (John 15:11)

**Comment:** This passage was discussed briefly earlier. Again, compare Jesus' phrase "these things I have spoken" and John's phrase "these things I write". From our vantage point, both refer to the Word of God. It follows that in order to maintain our joy, while it is ultimately wrought by the indwelling Spirit of Christ, we have a responsibility to read His Word as our part in fighting "the good fight of faith" for the joy He gives. Is this important? Nehemiah 8:10 says the "joy of Jehovah is our strength" ("our strong place", "our stronghold") (Neh 8:10), which leaves no doubt that joy is vital to the believer's spiritual walk and warfare! **How's your joy (Jehovah's joy in you)?** **John Angell James** alludes to how **joy** functions as the believer's **strength** or stronghold writing that...

Spiritual joy is the oil to the wheels of obedience. It is this which braces up the soul for action, and carries it forward through difficult and self-denying duties. How can we best vanquish the world, that ever present, and every where present foe, which comes in so many forms, and with such golden pleas? How, but by a heart already well pleased with its own happiness in Christ. Spiritual joy is the world's vanquisher! And how easy, how perfect in its triumph! The heart by holy joy rises above the world, sees it below, covered with smoke and dust, and finds itself in a brighter, purer, happier region, with the cloudless sun above, and all around filled with his glory. (See **James'** article [Spiritual Joy](#) which

discusses a number of factors that dissipate and destroy a disciple's joy, eg, his admonition "*Watch against sin, for sin is like water to the flame of joy*")

**Comment:** Beloved, complete, full to the brim, overflowing joy comes to those who obey Christ (cp 1Sa 15:22 Gal 5:22) Sin (and disobedience to God) in any form is a joy stealer. Run quickly to 1John 1:9! Compare David's sin with Bathsheba and his loss of spiritual joy, for which he pleaded not once but twice in his famous psalm (Ps 51:8, Ps 51:12 where "restore" clearly indicates David had "lost" it!) Hab 3:17, 3:18 presents a powerful pattern in our fight for joy. Notice the prophet's circumstances did not preclude his personal choice to rejoice. While the Spirit is not mentioned here, there is little doubt that He was an active "Participant" in Habakkuk's making the choice for joy as he focused on Jehovah rather than his circumstances.

**Warren Wiersbe adds this comment about joy:** The secret of Christian joy is to believe what God says in His Word and act upon it. Faith that isn't based on the Word is not faith at all; it is presumption or superstition. Joy that isn't the result of faith is not joy at all; it is only a "good feeling" that will soon disappear. Faith based on the Word will produce joy that will weather the storms of life. It isn't enough for us to read the Word or receive the Word as others expound it; we must also rejoice in the Word. "I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure" (Ps. 119:162NKJV). In Bible days, people sometimes hid their wealth in jars buried in the ground (Matt. 13:44; Jer. 41:8). If a farmer plowing his field suddenly discovered a jar filled with gold, he would certainly rejoice. There are great treasures buried in God's Word, and you and I must diligently "dig" for them as we read, meditate, and pray; and when we find these treasures, we should rejoice and give thanks. If we read and study the Word of God only from a sense of duty, then its treasures may never be revealed to us. It is the believer who rejoices in the Word, who delights to read and study it day by day, who will find God's hidden treasures. (Ps 112:1, Ps 1:2-note) ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary - Old Testament. Victor or Wordsearch](#))

"Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that **your joy may be made full (pleroo)**. (Jn 16:24)

But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have **My joy** (Jesus is the Source of Joy - reminiscent of the old acronym = **J**esus **O**thers **Y**ourself) **made full (pleroo)** in themselves. (John 17:13)

**Robert Candlish comments:** It is surely very wonderful that the occasion on which Jesus manifests so intense an anxiety about his disciples having enough of joy, and of his own joy, should be the eve of his last agony. Is it really with him a time of joy? Are the bloody sweat and the cry as of one forsaken by his God the signs of joy? Is that the joy, his joy, which he prays they may have fulfilled in themselves? At all events, his joy, whatever it may be, must be of such a nature that it can be compatible with experience as dark as that. For his joy must be, like himself, "the same yesterday, today, and for ever." It cannot be fluctuating and intermittent. It cannot be merely one of many emotions, alternating or taking its turn with others, fitfully swaying the mind at intervals, according to the shifting breezes of the outer atmosphere. His joy must partake of his own unchangeableness, as the eternal Son of the Father. It is true that in his human nature and in his earthly history he is subjected to the impulses and influences of this chequered human and earthly scene. He meets with what may move, at one time to tears, at another time to gladness. Nor is he unsusceptible of such impressions. But beneath all these his real joy must be deeper far; a fathomless, infinite ocean, whose calm repose the wildest agitations of the upper sea cannot reach or ruffle. "My joy," he says to the Father, my joy in and with thee, I would have to be theirs, through their fellowship with thee and me. Such, in substance, is the Lord's own desire, as expressed to his disciples and to his Father. And such is his beloved apostle's aim in his teaching—"that your joy may be full." ([1 John 1:4 The Joy of the Lord and Its Fulness](#))

**Our joy** - The **KJV** (Textus Receptus) has "**your**" joy, which is possible. However other more modern Greek manuscripts have "**Our**" which fits with the context for all of the pronouns in verses 1-4, which are all in the first person plural (go back and circle "**we**" and "**our**").

**Hiebert** favors the latter translation writing...

"**Our joy**" may also be understood in an inclusive sense to include both writer and readers. Thus The New English Bible reads, "the joy of us all." This inclusive meaning seems natural in view of the possessive plural pronoun "our fellowship" in 1Jn 1:3 above. It is an instance of pastor and people rejoicing together in the fellowship of the gospel (cf. John 4:36).

**Wuest** agrees with Hiebert...

The best texts have "**our**" not "**your**," that is, John's joy and that of the recipients, since both will then enjoy that intimate, intelligent



fellowship with the Lord Jesus which only comes when the saint sees Him, hears Him speak, and touches Him, through the medium of the Gospel writers and the Holy Spirit as He ministers what they have written about the Lord in their writings.

As a third-century man was anticipating death, he penned these last words to a friend:

It's a bad world, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a **joy** which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people are the Christians—and I am one of them.

