



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do

Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

Resourcing for Prayer Network

Spiritual Guidelines

The Fruit of the Spirit (III)

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control Galatians 5:22

The Joy of the Lord is Your Strength

Monica Hill

August 2015

Joy is an outward expression of happiness and many of the Psalms help us to praise, give thanksgiving and make a joyful noise to the Lord in gratitude for all he has done for us.

'Let all those that put their trust in You rejoice: let them ever shout for joy' (Psalm 5:11); 'Shout for joy before the Lord, the King' (Psalm 98:6). We should 'Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice' (Philippians 4:4).

Expressing Joy

Isaiah promised, not only to the returnees from the Exile, but also to all those who are truly seeking God, that *'You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands'* (55:12).

At Jesus' birth, the angels announced *'good tidings of great joy'* (Luke 2:10) and even before that, Jesus had brought joy to Mary as he *'leaped for joy'* in his mother's womb (Luke 1:44).

Jesus taught his disciples to be joyful and left them with this promise *'I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete'* (John 15:11). When he was reassuring them that their grief would turn to joy (John 16:17-24) Jesus said *'Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete'*. And *'So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy'* (John 16:22).

The early church was seen to be full of the joy of the Lord and gladness (Acts 2:46; 13:52). *'Joy in the Holy Spirit'* is a distinguishing mark of the kingdom of God (Romans 14:17).

Being Joyful in Hard Times

Nehemiah spoke to a repentant people who were responding to the Word of God *'Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength'*.

The believer in Christ should be *'filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy'* (1 Peter 1:8) - even through all the bad times and trials. Adverse circumstances, instead of hindering our faith, can actually enhance our joy. Paul and Silas in the jail cell in Philippi sang loudly the praises of the Lord they were serving (Acts 16:25); the apostles in Jerusalem were arrested twice and ordered not to

preach in Jesus' name, but they returned home *'rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name'* and were ready to preach some more (Acts 5:41). James encourages us to *'Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance'* (James 1:2-3).

Exuding Joy

Those who do not possess this joy of the Lord may find it difficult to understand. But, for the believer in Christ, the joy of the Lord should come naturally. If he or she remains in the vine, good fruit should be the result, and this includes joy (John 15:5).

Joy is an obvious fruit of the Spirit but so often we fail to show it in our lives and in our dealings with others. The joy of the Lord is our best witness to others - being a joyful Christian draws others nearer to us so that they can know more about what it is that is making us happy - they too want some of this for themselves. A happy joyful presence publicly demonstrates our faith and it is through joyful networks that the faith spreads.

I always remember Demos Shakarian's vision for the FGBFMI (Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International) - and his book **'The Happiest People on Earth'** - it was such a good title to live up to. The joy of the Lord is happiness and a gladness of heart that comes from knowing God, abiding in Christ, and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

An Abiding Joy

Charles Spurgeon in 1871 speaking from Nehemiah 8 about **'The Joy of the Lord being the Strength of His People'** reminds us that it is not a joy that comes and goes. It is joy in the good times, the bad times, the night-time, the daytime, the rainy day, and sunny day. We're to rejoice in the Lord always. Jesus says, *'I have told you this, so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete'* (John 15.11) Jesus was facing a dark time when he said this, so he did not say these words lightly.

There should be an abundance of joy for all occasions - Joy is steadfast in sorrow (John 16:20); triumphant in tribulation (2 Corinthians 7:4); abundant in affliction (1 Thessalonians 1:6). *'Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour 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'*. (Habakkuk 3:17-18). Jesus read the passage proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour in the synagogue and it goes on to say *'To comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy 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).

Finally

Paul gives this advice to the Philippians *'then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind'* (2:2). He also tells Philemon *'Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints'* (1:7), to the Ephesians *'be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord'* (5:18,19) and to the Romans *'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit'* (15:13).

*This paper come to you as part of the Issachar Ministries Resourcing for Prayer e-mail in August 2015
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*(C and M Ministries Trust)
registered charity no 1029797*

PO BOX 184, Sandy, Beds SG19 1EL

Telephone: 01767 641006

Website: www.issacharministries.co.uk

office e-mail: info@issacharministries.co.uk