

Chapter 5

Secret Number Four:

THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH

*The difficulties we go through in life have nothing to subtract from
God's faithfulness to us.*

*"Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you
who are upright in heart!"*

—Psalm 32:11

*Did you know that clinging to the joy of the Lord even at the most
trying moment is a powerful weapon against depression and
despair? And did you equally know that exercising the joy of the
Lord is in itself an act of worship?*

God's Verdict vs Men's

Sometimes we allow what people tell or do to us ruin our day or
even our entire life. We meditate on what people say more than
we do on what God says.

We sometimes allow our social environment manipulate our egos

with flatteries, leading to pride and lofty attitude, all along oblivious that they are setting us up for a flop—that is when it is ‘positive’. When it is negative, we allow the withheld compliments; mistreatment; afflictions; negative criticism; oppression, *etc.* rob us of the joy of the Lord. Both ways, man can get us out of step with God.

When they flatter us, we become proud; when they look down upon us we, develop low self-esteem. This shouldn’t be so. Human judgment of who we are is always not accurate. Furthermore, man’s judgement is like weather—it changes with time and can be very abrupt. Anyone who depends on what people say about him to define his identity is prone to always fail to know ‘who’ he is.

Why should we allow what people do or say send us downcast more than we allow what God does and say send us rejoicing? Why would what people say or do to us make us unhappy while what God tells us doesn’t send us jovial and rejoicing? Whose word do we need to identify with? Whose word really counts in matters of our identity; our worth and our future?

It would be dishonest and unrealistic to hold that what people say or do ‘mean nothing’. The point is that we need to quickly remember our identity; worth; promises and destiny in Christ so that we can make a quick recovery lest we be made to think that the human condemnation, judgement, insult and write-offs, *etc.* are what will ultimately count to determine who we really are and what we are capable of becoming.

When we allow people make us feel less than what we actually are, the foundation of our worth and identity crumbles. When this happens, we may grumble within us ‘questioning’ God, directly or indirectly, why we ‘lack’ what others have—for example. It becomes a demoralising task trying to build a spirit of worship when we bemoan our condition.

If we focus on our relationship with God, we would get immersed into worshipping Him in His glory. In this way, instead of becoming depressed and discouraged for weeks, we would remember the great promises we have in God—promises that nothing can take away from us, we would become surpassingly glad. This, I admit, is making it sound so simple. But, isn’t that the secret? I have tried it and it works. I must say that it doesn’t come easily.

One has to struggle to get to a point of ‘forgetting’ the adverse things happening around him to focus on rejoicing and worshipping God. The faster one struggles out of the hole of despair, the better strength one would acquire to even ‘win the battle’ after a ‘war had been lost’.

The promises of God stand even after we have lost a war. We must know that we may lose a war but win the battle. What God says about us is so powerful that it has power to cancel any depression. But we have to believe it and resist the prodding temptation of picking a grudge or settling in a hole of despair. We have to resist the temptations of being bent on settling the score.

It begins with nurturing a good attitude and then cultivating a good practice. Before knowing what manner of challenges we may face, we can resolve not to allow anything rob us of the joy of the Lord.

Once the joy of the Lord is taken, we can be sure that we have been weakened. In fact, we need strength more when we are down than when we are up. This means that we need the joy of the Lord when we are down more than otherwise. When things are pretty bad, that is when we need to rejoice forcefully and devotedly. This is not just making an act, it is a real thing.

When things are not going on well, we need to remind ourselves that if we put on a gloomy countenance and allow the trouble to sink into our spirit, we would have let go our strength at a time we need it more. Rejoicing is a weapon, and a powerful weapon at that. By rejoicing in the face of adversity, we would be literally worshipping God. We would be practically expressing our faith in Him and ascribing to His omnipotence.

Life can deny us many things; we can be robbed of virtually anything but one thing we must not allow anybody or anything to rob us of is the joy of the Lord. Thank God it isn’t something physical that someone can overpower us and carry away. It is something in the heart. God has given us the power and choice to protect it. What we need is a right attitude, strong will and a covenanted resolve. All these must be backed up by a ‘right conduct’.