**JOHN'S DESIRE FOR US...**  
**JOY, JOY, JOY**  
**DOWN IN OUR HEART!**  
([Play this song sung by kids](#))

**Joy** (5479)(chara) is a feeling of inner gladness, delight or rejoicing. **Joy** in the NT is virtually always used to signify a feeling of "happiness" that is based on spiritual realities (and independent of what "happens"). Joy is an inner gladness; a deep seated pleasure. It is a depth of assurance and confidence that ignites a cheerful heart. It is a cheerful heart that leads to cheerful behavior. It is not an experience that comes from favorable circumstances but is God's gift to believers. **Joy** is a part of God's very essence and as discussed below His Spirit manifests this supernatural joy in His children (Galatians 5:22-note, Acts 13:52, 1Th 1:6-note). **Joy** is the deep-down sense of well-being that abides in the heart of the person who knows all is well between himself and the Lord. There is a chorus from an old spiritual song that is apropos...

**Happiness happens**  
**But joy abides**

**Chara** - 59x in 57v in the NAS and translated - greatly(1), joy(54), joyful(1), joyfully(1), joyously(1), rejoicing(1). Note the association of **chara and pleroo (joy and filled)** -John 3:29, 15:11, 16:24, 17:13, Acts 13:52, Ro 15:13, 2Cor 7:4, Php 2:2, 2Ti 1:4, 1 John 1:4, 2 John 1:12. This repetitive association certainly suggests that God's desire for His children is fullness of joy!

**John** uses **chara** once in each of his epistles...

1 John 1:4 These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

2 John 1:12 Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your **joy may be made full**.

3 John 1:4 I have no greater **joy** than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

**Alfred Plummer** writes that **joy** in 1John 1:4 is...

that serene happiness, which is the result of conscious union with God and good men, of conscious possession of eternal life... and which raises us above pain and sorrow and remorse.

**Donald Campbell** writes that...

**Joy** (chara) is a deep and abiding inner rejoicing which was promised to those who abide in Christ (Jn 15:11). It does not depend on circumstances because it rests in God's sovereign control of all things.

**Martyn Lloyd-Jones** wrote that...

in any definition we may give of New Testament **joy**, is that we do not go to a dictionary; we go to the New Testament instead. This is something quite peculiar which cannot be explained; it is a quality which belongs to the Christian life in its essence, so that in our definition of **joy** we must be very careful that it conforms to what we see in our Lord. The world has never seen anyone who knew **joy** as our Lord knew it, and yet He was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." So our definition of **joy** must somehow correspond to that... **Joy** is something very deep and profound, something that affects the whole and entire personality. In other words it comes to this -

**There is only one thing that can give true joy**  
**and that is contemplation of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

He satisfies my mind; He satisfies my emotions; He satisfies my every desire. He and His great salvation include the whole

personality and nothing less, and in Him I am complete. Joy, in other words, is the response and the reaction of the soul to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. ([Life in Christ Studies in 1 John by Martyn Lloyd-Jones](#))

Secular dictionaries define **joy** as the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or the emotion evoked by the prospect of possessing what one desires. The world's definition of **joy** is synonymous with the definition of happiness, for both of these "emotions" are dependent on what "happens".

Certainly there is a semblance of **joy** in human life, such as joy when one experiences a victory ("We will sing for joy over your victory, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners. May the LORD fulfill all your petitions." Psalm 20:5 [Spurgeon's comment](#)) or when one reaps a bountiful harvest (see Isaiah 9:3), but more often the Bible speaks of **joy** in a truly spiritual sense (as described above by Martyn Lloyd-Jones). For example, Nehemiah declared to the down in the mouth (not very filled with joy) Jews that "The **joy** of the Lord is your strength" (Neh 8:10). Similarly, David pleaded with God to "restore to me the **joy** of Thy salvation" (Psalm 51:12 [Spurgeon's Comment](#)). As an aside, it is not surprising that **joy** and **rejoicing** are found most frequently in the Psalms (about 80 references) and the Gospels (about 40 references).

**Play (and believe the words of) the old song by Twila Paris...**

### **THE JOY OF THE LORD**

**Brother and sisters**

**"Rejoice in the Lord and again I will say rejoice!"**

(Php 4:4-note)

**C. S. Lewis** came a bit closer to the Biblical meaning of **joy** when he called it an "unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction." That statement is a bit obtuse but Lewis then went on to add that **joy** "must be sharply distinguished both from **happiness** and from **pleasure**". Ultimately Lewis' experienced joy when he discovered that Jesus was the wellspring of all joy.

**Spiritual Joy** then is not only an emotion that comes from favorable circumstances but paradoxically (supernaturally) can occur when circumstances are most difficult as Jesus taught His disciples declaring...

Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to **joy**. Whenever a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she remembers the anguish no more, for **joy** that a child has been born into the world. Therefore you too now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart will **rejoice**, and no one takes your **joy** away from you. (John 16:20, 21, 22)

Believers of course have the **Resident Source** of **joy** within for as Paul teaches

the fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy**, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (Galatians 5:22-note)

Compare other passages that associate the **Holy Spirit** with **joy**...

And the disciples were continually **filled with joy** and **with the Holy Spirit**. (Acts 13:52)

**Comment:** Clearly one of the effects of being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18-note) is joy, a supernatural joy He gives us as we surrender our will to His control.

(Paul to the Thessalonian believers who had just come to Christ out of pagan idolatry 1Th 1:9-note) You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation (thlipsis) with **the joy of the Holy Spirit** (1Th 1:6-note)

**Comment:** Observe the juxtaposition of "**joy**" and "**tribulation**" once again affirming that the believer's **joy** is supernaturally given by the indwelling Spirit of Christ and thus is independent of the circumstances! **Are your circumstances dire? The Bible teaches you can still have the Joy of Jesus!** Does this truth not help us understand Nehemiah's well known declaration to those grieving that independent of their grief, "the joy of Jehovah is your strength." (Neh 8:10) God given inner joy is like a shield that deflects disappointments, like a spring deep within our soul, able to quench our thirst regardless of how dire are our circumstances.

And in **Acts** we see a beautiful illustration of **joy that abides**, vividly contrasting with **happiness** that depends on **what happens**...

