



THE ORCHARD

## **Yet I Will Rejoice – The Call to Biblical Joy**

Habakkuk 3:17-19 | Philippians 4:4-7 | 1 Peter 1:6-9

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Let me ask you a question, and I want you to sit with it honestly before you answer. When was the last time you were genuinely, deeply happy? Not just comfortable, not just distracted by something pleasant — I mean happy.

Now let me ask the second question: what produced it? A promotion. A good report from the doctor. A reconciled relationship. A quiet Saturday with nothing on the schedule.

If we are honest, most of what we call happiness is essentially a report card on our circumstances. When things go well, the grade is high. When things fall apart, the grade falls with them. That is not a character flaw — it is simply what the world offers. And what the world offers, however good, often changes without asking our permission.

So let me ask a question underneath the question: are you joyful? Not happy. Not okay. Not getting by. Joyful. The kind of joy that is yours regardless of what greeted you this morning or tomorrow morning — the kind that does not depend on the diagnosis, the relationship, the bank account, the phone call you have been waiting for.

Most of us, if we are honest, would say no. Or sometimes. Or it depends on the week. That is not a failure of faith. It is what happens when we have quietly substituted happiness for joy without realizing we made the trade. Happiness is a response to circumstances. But joy — biblical joy — is a response to God. And that difference, friends, makes a difference.

C.S. Lewis spent decades pursuing joy as a feeling — chasing it through books, through music, through every moment of beauty he could find. But eventually he came to a difficult and clarifying conclusion. Joy was not about a feeling at all. It was about a Person. The feeling had only ever been a signpost pointing him toward the One his soul had been longing for all along — Jesus Christ. The joy he had been chasing was not in the experience. It was in Him.

We are going to look at biblical joy this morning.

Let me give you a working definition before we turn to the texts — something to carry with you through the rest of our time and beyond.

### **WORKING DEFINITION**

***Biblical joy is the settled gladness of soul that comes from knowing God in Christ as our supreme treasure — a satisfaction the world cannot give, circumstances cannot take, and eternity will only enrich.***

Let me unpack that, because every phrase is doing real work.

It is a settled gladness of soul. There is a gladness of the moment that we all know — it is a joy to hold a newborn, a joy to sit at a full table with people you love. But that gladness arrives with the moment and leaves with it. What Scripture means by joy is a gladness not of the moment but of the soul — a gladness that remains long after the good moment is gone. It is not at the mercy of circumstance; but a gladness anchored in the God who is sovereign over every circumstance — a glad assurance, a soul at rest in Him.

It comes from knowing God in Christ as our supreme treasure — meaning what we know about God comes first, and the gladness rises up out of that knowing. The feeling follows the knowing. This is true of every example we will consider — Habakkuk, Paul, and Peter alike — in each of whom the grasp of God’s truth came first, and the joy flowed out of it.

It is a satisfaction the world cannot give — no promotion, no relationship, no diagnosis turning out well can manufacture it. The world does not have it to give.

It is a satisfaction circumstances cannot take — when the dream collapses, the diagnosis goes the other way, the body fails, your ultimate joy is not in any of those things, so their loss cannot reach it.

And it is a satisfaction eternity will only enrich — what you have now in Christ is the first sip of something whose full taste is still coming. Every joy in this life is, as Lewis said, a pointer to a joy that awaits us in the presence of God himself.

So if you forget everything else I say this morning, take this with you: **Joy is gladness rooted in God, not in circumstances — and so it anchors us.**

That is what we are after this morning. Not happiness — which can be fragile, and which we already know how to chase. Joy. The kind Habakkuk found in the ruins, the kind Paul practiced from prison, the kind Peter said is already taking on the quality of heaven in the midst of suffering. We will look at three texts that together give us a biblical picture of this joy — not the whole of it, but a true beginning for us to grasp.

### **I. Joy Has a Resolve — Habakkuk 3:17-19**

Habakkuk opens with the prophet deeply disturbed about God’s apparent silence in the face of violence and injustice. God’s answer only makes it worse: He intends to use the brutal Babylonian empire as an instrument of judgment against His own people, Israel. Habakkuk is staggered.

The book is a record of his wrestling with God in dark and dire circumstances. But listen to where the wrestling lands. Chapter three moves from trembling to trust to something that can only be called triumph — and arrives, in the final three verses, at one of the most astonishing declarations in all of Scripture.

***“Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer’s; he makes me tread on my high places.” - HABAKKUK 3:17-19 (ESV)***

What Habakkuk describes is total agricultural and economic collapse. The failure of fig trees, vines, olives, grain, flocks, and herds in an agrarian economy is not an inconvenience. It is the end of everything. There is nothing left.

And into that absolute nothing, Habakkuk says three words that should stun us: “Yet I will.”