Why should we allow what people do or say send us downcast more than we allow what God does and say send us rejoicing?

One thing we must always remember whenever we are faced with any manner of trouble is that the joy of the Lord is our strength. If we would *fight*, we must know our weapon. I wouldn't be surprised if it turned out that the trumpet that was being blown as the Israelites went round the wall of Jericho (Josh. 6), was music enough that it elated their spirit. They must have begun rejoicing and expressing themselves in dances as they shouted, bringing down the walls of the enemy.

The joy of the Lord makes music in our heart that is a true worship unto the Lord. In the face of a battle, we can make music in our heart and rejoice before the Lord. This in itself is weapon enough to scatter the enemy.

A man at his late thirties sat in front of a doctor who frankly told him that he had at most two years to live. The terminal condition he had would not allow him go beyond two years. The man, fully persuaded that he had God's verdict on his case, found the doctor's statement amusing. He broke out laughing. He had such a hearty laugh that the doctor couldn't understand how someone could laugh at such a terrifying turn of event.

When the doctor asked him what was funny in that dreadful news, he got an opportunity to share his faith and convictions with the doctor. Knowing the kind of scepticism that many doctors have in medical matters vis-à-vis divine healing, he didn't want the doctor to think that he was out of touch with 'the medical reality'. He told the doctor that he is aware that what the doctor said can happen but it must not look like it is the last word and that his case is sealed. He shared with the doctor how he has peace in his heart and with God. As long as we have peace with God, we would have all the reason to rejoice.

He told the doctor that he was not afraid to die since he knew where he was destined to. He had talked to God about his case and

was not bothered. By the time I was writing this book, it was about eight years since he was diagnosed with the problem and three years since the doctor told him he had only two years to live. He is healthy and strong, not a single sign that he might be winding up soon.

Don't allow anyone or anything rob you of the joy of the Lord. It is the most powerful weapon to use when the battle rages. The joy of the Lord forestalls worries, despair and feelings of hopelessness.

Just about the time I started writing this book, I lost my job in very questionable circumstances. The day it dawned on me that I was losing my job, despair began creeping over me—it almost did me in. Then I realised that it was a test for the very convictions God had put in my heart. From the place of work, I went home and put on some praise and worship songs. You could have seen me praising, dancing and worshipping. By the time I lost the job, I was completely 'in control'.

It was not easy dancing away the bad news about the imminent loss of my job, especially for the questionable grounds. Nevertheless, I was determined to tightly clasp at the joy of the Lord. It worked—sooner rather than later. In the process, God gave me the grace to hold no grudge against the people who worked behind the scene to have me dismissed. In fact, I put them in my prayer list and prayed for them as often as I remembered them. The prayer was not that God may deal with them. I prayed and still pray grace and blessings over them. I knew that even without a job, I still had something much more precious than what they had. My desire was that they may also have what I have.

Rejoicing is impossible with a grudge-infested heart. The heart must therefore be kept free from grudges.

If we know our true identity with the Lord of lords and the King of kings, we wouldn't allow the weight of prejudiced people, whether it is racial, ethnic, social, gender or economic, *etc.*, weigh us down. A good attitude turns things round.

A man had an experience that would normally send an average person reeling in disgust, perhaps cursing and swearing. One day, the man went into a food store to buy some things. After picking the wares he needed, he headed to one of the counters that was being manned by a lady—a white. When she saw him approaching, she

pointed him to the next counter. The man quickly complied, thinking that the lady was taking a break or maybe she was done for the day.

The man was surprised to see her settled and serving others. There was no sign that she was about to leave the counter. The man, a black, was reluctant to jump to any conclusions yet. He decided to give it a ‘test’ next time he would visit the mall. A few days later, he went back to the mall and went to the counter the same lady was manning. This time round she accepted to serve him. He was just about to ‘release’ her from the implications of the previous occasion when *it* happened again.