So they (Peter and the apostles who had been imprisoned and flogged - Acts 5:28, 29, 40) went on their way from the presence of the Council, **rejoicing** (**chairō** in the **present tense** = continually rejoicing) that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:41, 42)



**Comment:** Note that the apostles' joy was independent of their uncomfortable, even painful circumstances but it was intimately linked with their proclamation of Jesus the Messiah (cp John's "these things we write **so that** our joy may be made complete"). Have you not had this supernatural joy in those times the Spirit has opened a door for you to proclaim Jesus to some lost soul? And doesn't this make sense... Jesus is the single most important Person in time and eternity and when we have the opportunity to share Him the joy we experience is simply unspeakable! May we pray for and be alert for more and more opportunities from God's Spirit to share His Son with those dead in their trespasses and sins and in desperate need for the Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Christian life is to be a life of **joy**. It is founded on faith in Jesus, Whose life on earth began as "good news of great **joy** for all people" (Luke 2:10) and Whose last prayer was for His followers to have His joy made full in themselves (Jn 17:13). Joy from beginning to end and then without end (See our rejoicing in heaven in Revelation 19:7-[note](#) where rejoice is chairo).

**Augustine...**

There is a joy which is not given to the ungodly, that of all those who love Thee for Thine own sake, whose joy Thou Thyself art; and this is the happy life, to rejoice in Thee, of Thee. This is it! And there is no other.

**Laurin** has some interesting insights on holy joy...

As fellowship is the result of experience so joy is the result of fellowship. It is not said to have its source in riches although riches do afford no small measure of comfort and satisfaction. It is not said to have its source in pleasure although pleasure may bring diversion and recreation. Joy is mentioned in connection with Christ because it has its source in character. Joy is born, not bought. It is the cause of our happiness, not the effect of our pleasure. ([As Quoted by Paul Apple in First John - Tests of Eternal Life - A Devotional Commentary](#))

**May be made complete** ([4137](#)) (**pleroo**) literally means to fill something to the brim (a net = Mt 13:48, a building = Jn 12:3, Acts 2:2, a city = Acts 5:28, figuratively of needs = Phil 4:19) and so to make complete in every particular and cause to abound.

#### **The Highest Joy**

The highest joy that can be known  
To those who heav'nward wend—  
It is the Word of Life to own,  
And God to have as Friend.

In some NT contexts the idea of **pleroo** is not only that one is filled with something but that they are controlled by what fills them. For example, when Paul commands believers to continually "be filled with the Spirit" in Ephesians 5:18-note, his desire for them is that the Holy Spirit would so permeate their being, that He would control their spiritual lives. In a similar manner when one is **filled with joy** (a fruit of the Spirit - Gal 5:22-note), that **joy** exerts (or should exert) a controlling influence on our everyday lives. Why so? Because joy is a supernatural attribute, a work of the Spirit indwelling us, and as such is independent of bad circumstances, difficult people, etc, which is in stark contrast to the unsaved world's word "happy" which is a feeling which depends on what "happens."

**How is your joy beloved? If your "joy quotient" is low, my prayer for you is..**

Now may the God of hope fill (**pleroo**) you with all (not some but "all") joy and peace in believing (Our responsibility - to believe, have faith, trust the non-lying God), that you may abound (overflow the banks of the the river is the picture) in hope by the power (dunamis) of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13-note)

John uses **pleroo** in the **passive voice** (indicating the subject receives the action or effect from an outside source - in context this is what some refer to as the "[divine passive](#)" for He is the Source) which points out the fact that as believers we do not fill ourselves with **joy** by "self effort" (or even "self affirmation") but we permit the Spirit of God to fill us (and control us) with His joy. In short **joy** is a gift of God! In context John associates this "filling" with what he is writing (especially that finite man can have fellowship with the Infinite God). It follows that if your joy is low, get into the Word (E.g., Meditate on 1Jn 1:3) and allow His Word to get into you. Surrender to what God says in the Word. The Spirit Who transforms us from glory to glory (2Cor 3:18) uses the Word to bring us joy.

The **perfect tense** generally identifies past completed action with present ongoing result. The idea is that their joy is brought to fullness and remains in that state. In this verse the parsing of the verb **pleroo** is referred to as the periphrastic perfect participial construction, which Wuest paraphrases...

having been filled completely full in times past, may persist in that state of fulness through the present time.

**David** said...

Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; **In Thy presence is fulness** (Lxx = **pleroo**) **of joy**; In Thy right hand there are pleasures forever. (Psalm 16:11)

**Spurgeon comments on fulness of joy:** In Thy presence is fulness of joy. Christ being raised from the dead ascended into glory, to dwell in constant nearness to God, where joy is at its full for ever: the foresight of this urged Him onward in His glorious but grievous toil. To bring His chosen to eternal happiness was the high ambition which inspired Him, and made Him wade through a sea of blood.

O God, when a worldling's mirth has all expired, for ever with Jesus may we dwell at thy right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore; and meanwhile, may we have an earnest by tasting thy love below.

**Trapp's** note on the heavenly verse which closes the Psalm is a sweet morsel, which may serve for a contemplation, and yield a foretaste of our inheritance. He writes

Here is as much said as can be, but words are too weak to utter it. For **quality** there is in heaven joy and pleasures; for **quantity**, a fulness, a torrent whereat they drink without let or loathing; for **constancy**, it is at God's right hand, Who is stronger than all, neither can any take us out of His hand; it is a constant happiness without intermission: and for **perpetuity** it is for evermore. Heaven's joys are without measure, mixture, or end. [Psalm 16:11 - Treasury of David](#)

**Chuck Smith** writes...

**Oh the fullness of joy that comes from fellowship with God.** As David said, "My cup runneth over." (Ps 23:5-[note](#)) Peter said, "Whom having not seen you love, and though you do not see Him now, yet you rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1Pe 1:8-note) I think of the words of that hymn, "The love of Jesus, what it is none but the loved ones know." I feel so sorry for those whose hearts and minds are closed to Jesus Christ. If they only knew what they were missing out on. The philosophers who talk about the ultimate experience, confess that they know nothing about it. We know what it is. **It is walking in fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ.** ([Chuck Smith - 1 John 1:3 Sermon Notes](#))

