

## **How To Live The Joy Filled Life** **How God Meets Your Deepest Needs (Part 5)** Rev. Jean Smith

Mothers, you are going to love this. I came across a study by Eddleman Financial Services of Farifax, Virginia on the financial worth of mothers in our nation. They studied the various responsibilities mothers have and compiled a list of 17 different occupations a typical mother fulfills in a given day. A mother functions as cook, house keeper, financial manager, psychologist, cab driver, nurse, and more. The study concluded that if a mother was paid fairly for her work taking care of her family, she'd make a considerable income. Taking into consideration that she's on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week and comparing what she does with the U.S. average salaries, if fairly paid, the American mother would earn over \$500,000 a year for all that she does. The editor of *Working Mother* magazine called the half million-dollar figure a little low saying that many mothers often take on far more jobs than were covered in the Eddleman study.

It's pretty easy see that mothers are under appreciated, underpaid and overworked. It's no wonder then that mothers of young children fight daily fatigue and depression. Even though we live in a nation where living is easy compared to the rest of the world, we find ourselves drained and fatigued by life's responsibilities. We all experience daily pressures that rob us of joy, and joy is something we all need. It's a fundamental need of all human beings. We need to experience joy. We were created not just with a capacity for joy but with a hunger for joy and a thirst for joy.

The need for joy is so strong and so powerful. It's not just some frivolous thing that would be nice to have. Life without joy is unbearable. Life without joy is not worth living. Studies have actually shown that the more joy we have in our lives, the more productive we are. An article in US News and World Report tells of how corporations are hiring Joy Consultants to show up randomly at the work place to build up joy in the employees so they can be more productive. It's a proven fact that people have more energy, more creativity, more productivity, when their lives are filled with joy.

For several weeks we've been looking at How God Meets Our Deepest Needs and we've been looking at the different names for God in the Bible. These names describe God to us. In Psalm 43 we find the name *El Simchathgali*, which means, "***I am the God of exceeding joy***". (Psalm 43:4) The God of the Bible has a tremendous capacity to experience joy and He has made us in His image—with a tremendous capacity to experience joy as well. He has also made us with a tremendous need for joy. Joy is like the oil that keeps the engine running smoothly.

There is a little book in the Bible written to the church in Philippi. It's often called the epistle of joy because it's filled with so many references to joy. Sixteen times in just four chapters the apostle

Paul tells the people of Philippi to rejoice, be joyful and be full of joy. The truly amazing thing is that Paul didn't write this letter while he was kicking back on vacation. He wrote it from prison. Now if you know anything about first century prisons in the Middle East, you'll know they weren't very nice places. They were dungeons – horrible places. In the darkest most difficult days of his life, Paul writes the most joy full book in the entire Bible. How can he do that? What can we learn from Paul about how to be joyful? I'm going to share with you **six joy-builders** that we learn from Paul. They are the opposite of the joy killers we've all experienced in life. These joy-builders are the antidotes to the things that kill our joy.

**The first key to living a joyful life is to jettison all regrets.** Paul teaches us to jettison all our regrets about the past. *Jettison* means, “*to throw overboard*”. Think of an airplane losing altitude because it's too heavy, so its crew jettisons cargo out the cargo door in order to keep from crashing. Or think of a boat beginning to sink because it's too heavy and so its crew jettisons cargo over board in order to keep from sinking. It means “*to abandon as worthless; to discard; to eliminate; to get rid of.*” Paul teaches that there are some things in your life you need to get rid of. There are some things you need to abandon as worthless because they're weighing you down and causing you to lose altitude or even sink into despair.

The **first** thing Paul tells us we need to get rid of is **regrets about the past**. We all have regrets. We all have secrets we would never want anyone to know. Regret is a powerful emotion that sucks the joy right out of us and yet it can't change what's been done. It just makes us miserable today for what we did yesterday or yesteryear. All those “if onlys” just weigh us down and leave us unable to move on to where we can experience the joy God created us to have. The apostle Paul tells us to forget what lies behind and press on to what lies ahead. But how do we do that? We do that by seeking God's forgiveness. The Bible says, “*I will remember their sin no more.*” Once we have confessed our sin to God He forgets it and so must we. **The starting point for living the joyful life is to let go of past regrets. Jettison all regrets** – the grief, the grudges, and the guilt. Jettison them out of your life because they're only weighing you down. This is the first key to living the joy filled life.