As she was giving back the change, the man stretched out his hand to receive the money. She arduously dodged the man’s hand and put the money on the counter. The man picked his money and went away. He was greatly offended but he quickly remembered what he had sworn in his heart:

“Offence! Neither take nor give!”

Though the lady’s ‘problem’ was then apparent, the man decided that he would be going to her counter each time he went to that mall. The third time the man went to her, he had returned some bottles against which he got a receipt. When he gave the lady the receipt against which he was to get refund, she kept on turning the receipt in her hand; checking the printed side and the blank back-side alternately. The man stood there ‘enjoying’ it. Thank God he was not in a hurry that afternoon. She gave it a thorough examination until the man wondered if he was at the airport and his passport had just looked mischievously suspicious.

All along, he was of course wondering within himself, ‘Does she think this receipt is fake or what? Is it a way of telling me that she hates me? What could be the meaning of all this?’ He came to the conclusion that the lady was a racist and that the way she had been treating him was a ‘blessing’—he would continue going to her counter to be ‘blessed’.

“Offence! Neither take nor give!”

For the third time in a row, the man had had unpleasant experience with the lady. He was, however, not going to allow that offend him.

His attitude is that if someone looks down upon him for racial reasons, that person is ‘blessing’ him. He never stopped going to that mall and he never went to other people to serve him. He would always go to this lady’s counter if she was on duty. Each time as he stood there waiting to be served, he would give the lady a very contagious smile. He won. With time, the lady began serving him normally and returning his smiles. The last time he was in the mall, she was stacking the wares on the racks and was standing in the way. When she turned and saw the man, she took the initiative, gave a broad smile and apologised for ‘blocking’ him—she didn’t know there was someone waiting to pass.

When we refuse to take offence it doesn’t mean that whatever we were put through wasn’t offensive. The fact that something is offensive doesn’t mean that you have to take an offence. Offence is like deception, it doesn’t matter whether you are the subject or the object. In other words, deceiving or being deceived, offending or being offended, we stand to lose.

Keep The Heart Idol-Free Zone

Just as God said that He will put His law in our hearts, so has the devil countered by transferring idols into people’s hearts. Those who think that our generation is civilised enough to repudiate sculptured images (idols), should think again. People have idols in their hearts more than we will be able to know or concede.

A heart that has altars raised for idols cannot reverberate with the godly joy. A joyous life is easily enthused to worship God. In fact, a godly joy is expressed in worship. Rejoicing is an expression of exuberant life and strength. Rejoicing keeps the spirit high.

The idols in people’s hearts are mostly to do with material things and personalities. One way that such idols quench a genuine joy is by making people discontented with what they have and what they are. Anyone who continuously craves for more material things,

for example, would always set his heart on things that are usually elusive. Even when they have what they *need*, they would allow what they *want* rob them of joy.

Many people are also not satisfied with what they are—may be in terms of ‘looks’ or ‘giftings’. They want to be like one of the celebrities around. When we get our true identity in the Lord and really know what it means that our names are written in the Book of Life, we wouldn’t allow what we don’t have and what we are not blind us to the heritage we have.

Saved To Celebrate And Anointed To Bring Joy

Part of verse 2 in Isaiah 12 says, “The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation”. What does it mean to have the Lord as our salvation? God sent His own Son to save us. Prophet Isaiah seemed to have captured this in his prophecy. By sending Jesus whom the prophet Isaiah called Emmanuel (Is. 7:14) which means ‘God with us’ to save mankind, God Himself became our salvation. This is more than enough reason to send us singing with joy.

Many people have not grasped the depth of what it means to be saved. The Bible says, “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit” (Ps. 32:1-2. See also Romans 4:8).