**Spurgeon comments on "the love of Jesus that only the loved ones know":** "I fear that if you do not love Christ better than you did; if you do not feel that there are new tendrils which bind you to Him; if you do not feel that it would be harder now than ever to give up your hold on the Savior, you have not begun to learn the love of Christ. When we know that love, when we feel gratitude for mercies received, then we see every mercy, both temporal and spiritual, coming from that love! Ungrateful souls cannot learn this love. They have the Book of mercy but they are blind and cannot read it. Grateful souls, in every Letter from Jesus their absent Friend, whom having not seen, they love, and in every second of daily fellowship, and of daily mercy, read again that glittering sentence—"He loved me, and gave Himself for me." ([Sermon by Spurgeon](#))

## THE "EXCITEMENT" OF JOY

**Ray Stedman** comments that clearly joy is the inspired word...

but perhaps it will be more helpful for us to understand what John means if we use the word, excitement. "That your *excitement* may be complete." Joy is a kind of quiet inner excitement and this is what results when we really experience the fellowship that John is talking about. When we discover that God is actually using us, it is the most exciting and joy-producing experience possible to men. I have seen it happen many, many times. I have seen young people get so excited over this that they literally jump up and down. There is a dear girl in this congregation that cannot relate what the Lord does without literally bouncing as she tells it. I have seen men, familiar with the world of high finance who work continually in the great marts of trade, get so excited over the fact that God was using them in some simple way that they literally trembled as they told it. I have known women who have discovered how exciting it is to have God at work in their neighborhood, using their kitchen, and their coffee pot, that they have not been able to sleep at night. They are overwrought with excitement, with joy. That is what John is talking about, life, as life was intended to be lived, filled with joy. Oh yes, with many pressures! Do not make the mistake of thinking that the only way to have joy is to be free from pressures or problems. No, take all the pressures and the problems, but with them that wonderful feeling down inside that God is at work, and He is at work in you. You are a vital part of God's program. God is using you to do His eternal work. There is nothing more exciting than that. That is what John is writing about. That is worth listening to, is it not? ([1 John 1:1-4: Life With Father](#))

**John Calvin...**

True is that saying, "Where your treasure is, there will be your heart also." (Matt. 6:21-note) Whosoever, then, really perceives what fellowship with God is, will be satisfied with it alone, and will no more burn with desires for other things. "The Lord is my cup," says David, "and my heritage; the lines have fallen for me on an excellent lot." (Ps. 16:5, 6.) In the same manner does Paul declare that all things were deemed by him as dung, in comparison with Christ alone. (Phil. 3:8.) He, therefore, has at length made a proficiency in the Gospel, who esteems himself happy in having communion with God, and acquiesces in that alone; and thus he prefers it to the whole world, so that he is ready for its sake to relinquish all other things.

**Steven Cole** writes that...

John was by this point the only surviving apostle. But, how was his joy made complete in writing these things? In the sense of 3 John 4, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth" (see also, 2 John 4). If John's little children would read these letters and not be carried away by the false teachers, but continue in the truth, he was a happy man.

You may think that joy in the Lord is a nice extra, but not essential. But as John Piper often points out, we cannot glorify God properly unless we enjoy Him thoroughly. A. W. Pink (ibid., p. 28) observed, "Now this joy is not to be regarded as a luxury, but rather as a spiritual necessity. We are obligated to be glad in God." He goes on to cite several Scriptures that command us to be glad and rejoice in the Lord. Then he points out that we will not glorify God apart from such genuine joy in Him. Our aim in proclaiming the gospel to others should be that they, too, would come to share our joy in Jesus Christ.

**Guzik** summarizes these first four verses noting that...

Observations on this first portion of the book, which is one long sentence in the original manuscript.

- a. John began with the beginning - the eternal God, who was before all things.
- b. He told us that this God was physically manifested, and that he and others could testify to this as eyewitnesses.
- c. He told us that this God is the Word of life, the Logos.
- d. He told us that this God is distinct from the person of God the Father.
- e. He told us that we may have fellowship with this God, and that we are often introduced into this fellowship with God by the fellowship of God's people.
- f. He told us that this eternally existent God, the Word of Life, who was physically present with them, and present for fellowship, is God the Son, named Jesus Christ.
- g. He told us that fellowship with Jesus leads to a life lived in fullness of joy.
- h. We could say that in these four verses, John gave us enough to live our whole Christian life on.

No wonder one commentator wrote,

Observe the note of wonder in the Apostle's language. Speech fails him. He labours for expression, adding definition to definition. (Expositor's)

#### **NET Bible Note**

The prologue to 1 John (1Jn 1:1–4) has many similarities to the prologue to the Gospel of John (Jn 1:1–18). Like the 1prologue to the Fourth Gospel, the prologue to 1 John introduces the reader to important themes which will be more fully developed later in the body of the work. In the case of 1 John, three of these are: (1) the importance of eyewitness testimony to who Jesus is (cf. 1Jn 4:14, 5:6–12), (2) the importance of the earthly ministry of Jesus as a part of God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ (cf. 1Jn 4:2, 5:6), and (3) the eternal life available to believers in Jesus Christ (1Jn 5:11–12, 5:20).

**James Montgomery Boice** sums up

This then is the way in which the gospel has come to us and must be passed on. The apostles bore witness to what they had seen and heard of Jesus, proclaimed it authoritatively on His commission, and finally preserved it in the writings which have since become our New Testament. Today believers are to take their writings and, having through them entered into the experience of the apostles, proclaim the Christ of the apostles to the world.

**Steven Cole** writes that...

Many people believe in a Jesus of their own imagination and have an emotional experience that they call being born again. But when their problems are not all magically solved, or they go through difficult trials, they conclude that "Jesus didn't work," and they go back to the world. The problem is, they didn't believe in the Jesus revealed by the apostles in the New Testament. Their experience was not that of true fellowship with God and with others who know God. And so any witness about their supposed conversion is lost when they abandon the faith. It's likely that they never experienced true Christianity. True Christianity is essentially Jesus Christ—revealed in Scripture, experienced in new life and fellowship, and proclaimed with joy. Make sure that you've got the real deal!