Notice what kind of words those are. Yet I will. That is not the language of a feeling. A feeling would say “yet I feel” or “yet I hope”. Habakkuk says “yet I will.” That is the language of the will — of a man setting himself, deciding, resolving. He is not reporting a mood that washed over him in the ruins. He is taking a posture. The resolve comes first — a will, anchored in who God is, choosing to rejoice — and the joy rises out of it.

That is why I state ***Joy Has a Resolve***. Underneath it, always, is a will that has settled itself on God before the feeling ever arrives. And that resolve is not a leap in the dark — it is grounded in something Habakkuk knows to be true about God.

**Yet.** That single word is significant. It does not deny the devastation. Habakkuk is not in denial, not acting contentment, not pretending. The “yet” acknowledges everything — the empty stalls, the barren fig tree, the silent fields — and then resolves to rejoice anyway.

R.C. Sproul observes that this movement from lament to praise is not irrational — it is the most rational response possible once you have settled the question of who God is. Habakkuk’s joy is the conclusion of a spiritual contest. He has wrestled with God’s sovereignty — and come through with a firmer grip on God himself. The resolve to rejoice is built on that grip.

The Hebrew word for rejoice here means— to leap, to exult, to spin with exuberance. This is explosive, defiant, liberated gladness, rooted in one thing: “the God of my salvation.” Notice Habakkuk does not say, “I will rejoice when things improve.” He says, “I will rejoice in the Lord.” The preposition in is telling. The Lord himself is the location of Habakkuk’s joy. God is not the means to joy — He is the substance of it.

John Calvin understood that Habakkuk's praise is the product of a faith that passed through the fire and came out holding on to God. The joy in that is not cheap; it was forged in the dark. This kind of joy is no shortcut — it is what happens when what you believe stops being something you hold and becomes something that holds you.

But what does this look like in a real life of the 21st C? Is it reachable — not just for an Old Testament prophet, but for someone like us? Let me tell you about a man who found out.

### *Nick Vujicic*

Nick was born in Melbourne in 1982 with no arms and no legs. Not injured — born. He was mocked, isolated, treated as something less than, and by the age of ten he was suicidal. He used to lie in bed and ask God the very question Habakkuk asked — why? Why this? Why me? Why won’t you fix it? The answer God gave him was not a healing. The limbs did not grow back. What happened instead was a reckoning — Nick

came to believe, and then to \*know,\* that God's purposes were not derailed by his body; that the One who formed him in the womb had not made a mistake and was not absent. And when that truth moved from his head into his bones, something broke open. Nick found a settled gladness of the soul.

He has stood before hundreds of thousands of people — no arms, no legs — and spoken about joy with a credibility no able-bodied person in the room can easily dismiss. Not happiness. Not positivity. Joy — the kind that looks out at a watching world and says, in almost exactly Habakkuk's words, yet. Yet I will. He has said that his lack of limbs is the greatest gift God ever gave him, because it made him unable to trust in anything but God himself. The fig tree was never going to blossom. And so he learned, earlier than most, where joy actually lives.

That is Habakkuk's "yet" in the flesh — not erasing the empty stalls or the missing limbs, but moving through them with a will resolved on God.

**APPLICATION** - Think of the barren fig tree in your own life right now. The empty stall. The diagnosis that came back wrong. The marriage that went quiet. The child who walked away from faith. Habakkuk — and God — are not asking you to minimize those things. They are asking whether God himself, apart from what God gives, is enough. And hear the good news underneath the question: He is — He proved it at the cross. So do what Habakkuk did. Bring your barren fig tree to Him by name this week and tell Him you will rejoice in Him whether or not it ever blossoms.

Habakkuk shows us where joy begins. Now Paul shows us how it becomes a daily practice.

## **II. Joy Has a Practice — Philippians 4:4-7**

Philippians is the most consistently joyful piece of literature in the New Testament. The word "joy" or "rejoice" appears sixteen times in four chapters. What makes that remarkable is the return address: Paul

writes from a Roman prison, awaiting trial before Caesar. If anyone had an excuse to be joyless, it is Paul. Yet he shows us that joy is not only a choice but a practice.

***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” - PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7 (ESV)***

The first word is a command: Rejoice. A present-tense imperative. Not a suggestion. A command. And that is either cruel or it is the most encouraging thing imaginable — because commands imply possibility.

### *The surgeon's command*

A few years ago my wife had knee replacement surgery. Only hours after the surgery, the surgeon did not come in and say, “I hope you feel like walking soon.” He commanded it: Jo Ann I want you to get up. Walk.” She could have said, “But it hurts.” And he would have said, “I know. Walk anyway.” His command was the most hopeful thing in the room — because it meant he had determined Jo could walk. The command assumed the capacity. And with the doctor supplying everything she needed, she yielded to it. She got up, and she walked. Command implies it’s possible.