If we can understand the depth of what this means, we would have a cause to celebrate God’s goodness. The joy this ought to flood in our heart would send us beaming with excitement, oblivious to circumstances that attempt to quench it. There is a unique relationship between joy and strength. When we are happy and feel like expressing happiness in a dance or a song or both, there would be a strength that would be available. This strength accompanies the joy almost naturally. This is why when we allow the joy of the Lord flood our heart, we get the bonus of strength.

Jesus came to save us, an accomplishment which in itself was

enough to bring untold joy to the world, yet this is not the end of the story. In Isaiah 61:1, the Bible says,

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners...

This is the scripture that Jesus read in Nazareth on the Sabbath day in Luke 4:18 and of which He posed as its fulfilment. Though He closed the scroll before reading through all that was recorded about Him and what He would do as a result of the anointing, the list includes bestowing on them,

... a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the *oil of gladness* instead of mourning, and a *garment of praise* instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, *a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour*.

—Isaiah 61:3 (italics for emphasis).

We become an embodiment of worship when we declare and display the Lord's splendour as we make good the 'year of God's favour'; we choose to disregard the hardships we may be confronted with, putting on the garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair; we allow the oil of gladness to lubricate us so that the frictions in our environment do not wear and tear us down. How wonderful it is to be so 'lubricated' by this oil so that the grip of despair does not hold on us. This is truly the secret of appropriating the joy of the Lord and making it our strength.

When Jesus fulfilled the prophecy that He was to come to give us the oil of gladness instead of moaning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair, it never meant that He came to eliminate things that would make us mourn, neither did He eliminate

things that would cause us to despair (Jhn. 16:33, 2 Tim. 3:12). The appeal here is that we are to ‘fight’ moaning with the strength and weapon of gladness and ‘fight’ the spirit of despair using the joy of the Lord that comes as we sing praises to God. In this way, we would be oaks of righteousness, planted of the Lord for the display of His splendour.

If Christ came to eliminate all difficulties for people who believe in Him, He wouldn’t have said what He said in John 16:33,

These things I have spoken to you, that in
Me you may have peace. In the world you
will have tribulation; but *be of good cheer*,
I have overcome the world.
—NKJV (italics for emphasis).

What Jesus was saying was that we can allow the knowledge that He has overcome the world cheer us up. Meditating on this fact is enough to replace gloom with glee. When the Lord Jesus said that He had overcome the world despite the tribulations, He was guaranteeing that we are not hopeless, whatever is happening notwithstanding.

The difference is that we would still go through the problems that everybody else is going through, sometimes even worse, but we would not be decimated by what decimate those who don’t believe. We would not fear what non-believers fear (Is. 8:12; 1 Pet. 3:14). This is the essence for which the apostle Paul said,

We are hard pressed on every side, but not
crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;
persecuted, but not abandoned; struck
down, but not destroyed. We always carry
around in our body the death of Jesus, so
that the life of Jesus may also be revealed
in our body... dying, and yet we live on;
beaten, and yet not killed; *sorrowful, yet
always rejoicing*...
—2 Corinthians 4:8-10;6:9-10 (italics for
emphasis).

The Basis And Reasons For The Joy Of The Lord

Joy brings praise and praise brings joy. When you seem to lack joy sing and dance yourself into joy. And when you are joyous, dance, praise and worship before God. The Bible records that Jesus full of joy praised (Lk. 10:21).

The basis for the joy of the Lord that is sure to sustain our strength is not the ‘successes’ we register as we execute our callings. To the contrary, it is the fact that we have been reconciled to our heavenly Father. If we base our joy on the ‘successes’ that we experience, we would have a fluctuating joy because there are times when things may not go well.

The Lord Jesus had commissioned His disciples for a mission (Lk. 10:1-20). When they came back, they were excited because their mission was successful. Luke recorded it thus: “The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name’” (Lk. 10:17). Jesus’ response implied that it was ‘no news’. He confirmed to them that He had given them authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy—they needed not to expect less. He assured them that nothing would harm them but this was not to be the basis of their joy. He said, “... do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Lk. 10:20).