**G G Findlay** writes...

To communicate these truths (1Jn 1:1-3), to see this fellowship established amongst men, is the Apostle's delight, the business and delight of all those who share his faith and serve his Master: "these things we write, that our joy may be fulfilled." We have a great secret in common—we and the Apostles. The Father told it to Jesus, Jesus to them, they to us, and we to others. Those who have seen and heard such things, cannot keep the knowledge to themselves. These truths belong not to us only, but to "the whole world" (1Jn 2.2); they concern every man who has sins to confess and death to meet, who has work to do for his Maker in this world and a pathway to find through its darkness and perils. The Apostle John is writing to Greeks, to men far removed from him in native sympathy and instinct; but he has long since forgotten all that, and the difference between Jew and Greek never appears to cross his mind

in writing this letter. The only difference he knows is between those who "are of God" and those who "are of the world." ([1 John - An Exposition of the Epistles of St John](#))

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**He Put It In Writing** - Two days after the April 27, 1996, cease-fire in Lebanon, a TV interviewer asked Israel's prime minister how the new agreement differed from one a few years earlier. He replied, "This one is in writing, whereas the former one was verbal over the telephone. Print has a different value."

Spoken words can be forgotten, or they can be changed when they are repeated. Written words, though, aren't dependent on memory, and they can't be easily ignored or changed.

In the Old Testament, when God spoke to the people of Israel, He told His prophets to write down what He said (Dt 5:22; Jer 36:2; Hab 2:2). He didn't want His words to be forgotten or misrepresented.

Likewise, when Jesus lived on earth, God gave audible approval of His Son (Mt. 17:5). John, who saw the transfiguration and heard God's voice from heaven, did not merely tell others. Under the guidance of God's Spirit, he wrote a book (the Gospel of John) and three letters (1,2,3 John) so that all his readers would know truth from error, believe on Christ, and be filled with joy (1Jn. 1:4).

When we read God's Word, we too can "hear" God speak. We can begin to learn of His greatness, glory, and goodness. Are you finding that true?— by Dennis J. De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

God, who formed worlds by the power of His word,  
Speaks through the Scriptures His truth to be heard;  
And if we read with the will to obey,  
He by His Spirit will show us His way.  
—DJD

**When you open your Bible,  
ask the Author to open your heart.**

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**Are You Happy?** - An elderly woman was once asked by a friend about the spiritual welfare of a mutual acquaintance. She replied, "Well, she's in a very bad state of mind. She's got just enough Christianity to make her miserable when she's doing wrong, but not enough to make her happy in a prayer meeting."

The most unhappy people, it seems to me, are not the unsaved but Christians who are disobedient to Christ. When they continue to sin, they are inviting God's loving chastening and are asking for much sorrow and loss. Because they have the benefit of the

indwelling Holy Spirit and a knowledge of God's will through the Scriptures, they feel more wretched in their backslidden state than those who have not accepted the Savior. Every Christian who has lived for a time with unconfessed sin knows what I'm talking about.

To avoid such heartache and to be a happy Christian, we must seek to know God's will through Bible study and prayer. Then in the power of the Holy Spirit we must strive to do God's will, walking in the light as He is in the light (1 Jn. 1:7). We are not without sin (1Jn 1:8), but we must be honest and open with God about our sin (1Jn 1:9) and strive to overcome it. — by Richard De Haan (Ibid)

Trust and obey—  
For there's no other way  
To be happy in Jesus  
But to trust and obey.  
—Sammis

**Sin causes the cup of joy  
to spring a leak**

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**The Smile of Joy** - Remember those round, yellow, happy-face stickers that showed up frequently on stationery and postcards? They were often accompanied by the one-word message, "Smile." They implied that you can put a smile on your face as easily as you can put a hat on your head. In a sense, that is true. A good actor can look happy even when his heart is breaking.

Favorable circumstances can also produce smiles. A person with good health, an adequate income, and a nice house finds it easy to look happy. The best smile, though, comes naturally from within. It reflects a joy that remains even when a person has few of life's material blessings. It comes from knowing God, believing and obeying His Word, being assured of sins forgiven, possessing eternal life, and anticipating the glories of heaven. The believer who depends on God for these blessings can smile despite adversity.

In today's Scripture reading, the prophet Habakkuk declared triumphantly, "I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Habakkuk 3:18). Even if everything were taken from him, the Lord would be his strength. He didn't need to "put on" a smile, because the joy in his heart would do it for him. —Richard De Haan (Ibid)

A smile can conceal our pain  
And lighten our despair,  
But trust in God gives inner peace  
And joy beyond compare.  
—Sper

**Happiness depends on happenings,  
but joy depends on Jesus.**

**THE JOY OF THE LORD  
AND ITS FULNESS**

**Robert Candlish** ([continued from above](#)) discusses the joy John desires for his readers (which includes you and I beloved of the Father)...

Joy, as it is commonly understood and exemplified among men, is a tumultuous feeling; a quick and lively passion or emotion, blazing up for the most part upon some sudden prosperous surprise, and apt to subside into cold indifference, if not something worse, when fortune threatens change or custom breeds familiarity. "As the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of fools" (Ecclesiastes 7:6). It is indeed vanity; an outburst or outbreak of exuberant hilarity, subsiding soon into weariness and vacancy, the dull cold ashes of a brilliant but passing flame. All the joy of earth partakes, more or less, of that character; for it is dependent upon outward circumstances, and has no deep root in the soul itself. Even what must in a sense be called spiritual joy may be of that sort. There may be joyous excitement when the glad jubilee-trumpet fills the air with its ringing echoes, and an enthusiastic multitude are hastening to keep holiday. There may be a real elevation of spirit when some affecting scene of spiritual awakening is witnessed, or some gracious ordinance is

celebrated, or some stirring voice is heard. Such joy is like the goodness which, as a morning cloud and as the early dew, goes away. There may be the joy also of complacency in one's own success in a good and holy work; such joy as the Baptist's disciples feared that their tidings would mar in their master's breast, when they came to tell him, "Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizes and all men come unto him" (John 3:26). His answer is very memorable, and very much to the purpose of our present inquiry:—"He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice; this my joy therefore is fulfilled" (John 3:29).