John Piper has hammered this for decades: if joy were merely a feeling, commanding it would be absurd — like commanding a man to be six feet tall. But if joy can be cultivated and practiced through specific disciplines, then the command is a gift. ~~God is saying: here is how.~~

Notice the qualifier: ***“in the Lord.”*** The command is not to manufacture good feelings or practice positive thinking. It is to rejoice in a Person. To be “in the Lord” means Christ is now the place you live — your identity, your strength, and your hope are found in being joined to Him, not in anything around you.

Then Paul says it again: “*Again I will say, rejoice.*” The repetition is emphatic and pastoral. He knows that when the service is over and the Bible is closed, the command will feel impossible the moment you return — to the room where you are waiting, to the conversation you are dreading, to the weight you are carrying that does not lift.

Then Paul lays out the actual practice — and here is how these verses fit together. Many careful readers — and they are right — see in verses 6 and 7 a remedy for anxiety. Paul says do not be anxious about anything, and gives the antidote: prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. And the result? The peace of God will guard your hearts and your minds. Anxiety is the problem, prayerful thanksgiving the means, peace the outflow. That is a true and precious reading — and if you came this morning weighed down with worry, that alone is worth the price of admission.

But notice where the passage begins. Not with anxiety. It begins with a command to rejoice — twice. And it ends with the peace of God standing guard over the heart. Joy at the front, peace at the back, and in between, the practices: gentleness/reasonableness, prayer, thanksgiving. The very practices that drive out anxiety and produce peace I believe are also the practices that cultivate and sustain joy. They are not two mechanisms but one. The prayer that quiets your fear is the prayer that feeds your joy. The thanksgiving that guards your mind is the thanksgiving that gladdens your heart.

**First: gentleness toward others.** “Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.” That word — reasonableness — is one no single English word quite captures; it is also rendered moderation, graciousness, or gentleness, describing a whole disposition: the person who does not insist on their own rights, who is yielding rather than grasping, gracious rather than harsh. Notice where Paul places it — right on the heels of “rejoice in the Lord always.” He moves from joy to how we treat people in the same breath, and that is no accident. When we lack joy, the lack does not stay hidden inside us; it leaks out onto everyone

around us. Joyless people are exhausting to live with. And the reason is almost always fear: anxiety about what we might lose makes us demanding, brittle, impossible — we grasp, we control, we keep score.

But the person whose joy is anchored in God is no longer desperately protecting what they have. And a person who is not anxiously protecting themselves can finally be free to be gentle. That is Tim Keller's observation exactly: the gentle person is the one who has found a security that circumstances cannot threaten. So gentleness is not a separate item on a checklist. It is joy becoming visible — the overflow of a heart so settled in God it no longer needs to grasp. Show me a gentle spirit, and I will show you a soul at rest in God. Show me a harsh and grasping one, and I will show you a soul that has misplaced its joy.

**Second: prayer saturated with thanksgiving.** "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Thanksgiving in prayer is not polite formality — it is the active recollection of God's past faithfulness as the ground for present petition. To pray with thanksgiving is to say: thank you for all you have already done — now I bring you this impossible thing. That reorientation is itself joy-producing.

And take note **how the practice produces fruit:** the fortress of peace. "The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." The word "guard" is a military term — the word for keeping watch over a fortified place. And notice: the guarding is not yours to do — you bring the prayer; God posts the sentry.

### *The walled city*

In the ancient world, a walled city with watchmen on its ramparts was a city that could sleep. Without sentries posted through the night, no one rested easy — every sound might be an enemy, every shadow a threat. But inside a guarded city, even knowing the dangers were real outside the walls, the people could lie down and sleep. Not because the threat was gone. Because the protection was certain.

Paul is saying that when joy is practiced, the peace of God becomes a fortress around the heart — the threats outside the walls are still real, but the soul inside can rest. Your diagnosis is still real. The threats have not vanished from outside the walls. But for the soul that has brought those things rightly to God, peace stands guard over the interior life — a protection that does not depend on the circumstances resolving. This is what makes Paul's joy from a Roman prison not just admirable but understandable. The peace was keeping watch over him. And that same protection is available to everyone who will bring their anxieties to God with thanksgiving for what He has already done.

Notice that every element in these verses — the command, the gentleness, the prayer, the thanksgiving, the fortress of peace — carries the same address. In the Lord. In Christ Jesus. The practice of joy is not a self-improvement program with religious language attached. It is life lived in Person, in Christ. Keep Him — practice joy in Him — and even a Roman prison becomes a place where joy not only survives but instructs the church for two thousand years.

**APPLICATION** - Here is your task this week — not to feel joyful, but to do what Paul says. Take the one thing you are most anxious about, the thing sitting on your mind and heart, and bring it to God with thanksgiving for what He has already done. Then leave it with Him and watch for the peace that stands guard. The fortress is real, and it is yours in Christ. That is not passive; it is the most active, most Christ-grounded thing you could do with your fear.