Jesus knew that if the focus of their joy was misplaced, they would easily become proud. Again, if their joy was to be based on their ‘missionary successes’, they would fail to express any joy when they meet opposition and resistance. The joy of the Lord that is a sure strength is that based not on our success but on the success of the Lord; not on what we have been able to do but what has been done for us. This kind of joy is certain to sustain worship.

If we base our reasons for the joy of the Lord on the constant attributes of God and the constant things He has done, we would always have a reason to ‘cling’ to the joy that knows no limit.

We rejoice because we hope in His unfailing love (Ps. 33:18-21). We rejoice because we are blessed and our sins are forgiven (Ps. 32:1-2).

By forgiving us, the Lord has surely become our salvation. We will trust and not be afraid. He is our strength and our song (Is. 12:2). Salvation and deliverance result into praise (see Exodus 15).

We rejoice because even old age would not take away our vitality and fruitfulness (Psalm 92:14; Josh. 14:10-12, Is. 40:29-31).

We rejoice because each day is the day of the Lord, a day that He has made—a special gift to us (Ps. 118:24).

We rejoice because the peace of Christ is available for us. If we care to strive and reach out to this peace, we would be glad we have something supernatural. The Lord Jesus said, “My peace I give to you, not as the world gives give I unto you” (Jhn. 14:27). This means that our environment or the circumstances around us may be stormy but the peace that matters is the inner one. People who lack an inner peace are in more problems than those that have external storm. In other words, internal storm is more devastating than external storm. The peace that Jesus gives is supernatural because it is, “peace that surpasses all understanding”. This peace can rein in our inner man (Philipp. 4:6-7). As we remain focused on the promises, no one will take our joy from us (John 16:22).

We rejoice because we are the righteous of the Lord. After our sins have been forgiven, we have inherited the righteousness of Christ. Anyone who is upright in heart has a cause for a true joy. The Bible commands, “Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!” (Ps. 32:11). And Psalm 118:15 puts it like this: “Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous...”

Relationship Between The Joy Of The Lord And His Statutes

We saw above (chapter 4) how important the Word of God is as far as ‘meaningful’ worship is concerned. I established that the Word of God can sometimes be a ‘knife’ for spiritual surgery (Heb. 4:12). Who can rejoice under the knife of surgery—with all that pain? Who can rejoice when God’s Word has just subjected him to a spiritual surgery, which, to make it worse, is usually done without

any ‘anaesthesia’?

We can only rejoice if we ‘forget’ the present pain and focus on the prospective health that the ‘surgery’ is meant to accomplish for us. Unlike the physical surgeries where one can pass out and even die, in spiritual surgery, one has a choice to stay alive or ‘pass out’.

What the apostle Paul had subjected the Corinthians to was not ‘surgery’ but a ‘surgery’—a cutting rebuke. Aware of this, he wrote,

Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret*, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.

—2 Corinthians 7:8-11 (italics for emphasis).

Talking of the sharp-cutting Word of God reminds one of the time Nehemiah came back from exile to launch the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. Everything was in bad shape, including the lives of the people. Many had returned from exile but there was no joy of home-coming. They were not living according to the statutes of God. Nehemiah gathered them in the square and Ezra the scribe was called to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses which God had commanded for Israel (Neh. 8).

So, on the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as all the people listened attentively.

In verse 6 of Nehemiah 8, the reading of the Word of God stirred the people up and they began worshipping,

Ezra praised the LORD, the great God;
and all the people lifted their hands and
responded, “Amen! Amen!” then they
bowed down and worshipped the LORD
with their faces to the ground.

The Levites read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. When the people understood the gap between how they had been living their life and the expectations as revealed in the Law of God, they were deeply cut—they began mourning,

Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, “This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep”. For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.
—Nehemiah 8:9.

As a result of finding the Law of the LORD and being receptive to it, Nehemiah told them, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our LORD. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10).

All the people then “went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, *because they now understood the words that had been made known to them*” (v. 12—italics for emphasis).