It is Christ's joy that is fulfilled in him who is so truly and heartily the bridegroom's friend; Christ's twofold joy; first, his joy as the bridegroom possessing the bride; "as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (Isa. 62:9);—and, secondly, his joy as the Son possessing the Father; as the Baptist goes on to testify so affectionately; "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand" (Jn 3:35).

Now, upon the subject of this "joy of the Lord," this joy of Christ, this double joy of Christ; his joy as the bridegroom having the bride; his joy as the Father's beloved Son and trusted servant, into whose hand he gives all things;—I would beware of "exercising myself in things too high for me." I would not venture so much as to imagine the ineffable joy of the Son dwelling from everlasting in the bosom of the Father, and with the Father and the Holy Spirit ordering the eternal counsels of the Godhead;—the whole vast ideal of creative and providential goodness, all holy and all wise:—and especially the covenanted plan of electing love, for "gathering into one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are in earth" (Eph 1:10). Neither dare I do more than touch on what, as the eternal wisdom, he himself says about the Father "possessing him in the beginning of his ways, before his works of old;"—"Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men" (Pr 8:22-31).

I come at once to his earthly course, his human experience.

And, first, I see him in the temple, when he was twelve years old. I hear his answer to his mother and Joseph, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" How intense his consciousness even already, at an age so tender, of the trust committed to him; his Father's business, the business on which his Father's heart is set, for glorifying that name of his which is light and love, and saving a people to bask in that light and love evermore! "I must be about it." There is deep joy in such a consciousness as that (Luke 2:49).

Then, secondly, I see him as the disciples left him, faint and way worn at Jacob's well. On their return they find him fresh and bright. Is it an outward cordial, or is it inward joy, of which he speaks as having revived him? "I have meat to eat that ye know not of: my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:32-34).

And, thirdly, I find it once, and once only, said in express terms that "Jesus rejoiced in spirit" (Luke 10:21). The statement is a very strong one; it implies inward leaping for joy. And the occasion is remarkable. It is connected with the mission of the seventy. In sending them forth, the Lord has been much exercised with thoughts of the failure, to a large extent, of their ministry and of his own, and the aggravated guilt thus entailed on the highly-favored objects of that ministry. In receiving them back, he sympathizes so far with their delight at finding even "the devils subject to them;" but he adds, "Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." "In that hour," and in the view of the names of these his little ones being written in heaven, "Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight" (ver. 21). There is here the joy of full, filial acquiescence, for himself, in the gracious and holy will of his Father. And there is added to that the crowning joy of so making known the Father to these babes that they too may acquiesce as he does; "All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knows who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him" (ver. 22).

Thus "the joy of the Lord is his strength;" prevailing over the diffidence of extreme youth, the exhaustion of nature, and "the contradiction of sinners against himself." Nothing—either in his being a mere child, as when Jeremiah complained, "Ah, Lord God, behold I cannot speak, for I am a child" (Jerem. 1:6); or in his being overcome by distress, hunger, and fatigue, as when Elijah sat down in the wilderness and requested for himself that he might die (1 Kings 19:4);—or in his being forced to utter triple woes against the cities of his own habitation, as when Isaiah, sent on an errand of judgment to his people, was fain to cry, "Lord, how long?" (Isa.



6:11);—nothing, I say, in any such trials of his flesh and heart, causes either flesh or heart to faint. At least, when flesh and heart faint, his spirit is refreshed with joy. To be about his Father's business; to be doing the will of him that sent him, and finishing his work; to say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight;"—such joy is his always. Throughout the whole of his painful toil and solitary suffering there may be traced an undercurrent of real joy, without Which, I am persuaded, that countenance "so marred with grief" could not have worn, as it did, the aspect of one "fairer than the children of men, into whose lips grace was poured."

Nay, even of his last agony is it not said that "for the joy set before him he endured the cross?" (Heb. 12:2). There was joy set before him, lying full in his view, in his very endurance of the cross. But what! one says—joy in that dark hour! Over the most excruciating torture of body the brave soul may rise triumphant. But when his soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death; when his Father was hiding his face from him; when the wrath of a holy God and the curse of a broken law were upon him; when literally the pains of hell gat hold of him; how could there be joy then? Nay, I cannot tell how. But I bid you ask yourselves if, when he cried, "Father, glorify thy name;" if, when he said, "The cup which my Father giveth me shall I not drink it?" if, when in his bloody sweat these words came forth, "Father, thy will be done,"—there was no joy in his spirit. More than that, I ask if you can conceive of him, in his utmost extremity of peril, endurance, and expiatory woe, ever for a moment losing the consciousness that he was doing his Father's will and finishing his Father's work? Could that consciousness be ever interrupted? Could it ever cease to be a source of inward joy? There is joy lying before him, beside him, as he hangs on the accursed tree; not the joy of hopeful anticipation merely, in the near prospect of victory, but the stern joy of battle in the midst of the hot and heady fight, as—true to the trust committed to him by his Father and loving to the last his own whom he came to save—he bares his bosom to the sword awaking in its righteousness to smite the willing victim. That joy no man, no devil, taketh from him; the joy with which he meets the Father's just demand of a great propitiation:—"Lo, I come; I delight to do thy will, O God;"—the joy with which he sees already of the travail of his soul when he says to the dying penitent, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Not in heaven only, among the angels of God, but on earth also, in one holy bosom at least, there is in that hour joy "over one sinner that repents."

This joy, "his joy," is to become ours; it is to "remain in us." "Our joy is to be full" by "his joy being fulfilled in us." Let us notice first the reality, and then the fulness, of this fellowship or partnership of joy between Christ and us.

(I.) Christ would have his joy to be really ours. The bridegroom's friend, standing and hearing him, is to rejoice greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. But that is not all. Something more than the Baptist's official joy, as the bridegroom's friend, waiting upon him as his minister, is to be ours. For the Lord says that "to be least in the kingdom of heaven is to be greater than John the Baptist." In all that constitutes the essence of his own joy the Lord associates us in intimate union with himself.

