

Can I Have Joy in My Life?

Crucial Questions

R. C. SPROUL

Can I Have Joy in My Life?

Crucial Questions booklets provide a quick introduction to definitive Christian truths. This expanding collection includes titles such as:

Who Is Jesus?

Can I Trust the Bible?

Does Prayer Change Things?

Can I Know God's Will?

How Should I Live in This World?

What Does It Mean to Be Born Again?

Can I Be Sure I'm Saved?

What Is Faith?

What Can I Do with My Guilt?

What Is the Trinity?

TO BROWSE THE REST OF THE SERIES,
PLEASE VISIT: **REFORMATIONTRUST.COM/CQ**

CQ

Can I Have Joy in My Life?

R. C. SPROUL

Can I Have Joy in My Life?

© 2012 by R.C. Sproul

Published by Reformation Trust Publishing

a division of Ligonier Ministries

421 Ligonier Court, Sanford, FL 32771

Ligonier.org ReformationTrust.com

Printed in China

RR Donnelley

0001018

First edition, eighth printing

ISBN 978-1-64289-047-1 (Paperback)

ISBN 978-1-64289-075-4 (ePub)

ISBN 978-1-64289-103-4 (Kindle)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the publisher, Reformation Trust Publishing. The only exception is brief quotations in published reviews.

Cover design: Ligonier Creative

Interior typeset: Katherine Lloyd, The DESK

All Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sproul, R.C. (Robert Charles), 1939-2017

Can I have joy in my life? / R.C. Sproul.

p. cm. -- (The crucial questions series; no. 12)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-56769-295-2

1. Joy--Religious aspects--Christianity. 2. Joy--Biblical teaching. I. Title.

BV4647.J68S67 2012

248.4--dc23

2012006008

Contents

- One** Don't Worry, Be Joyful1
- Two** Counting It All Joy11
- Three** How Do You Spell *Joy*?21
- Four** The Greatest Joy33
- Five** Fullness of Joy43

Chapter One

Don't Worry, Be Joyful

The word *joy* appears over and over again in the Scriptures. For instance, the Psalms are filled with references to joy. The psalmists write, “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning” (Ps. 30:5b) and “Shout for joy to God, all the earth” (Ps. 66:1). Likewise, in the New Testament, we read that joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22), which means that it is a Christian virtue. Given this biblical emphasis, we need to understand what joy is and pursue it.

Can I Have Joy in My Life?

Sometimes we struggle to grasp the biblical view of joy because of the way it is defined and described in Western culture today. In particular, we often confuse joy with happiness. In the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–11), according to the traditional translations, Jesus said: “*Blessed* are the poor in spirit. . . . *Blessed* are those who mourn. . . . *Blessed* are the meek . . .” (vv. 3–5, emphasis added), and so on. Sometimes, however, translators adopt the modern vernacular and tell us Jesus said *happy* rather than *blessed*. I always cringe a little when I see that, not because I am opposed to happiness, but because the word *happy* in our culture has been sentimentalized and trivialized. As a result, it connotes a certain superficiality. For example, years ago, Charles M. Schulz, in the comic strip *Peanuts*, coined the adage, “Happiness is a warm puppy,” and it became a maxim that articulated a sentimental, warm-and-fuzzy idea of happiness. Then there was the catchy song “Don’t Worry, Be Happy,” released by Bobby McFerrin in the 1980s. It suggested a carefree, cavalier attitude of delight.

However, the Greek word used in the Beatitudes is best translated as *blessed*, as it communicates not only the idea of happiness but also profound peace, comfort, stability,

and great joy. So, we have to be careful when we come to the text of the New Testament that we do not read it through the lens of the popular understanding of happiness and thus lose the biblical concept of joy.

Think again about McFerrin's song. The lyrics are very odd from a contemporary perspective. When he sings, "Don't worry, be happy," he is issuing an imperative, a command: "Do not be anxious. Rather, be happy." He is setting forth a duty, not making a suggestion. However, we never think of happiness in this way. When we are unhappy, we think it is impossible to decide by an act of the will to change our feelings. We tend to think of happiness as something passive, something that happens to us and over which we have no control. It is involuntary. Yes, we desire it and want to experience it, but we are convinced that we cannot create it by an act of the will.