The Word of God may painfully cut us. However, when we *understand* that its purpose is not to destroy but to restore us, instead of mourning, we would celebrate. When we want to be strong in our worship, we must celebrate the Lord.

True worship that is also prompted by the *understanding* of the law of God means that we must bring everyone in our immediate surrounding to the ‘joyous mood’. When Nehemiah told the people to go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks as an expression of the joy of the Lord, He equally charged them to send some of the choice food and sweet drinks to those who had nothing prepared. People who would have been gloomy for lack of something to eat were ministered to. In this way, they were also brought into the ‘joyous mood’. The joy of the Lord must be ‘contagious’—it should influence our neighbourhood. It is real and it counts if we minister to one another so that everyone in our neighbourhood is lifted on to the platform of joy.

What Nehemiah told the people regarding the joy of the Lord as a result of having been exposed to the Lord’s statutes was also captured by king David in Psalm 19:7-8:

The law of the LORD is perfect, *reviving the soul*. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, *giving joy to the heart*.

—Italics for emphasis.

To get them to celebrate, Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites emphasised to the people of Israel that the ‘day was sacred to the Lord’, therefore, they needed to celebrate instead of weeping.

We need to have the attitude that each day is the ‘day of the Lord’. Though some people may wish to consider one day more sacred while others regard each day the same (Rom. 14:5), an attitude that each day is unto the Lord will help us have a cause to worship God all days—one day at a time.

The Word of God may painfully cut us. However, when we ‘understand’ that its purpose is not to destroy but to restore us, instead of mourning, we would celebrate.

We can decide what attitude to have to help us celebrate everyday for the Lord. Suppose we determine in our heart that each day we wake up, we join the psalmist and say, “This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it?” (Ps. 118:24). Since rejoicing in the Lord is strength, we would have strength to face each day by rejoicing in the Lord everyday.

As we make it a point to rejoice everyday, we must remember that our joy is not dictated by the happenings around us. To the contrary, our joy has everything to do with the constancy of Christ and the salvation He won for us. Even when circumstances around us are discouraging, we can still ‘fight’ not to let go our strength—the joy of the Lord.

The apostle Paul added his voice on rejoicing, “Rejoice in the Lord *Always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* (Philipp. 4:4—italics for emphasis). The way it sounds, Paul commanded it. This shows two things. First, that it is very important to rejoice, and second, that rejoicing is a choice.

The attitude that the joy of the Lord is our strength and the practice of it make it ‘easy’ to worship God in and out of season. Celebrating God is in itself an act of worship.

Jubilation In Tribulations

I have already noted that joy that sustains worship must not be based on ‘successes’. If this were the case, there would be no joy and the celebration of the constancy of Christ when things do not seem to go our way.

It is human to respond in the natural way when things are not going on well. This is why we need to be determined to train

ourselves to cultivate an attitude that can help us find strength in times of afflictions. In fact, it is in tribulations that we need to rejoice more so as to 'lift our spirit'. Otherwise, we may be drowned in the depths of depression and despair. The joy of the Lord is the mechanism by which we swim to the surface and stay afloat in the sea of tribulations. This must be the reason 'joy' was so emphasised and practised by the apostles. We shall look at few examples:

In 1 Peter 4:12-13, the Bible says,

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

If we can rejoice in tribulation, our fellowship with Christ would go from strength to strength. In James 1:2-4, it is written,

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Perseverance and maturity are key ingredients to a life that worships in Spirit and in truth; a life that worships in and out of season. Worshipping God entails patience. When God commanded Pharaoh to let go the Israelites so that they may worship Him (God) in the desert, they lacked maturity and patience a result of which they started complaining when the desert conditions began to take toll on them. If they could only be patient with God and His servant Moses, things would have been a lot easier; worshipping could have established God's dwelling amongst them in a way that would

neutralise the adverse conditions in the desert.

If we rejoice and worship under trials, the latter may not last so long as it would when we start complaining about our afflictions instead of proclaiming the majesty and splendour of our God.