Thus, first, in his standing with the Father, and before the Father, he calls us to share. The position which he occupies in the Father's house and in the Father's heart is ours as well as his. It is that which opens the way to his joy being ours. And what opens the way to that? His making our standing and our position his. There is an exchange of places between him and us. Our state of guilt as criminals and prodigals, with all its misery, he takes to be his, that his state of acceptance as the Father's righteous servant, and exaltation as the Father's acknowledged Son, with all its joy, may be ours. Hence our sharing his joy begins with our sharing his cross. It begins with our mourning for our sin as piercing him. The very mourning itself has in it an element of joy; a certain feeling of calm and chastened satisfaction that the strife with God is ended, through our being moved by his Spirit to give in to him. And soon clearer, fuller joy comes. Looking still on that pierced one, pierced for us as well as by us, we see how thoroughly, by putting himself in our place, he has so met and discharged all our liabilities, that we, "being redeemed from the curse of the law," may, by his putting us in his own place, "receive the adoption of sons."

Then, secondly, he makes us partakers of the very same inward evidence of acceptance and Sonship which he himself had when he was on earth. The Baptist testified, "God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him." How much the presence of the Holy Ghost, ever consciously realized, contributed to keep alive in the holy human soul of Jesus, amid all his toil and pain, a joyful sense of his being still the Father's chosen servant and beloved Son—who can tell?

Thirdly, we have the same commission with Christ; the same trust reposed in us; the same work assigned to us. Accepted and adopted in him; sealed as he was sealed by the Spirit; we are sent as he was sent into the

world. This capital ingredient, this great element of his joy, is ours. It was a deep, secret wellspring of joy in his heart; the feeling, never for a moment lost or interrupted, of his being the Father's fellow, the Father's agent, in carrying out that wondrous plan that had been concerted between them, in the council-chamber of the Godhead, from everlasting. There could be nothing, in all his experience, so mean but that this thought must ennoble it; nothing so dark but that this thought must enlighten it; nothing so toilsome or so tearful but that this thought must gladden it. And now, he takes us into his counsels, as the Father has him in his. "All that he has heard of the Father he makes known to us." He does not keep us, as mere servants, in the dark, about what he is doing; prescribing to us our tasks, without information or explanation, to be blindly executed by us in ignorance of what it may all mean. We are "his friends;" the men of his secret; with us he has no reserve; from us he keeps back nothing (John 15:14, 15). He admits us to his fullest confidence. Some matters, indeed, pertaining to "the times and seasons which the Father hath put in his own power," it may not be for us to know. They are such as he himself, in the days of his manhood, did not care to know. But as to all that is essential, we have the same intelligence that he had, and the same insight. He sends us, as the Father sent him.

Have you, let me ask, duly considered what community of mind and heart between Christ and you all this implies? And what community of joy?

Ah! when you wearily pace the beaten round of certain devout observances; or when you painfully deny yourselves this or that gratification on which your inclinations remain as much set as ever; or when, with half-opened hand, you dole out your measured mite, as you call it, in a good cause, or a cause you cannot venture to put away as bad; or when you labor hard at your cheerless daily toil, or drag your lazy limbs along in some self-prescribed walk of beneficence, as if you were doing the dullest piece-work for the scantiest wages; and when you count such sort of service religion, as if that were the new obedience to which you are called;—can you wonder that you have no joy in the Lord? May not God say to you, as he said once to another, who, however grudgingly, must yet do his pleasure,—"Have you considered my servant Jesus?" Get something of his acquaintance with me, and with my plans and my ways. Get something of his spirit as he rejoiced to feel always the greatness of the trust committed to him. Get it from himself. Get it in himself. "Take his yoke upon you, and learn of him."

For, fourthly, here is the chief element of his joy. He is "meek and lowly in heart;" and therefore "his yoke is easy, and his burden is light;" so easy, so light, that he may count it joy to bear them. It is not an easy yoke in itself that is his; nor a light burden. But his meekness and lowliness in heart makes the yoke easy, and the burden light. The yoke that was laid on his neck when he took the form of a servant was hard indeed; the yoke of subjection to the law, as broken by us and demanding satisfaction from him. The burden that was lying on his shoulders all the time he was doing the work of a servant was heavy indeed; the burden of bringing in an everlasting righteousness, with full expiation of guilt on behalf of us, miserable sinners. But as the seven years of service seemed to Jacob but one day for the love he bore to Rachel, so the meek and lowly heart of Jesus makes the hard yoke easy and the heavy burden light. In his case, as in Jacob's, the charm is love; love, rejoicing in his Father, whose will he is doing; love, rejoicing over us, whom he is purchasing to be his spouse. For, in a word, it is his self-renunciation, so absolute and entire; his self-forgetting, self-sacrificing affection; his so completely losing himself, merging himself, in the Father whom he serves and the people whom he saves; this is that meekness and lowliness of heart which, making his yoke easy to him and his burden light, moves him, "rejoicing in spirit," to cry, "I thank thee, O Father." We must share that meekness of his; that lowliness of heart. We, like him, must be emptied of self.

For no true joy is or can be selfish. I may hug myself, and applaud myself, and pamper myself, and think to laugh all thought of others, and all care about their thoughts of me, away. I do but kick against the pricks. The task of vindicating my self-sufficiency and asserting my self-will, to my own contentment, against all and sundry, I soon find to be no child's play; but a hard yoke indeed, and a heavy burden. Let me get out of my own narrow self into Christ, and the large heart of Christ. Let me, like him, be meek and lowly in heart; accepting the conditions of my earthly lot; discharging the duty of my earthly calling; meeting the trials of my earthly pilgrimage; not as if I were entitled selfishly to take credit for what I do, or take amiss anything I have to suffer; but simply in loving obedience to my heavenly Father, and loving sympathy with him in his truth and holiness and wide and pure benevolence. That was Christ's way; that was Christ's joy. Then may I have freedom, enlargement, joy, as Christ had, in walking with my Father in heaven always; going about in my Father's name doing good; drinking whatever cup my Father giveth me; and on whatever cross he may see fit to nail me, saying still, as I give up the ghost, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

(II.) The reality of this joy,—Christ's own joy remaining in us,—may now be partly apparent. But who shall venture to describe its fulness? "That my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full;" so he speaks

to his apostles. "That they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves;" so he speaks to the Father concerning them. "That your joy may be full;" such is the beloved apostle's longing on behalf of his disciples, as it was his master's on behalf of his chosen ones.