Oddly, McFerrin sounds very much like the New Testament when he commands his listeners to be happy. Over and over again in the pages of the New Testament, the idea of joy is communicated as an imperative, as an obligation. Based on the biblical teaching, I would go so far as to say that it is the Christian's duty, his moral obligation, to be

Can I Have Joy in My Life?

joyful. That means that the failure of a Christian to be joyful is a sin, that unhappiness and a lack of joy are, in a certain way, manifestations of the flesh.

Of course, there are times when we are filled with sorrow. Jesus Himself was called “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). The Scriptures tell us, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting” (Eccl. 7:2a). Even in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4). Given that the Bible tells us it is perfectly legitimate to experience mourning, sorrow, and grief, these feelings are not sinful.

However, I want you to see that Jesus’ words could be translated as “Joyful are those who mourn.” How could a person be in mourning and still be joyful? Well, I think we can unravel that knot fairly easily. The heart of the New Testament concept is this: a person can have biblical joy even when he is mourning, suffering, or undergoing difficult circumstances. This is because the person’s mourning is directed toward one concern, but in that same moment, he possesses a measure of joy. I’ll have more to say about this in the next chapter.

How Can We Rejoice Always?

In his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul speaks about joy and about the Christian's duty to rejoice over and over again. For example, he writes, "Rejoice in the Lord always" (4:4a). This is one of those biblical imperatives, and it leaves no room for not rejoicing, for Paul says Christians are to rejoice always—not sometimes, periodically, or occasionally. He then adds, "Again I will say, Rejoice" (v. 4b). Paul wrote this epistle from prison, and in it he addresses very somber matters, such as the possibility that he will be martyred, poured out as a sacrifice (2:17). Yet he tells the Philippian believers that they should rejoice despite his circumstances.

That brings us back to this matter of how we can be joyful as a matter of discipline or of the will. How is it possible to remain joyful all the time? Paul gives us the key: "Rejoice *in the Lord* always" (emphasis added). The key to the Christian's joy is its source, which is the Lord. If Christ is in me and I am in Him, that relationship is not a sometimes experience. The Christian is always in the Lord and the Lord is always in the Christian, and that is always a reason for joy. Even if the Christian cannot rejoice in

Can I Have Joy in My Life?

his circumstances, if he finds himself passing through pain, sorrow, or grief, he still can rejoice in Christ. We rejoice in the Lord, and since He never leaves us or forsakes us, we can rejoice always.

Since joy is a fruit of the Spirit, our sanctification is displayed not only by our love, peace, patience, kindness, and so forth, but by our joy (see Gal. 5:22–23). We must not forget that the fruit of the Holy Spirit is not the same as the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament shows us that the Holy Spirit distributes various gifts to various believers for various reasons. Not everyone has the gift of teaching. Not everyone has the gift of preaching. Not everyone has the gift of giving. Not everyone has the gift of administration. But when we come to the fruit of the Spirit, it is not as if some Christians have the fruit of faithfulness while others have love, or that some Christians have the fruit of goodness and gentleness while others have peace and self-control. Every Christian is to manifest all of the fruit of the Spirit, and the more we grow in grace, the further we progress in our sanctification, the more gentle we should be, the more patient we should be, the more faithful we should be, and, obviously, the more joyful we should be.

We publish books that proclaim the historic Christian faith to new generations.

These are books you can trust.



Order your copy of this title, download the ebook version, or browse our entire collection at [ReformationTrust.com](https://www.ReformationTrust.com).

What is the difference between joy and happiness?

Western society prizes the pursuit of happiness and pleasure. But Christians are called not to happiness but to joy, even in difficult circumstances. How is this possible? Can we really rejoice in times of sorrow?

In this booklet, Dr. R.C. Sproul explains the difference between happiness and joy. People look for happiness in many places, but there is only one sure path to deep, lasting joy: a restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

The Crucial Questions booklet series by Dr. R.C. Sproul offers succinct answers to important questions often asked by Christians and thoughtful inquirers.

Dr. R.C. Sproul was founder of Ligonier Ministries, founding pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, Fla., and first president of Reformation Bible College. He was author of more than one hundred books, including *The Holiness of God*.



ReformationTrust.com

ISBN 978-1-64289-047-1



9 781642 890471

RELIGION / Christian Life / Spiritual Growth