The apostle Paul, also on the subject, told the Romans,

And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us,....

—Romans 5:2b-5a.

Paul and Silas showed what the joy of the Lord can do. The duo, despite the pains inflicted on them as a result of the senseless beating and the subsequent incarceration, got themselves lost in songs of praise to God. They had cast out evil spirit from a soothsaying slave girl. The owners of the girl, seeing that their hopes of making money through her fortune-telling was gone, colluded with the magistrates who ordered that Paul and Silas be stripped and flogged.

About midnight, the two were praying and singing hymns to God. Paul and Silas were not singing melancholic songs, kind of bemoaning their detention and the pain on their backs. The result of their joy was that God decided to ‘dwell in the hymns’ they were singing. It is not told what they were praying about but whatever it is, God visited them and the place shook at the base (Acts 16:16-28).

Naturally, this was definitely not a ‘season’ that the Lord Jesus could have expected the fruit of songs of praise from them. If anything, Paul and Silas had a ‘good reason’ to ask God a question or two. They would have done better to gloom themselves down as they nursed the wounds from the scathing flogging. The last thing they were to do was to sing praises to God who had ‘failed’ to protect them against their assaulters. But Jesus found a fruit of praise in them—out of season. Since they did the unexpected, God

also responded by doing the unexpected.

Many people stop fighting when they have been downed. The above case, however, shows that it is when we are down that we need to fight even more fiercely in order to get back on our feet. Thank God for, “though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:3-4).

With the spiritual weapons, we can win physical battles even when we are down. In our most desperate situation, the attitude of praise and the practice of an enduring worship of the Almighty God, is sure to declare us winners even when it was obvious to everyone that we had ‘lost’.

It Is A Question Of Attitude And Decision

Our attitude is enough to influence our world in very practical ways. It is important to remember that the very switch that turns off the light is the very one that turns it on. This means that the same thing can either brighten or darken our life, depending on our attitude and what we choose to do with it.

The apostle Paul had an experience that would have quenched his desire to rejoice in the Lord. It was already bad enough that he was in prison. Some people took advantage of his plight and wanted to stir up more trouble for him. The good thing was that they chose to do so through a noble cause—preaching the Gospel of Christ. This is how the Bible records the case and the attitude Paul adopted:

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way,

whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.
—Philippians 1:15-18.

If the apostle Paul said that ‘the important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached, this means that even the preachings done by the ill-motivated brethren was ‘important’—and it is still important today. That is to say, there would be results. I don’t think Paul would rejoice for preachings just for the sake of it. He knew that even the ill-motivated preachings would help people who are serious enough to accept to be pointed to Christ. We can always look at the positive side of a negative thing and help ourselves to still rejoice when the obvious thing would otherwise be to complain.

It may look unrealistic to rejoice when things are not working well, and more so when the negative side of things seem to carry the day. Rejoicing becomes an act of worship because it demonstrates our trust and faith in God. It is demonstrating that we believe that in *all* things God works for the good of those who love Him and whose life reflect His purpose (Rom. 8:28). In other words, we rejoice even in adversities because we know that something good will come out of it. The more the adversity, the better the anticipated result, and the more we need to rejoice.

You may be a member of a local church or a fellowship somewhere and you are not so inspired by the acts of some of the brethren. You can find a way of solving the problem. Nevertheless, what you must not allow is to let your joy in the Lord be quenched. Do not allow anything cut down on your devotion to God and service to others—including those you don’t feel encouraged by.

*Many people stop fighting when they have been
downed. ..., however, ... it is when we are down
that we need to fight even more fiercely in order
to get back on our feet.*

When Paul told the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord always and re-emphasised it to them to rejoice (Philipp. 4:4), he meant exactly that. He wanted them not to allow anything to steal their joy in the Lord; he knew how important it is to rejoice in the Lord. If he could rejoice in prison and do so when outside were also people bent on compounding more problems for him, it is clear that when we catch the spirit of the joy of the Lord, we would be able to use the very switch that turns off our light to turn it back on. Brethren, ladies and gentlemen, ‘The joy of the Lord’—what a weapon of righteousness!