Surely, one would say, it is to the future state, the life to come, the world beyond the grave, that these expressions point. And that is doubtless true. In its utmost and ultimate perfection, this full joy belongs to heaven. So it is with Christ's own personal joy. In heaven he fully rejoices with the Father and the eternal Spirit over his fulfilled work of glorious righteousness and grace, and the fulfilled fruits of it, in the fulfilled salvation of all the multitude of his redeemed.

Was it something of that joy that Paul caught a glimpse of in that strange ecstasy of his, when he was caught up into the third heaven,—into paradise,—and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for man to utter? (2Cor. 12:1-4). Was it Moses and Elias that he overheard, as on a higher mount of transfiguration, talking with Jesus about the deace now accomplished at Jerusalem? Or was it Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; the everlasting Father, communing with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, now in his bosom evermore, and the blessed Spirit plying evermore his ministry between God and men? But "something sealed the lips" of Paul. Let me, therefore, be silent, and wait. Let me rather see if there is not some sense,—some humbler and more practicable point of view,—in which I have to do with that fulness of joy.

In the 45th Psalm the Messiah, rejoicing over his church as a bridegroom over his bride, is thus saluted: "Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad." This gladness of the anointing oil and the sweet-smelling spices is all associated with his loving righteousness and hating wickedness. The secret of his full joy lies in his being, as his Father is, the holy one and the just.

Hence there can be no discrepancy of thought, or taste, or feeling, between him and the Father who has sent him. All things about his mission appear to him as they appear to the Father; they are to him what they are to the Father. No painful effort is ever needed to bring his judgment into subjection to the Father's; or his will into harmony with the Father's. No lurking tendency of his own nature toward evil; no insidious suggestion of the tempter; no impatience of subordination; no secret longing to taste the liberty of self-will;—can ever interfere with his walking in the light as God is in the light. And that is the perfection of blessedness. To one who is at once a servant and a son that is "fulness of joy."

Is it attainable by us here? Yes, in measure, and in growing measure. Let our nature be assimilated to that of God; our mind to his; our heart to his. Let our souls learn the lesson of seeing as he sees and feeling as he feels. Let sin be to us what it is to him; and righteousness and truth as well. Let there be a clear understanding between him and us upon all questions; a thorough identity of interest and inclination in all points; an entire agreement of opinion and choice in the great strife of good and evil going on in the world. That was Christ's own joy. And it was fulness of joy, even when his personal share in that strife cost him the tears of Gethsemane and the bitter cry of Calvary. Let it be ours, more and more, through our growth in grace and in holiness. All misery lies in our judgment not being in subjection to God's; our will not being in harmony with his. Misery ends, and fulness of joy comes, when we think and feel and wish as God does. Therefore fulness of joy may be ours; ours more and more; when "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord,"—this glory of his being the Father's willing servant and loyal Son,—"we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

And now, perhaps, we may see more clearly than we have been accustomed to see the propriety of this "joy of the Lord,"—this "joy in the Lord,"—being represented as not merely a privilege, but a duty. "Rejoice in the Lord; and again I say unto you rejoice." For this joy is not anything like that sort of mysterious incomprehensible rapture into which the spirits may be occasionally thrown under some sudden and irresistible impulse from without or from within. It is not mere excitement. It is not what many call enthusiasm, proper to high festivals. It is a calm and sober frame of mind, suited for everyday wear and everyday work. Neither is its nature recondite, abstruse, and mystical; nor does it come and go in flashes, like the winged fire of heaven. It can be explained and accounted for; analyzed and described. Its elements and causes can be specified. Its rise and progress can be traced. It is not therefore an attainment with which we can dispense; it is "our strength." Nor is it a grace for which we may idly wait until it drop upon us unawares from above. We have it in us, the germ of it, the essence of it, if we have Christ in us; if we have the Spirit of Christ. "And if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Stir up then the gift that is in you. Do you ask how? Observe the different connections in which your sharing the Lord's joy stands in the farewell discourses and the farewell prayer;—as first, with your keeping his commandments and abiding in his love, as he kept the Father's commandments, and abode in the Father's love (John 15:10, 11); secondly, with your asking in his name as you have never asked before (16:24); and, thirdly, with your being kept in the Father's name, in ever-brightening disclosures of the Father's glorious perfections (17:11, 13). And observe, in the fourth place, the beloved apostle's warm appreciation of this joy as realized in the communion of saints: "Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink; but I trust to come unto you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full" (2 John 12).

Surely this joy of the Lord, as it is thus intimately associated;—first with obedience,—secondly with prayer,—thirdly with the study of the divine character,—and fourthly with the cultivation of Christian communion;—is no rare rapture, to be snatched at intervals of excited devotion. It is, on the contrary, a calm and chastened frame of mind; such as may be realized in every common duty, in every humble supplication, in every devout exercise of soul upon the divine word, in every greeting exchanged lovingly with any of the Lord's people.

Well therefore may the apostolic precept run thus—"Rejoice evermore." For this joy is independent of events and circumstances. The labors you are engaged in may be the hardest drudgery; the people to whom you are seeking to be useful may be the most perverse of all men. Your temper, patience, love, faith, hope, may be tried to the very utmost; all may seem dark; friends may change, and enemies may be round about you. But Christ is the same, and his joy is the same; the joy of doing and suffering his Father's will. "Rejoice ye if ye are counted worthy to suffer for his sake." "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience," and that if "patience has her perfect work" ye shall be "perfect and entire, lacking nothing." Let nothing mar or damp your joy. What can mar or damp it if it is Christ's joy remaining in you; Christ's joy fulfilled in you; Christ's joy and yours together in his Father and your Father, his God and your God?

"Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation (Hab 3:17, 18).

That was the prophet's joy, because he apprehended it as Christ's joy, seeing his day afar off, and being glad as he saw it. Let it be your joy also, your joy in him, "whom having not seen you love, and in whom, though now you see him not, you rejoice;" with his own joy fulfilled in you; and therefore "with joy unspeakable and full of glory." ([1 John 1:4 The Joy of the Lord and Its Fulness](#))