Habakkuk shows us joy as resolve. Paul shows us joy as practice. Now Peter shows us joy as glory — and why suffering does not destroy it but deepens it.

### **III. Joy Has a Glory — 1 Peter 1:6-9**

Peter writes to believers scattered across Asia Minor — strangers, exiles, people displaced for their faith. He calls them “elect exiles.” They are suffering. And yet before Peter says a single word about that suffering, he

does something wise. He lays a foundation — three unassailable realities, set before them before the subject of trials ever comes up. Listen carefully.

***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” - 1 PETER 1:3-5 (ESV)***

Three things Peter nails to the wall before he says another word. A living hope — not a wish, not optimism, but a hope made alive by a risen Christ. An inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading — kept in heaven, beyond the reach of anything that can touch you here. And the power of God standing guard over you through faith until that salvation is fully revealed.

Now — with those three realities in place — hear what Peter says next.

***“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith — more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” - 1 PETER 1:6-9 (ESV)***

Three things in this passage deserve careful attention.

First: joy and grief coexist. “In this — in the hope, the inheritance, the power of God — you rejoice, ***though now for a little while you have been grieved.***” Peter does not ask his suffering readers to choose between

grief and joy. He says both are real and both are present at once. For some of you this may be the most important observation this morning. Biblical joy is not the suppression of sorrow.

Grant Osborne notes that the grammar here implies an ongoing, simultaneous experience — they are rejoicing even as they grieve. The joy does not cancel the grief. The grief does not cancel the joy.

We have seen this already — in Habakkuk, who felt the full weight of devastation before he said “yet.” But let me show you what it looks like not in an ancient prophet, but in a man many of us knew and loved.

### *Tim Keller*

When Tim Keller was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2020, he did something that surprised even those who knew him well. He did not minimize the grief or project a cheerful stoicism. He said plainly that he was afraid, that the prognosis was serious, that there were things he grieved losing. But in the same breath — sometimes the same sentence — he spoke of a joy so settled and so real that it was, in his own word, increasing. Not despite the cancer. Not after it resolved. Increasing in the middle of it.

In one of his last conversations he said: “I’m not going to pretend I’m not afraid. But I can tell you that the thing I have believed and preached for fifty years is now the most real thing in my experience. The joy is not theoretical. It is here. It is more here than the cancer.”

Those present at his death in May 2023 reported a man whose joy was not competing with his grief. It was larger than it.

That is what Peter is describing. Joy inexpressible and filled with glory — not the absence of grief, but a joy larger than the grief. Not canceling it. Outlasting it.

Second: the suffering is purposeful. The trials exist “so that the tested genuineness of your faith — more precious than gold — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” The suffering is not random. It is a refining fire, and what is refined is faith. God is sovereign over suffering.

He is not absent in it but at work through it, toward an end more glorious than our present pain can perceive.

Third: the joy is already taking on glory. The phrase is extraordinary — “joy inexpressible and filled with glory.” The Greek carries the very quality of divine glory. Peter is saying that the joy of the believer, even now, even in trial, is already beginning to take on the quality of heaven. And notice the final phrase: we are “obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” Joy has a destination. Our present joy is the first installment, a down payment on a joy so vast our language cannot contain it.

**APPLICATION** - If you are grieving something real this morning — and some of you are — Peter is not asking you to pretend otherwise, or to manufacture a feeling you do not have. But hear this, gently: underneath the grief, there is an anchor, and it will hold. The God who raised Jesus is at work in your suffering this very moment, carrying you toward a glory your grief cannot touch.

So when the gladness does not come — hold on. Hold to what is true: that you are kept, you are loved, the morning is coming. That holding on, in the dark, is faith — and faith is the hand that grips the joy God has already given you in Christ.

### **CONCLUSION**

The joy of Habakkuk when things were crumbling, the joy of Paul from prison, the joy of Peter in the midst of suffering — each of them had a thread that ties them all together: their joy was in the Lord God himself. They found joy by knowing the One who is himself the source and the substance of joy.

**Joy is gladness rooted in God, not in circumstances — and so it anchors us.**

I close with the question I want you to carry with you this morning: What is your fig tree? What is the person, the situation, the outcome that, if it were removed, you believe would take your joy with it? That is the place where Habakkuk’s “yet” needs to land. That is the place where Paul’s practice needs to begin. That

is the place where Peter's inexpressible joy wants to take root.

The fig tree may yet be barren. But the God of your salvation is not. And in Him — in Him alone — there is a joy that no circumstance in heaven, earth, or hell can take from you.

***"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation." - HABAKKUK 3:18***

Let us pray.