As I finalise this topic, may I emphasise the importance of rejoicing in the Lord. Remember that the joy of the Lord is your strength; it will lift and sustain you as you hang on the sure fellowship with Your heavenly Father. One may respond out of impulse when tribulation hits—this is human. It is, however, advisable to jump back to your feet and leap for joy as soon as possible. This topic must not be construed to suggest that there is everything wrong with weeping, mourning, *etc.* However, don’t allow yourself to sink in the ocean of despair. Make a quick come back; dwell your thoughts on the hope of glory and not on the casualties you may experience here and there. Worshipping God is a medicine that heals the soul and does so very fast. Your life would be intact in worship.

King Solomon said that there is a time for everything (Eccl. 3). Nevertheless, we have to be wise how we allocate time to different things. That there is a time for everything does not imply that the time must be divided equally between the different things. There are things that we must learn to ‘starve’ as far as time allocation is concerned. We must not dwell so much on things that rob us of the strength in God. We must, to the contrary, dwell more on the things that pertain to fellowship of worship.

Remember: The joy of the Lord is a real strength, I have personally tried it; it works. You need strength in order to worship God. You need His joy to be aflame in your heart and to be ablaze in your worship.

“Be joyful always” (1 Thes. 5:16).

The secret in a nutshell:

If the joy of the Lord is our strength, then we obviously know when we need this strength more. It is when we are ‘down’. This means that when we feel that *despair* is catching up with us, it would be the ‘right’ time to let the joy of the Lord *repair* us. The more we feel that there is nothing to rejoice about, the more we allow despair to drown us.

The joy of the Lord is a powerful tool that makes us fight back and get to our feet again.

Remember that joy is commanded. You can choose to rejoice amid tribulations. Your spirit will be lifted and your body will reflect it. The joy of the Lord is a therapy to the soul and a medicine to the body. This is why the Bible says in Psalm 18:14, “A man’s spirit sustains him in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?” When you begin rejoicing in tribulation, it will look mechanical but if you refuse to let go, you will soon experience that it has involved your emotions and your soul in a way that will leave you ministered to.

Remember, it is not natural to rejoice in tribulation and despair. If you do it, it will be one way of marshalling and mobilising supernatural powers of God to minister to you. It is one of the ways by which you engage in the ‘survival’ battle of faith (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). When you rejoice under extremely adverse circumstances, you will be practically expressing faith in God—the fact that you can still trust in Him.

When you are happy, make your rejoicing be within the context of the virtues of God. Many people go overboard when things are going their way. Their rejoicing may not give God any glory.

Our attitude is enough to influence our world in very practical ways. It is important to remember that the very switch that turns off the light is the very one that turns it on.

Reflections

1. *What is the difference between voluntary and involuntary joy? In what ways can we make joy voluntary? Why is it important to have a voluntary joy?*
2. *How does the joy of the Lord help us worship in a more practical way?*
3. *Doesn't it look impractical to rejoice in tribulation? Why does the Bible make it look so easy? And why is it commanded?*
4. *Have you ever faced a situation that dried any appetite to worship God? What difference would it make if you brood on the difficulties and when you act unnaturally and sing songs of praise to God? How would our worshipping relationship with God be if we only sing Him praises when we feel like it? How would our worshipping relationship with God be if we train ourselves to sing Him praises whether we feel like it or not?*
5. *Comment on the following statement: 'After suffering a humiliating betrayal or going through great loss, either we are going to 'cling' to the joy of the Lord or its place would be taken by bitterness'.*
 - a) *Can a heart that harbours unforgiveness and bitterness offer a 'meaningful' worship?*
 - b) *If we must worship in spirit and truth, what does this tell us about how we ought to 'prepare' our heart in readiness for worship?*