**The second key to living a joyful life is to OMIT all worries about your future.** On the one hand is the past; on the other hand is the future. If our hands are full of past regrets or future worries, we won't be able to experience joy in the present. By far the greatest thing that kills our joy is worry. Worry never makes things better. It only makes things worse. Worry is not going to change what the future holds. It's just going to make us miserable right now and add to our feelings of regret. Worry just keeps us from enjoying today and leaves us with yesterdays full of missed opportunities and unnoticed blessings.

Paul has an antidote for worry. He says, *“Don’t worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank Him for all He has [already] done.”* - Philippians 4:6. You can either worry or you can pray. If you are worrying it means one thing – you’re not praying. Some of us pray and then as soon as we stop praying we resume worrying. If you want to experience the joy you were created for then you have to jettison past regrets and omit worrying about the future. Let God do His job of taking care of you. Focus on right now and pray, telling God what you need and thanking Him for all He has done for you.

The old English word for **“worry”** actually means **“to choke or to struggle.”** Today the same word is translated as **“necktie.”** Like a necktie that can cut off circulation, worry can make you unable to think clearly and causes you to do senseless things. I’ve watched people who worry make some very dumb decisions. Worry can cause you to make rash decisions that you regret later. Paul teaches us to stop worrying about the future and instead, talk to God about the things that could go wrong. Give them to Him and let Him take care of you. Omitting worry from your life is one of the keys to living a joy filled life.

**The third key to living a joyful life is to YIELD yourself to God and His purpose for your existence.** Having no purpose or an unworthy purpose is a joy killer. If you’re drifting through life, unsure of where you’re going, why you’re here, what your purpose is for living, then you’re not going to know the joy that comes from being what you were created to be and fulfilling God’s purpose for your life.

Why has God made us? What is our purpose for existing? First, we were created to love God. When we express our love for God, we call that **worship**. Second, we were created to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. We call that **fellowship**. Third, we were created in God’s image—to reflect Christ-like character. We call that **discipleship**. Fourth, we were created to use our gifts and talents to build up the body of Christ. We call that **service**. Fifth, we were created to share Christ with the world. We call that **mission**. Paul summed up his life when he said, *“For me to live is Christ...”* (Philippians 1:21) In his letter to the church in Roman Paul gives us the key to a joy filled life when he says, *“Give yourselves completely to God – every part of you – to be tools in the hand of God to be used for His good purpose.”* (Romans 6:13) Yielding yourself to God is one of the keys to living a joy filled life.

**The fourth key to living a joyful life is to FOCUS on what is good.** If you want to have joy filled life, you need to **FOCUS ON GOOD THINGS**. Paul commands, *“Fix your thoughts (that means focus) on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.”* (Philippians 4:8) Where do you find things like that? On television? On the radio? On the phone listening to the latest

complaints about someone or the latest gossip? In the newspaper? Not necessarily. That's not where you'll always find good things to focus on. There is only one place you can count on to give you what is true and honorable and right and that is in God's Word. God's Word fills our minds with what is true and honorable and right. Focusing on what is true and honorable and right, whatever is pure and lovely and admirable, is one of the keys to living a joy filled life.

**The fifth key to living a joyful life is to USE your life to help others.** The unselfish person is the one who experiences a joyful life. God gives joy to those who give themselves away for the sake of others. The more you give your life away, Jesus said, *“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever gives his life away for my sake will find it.”* (Matthew 10:39) The more unselfish you choose to be the more joyful a person you will become. I know this is completely the opposite of what the world teaches. The motto the world lives by is much like the motto of the Pirates in the movie *Pirates of the Caribbean*: **“Take what you can and give nothing back.”** But Jesus says the more you give your life away, not expecting anything in return, the more joy you will experience. The more self-centered you are, the more miserable you'll be. The joyful person has as their motto: **“Give what you can. Expect nothing back.”**

Even in prison Paul was thinking about other people. He says, *“Dear brothers and sisters, I love you and I long to see you for you are my joy and the reward for my work.”* (Philippians 4:1) What's Paul talking about here? When our joy comes from seeing the people we have invested our lives in – seeing them come to know Christ and discover His purposes for their lives, then we will be filled with joy like the apostle Paul, who even in a damp dirty prison was filled with the joy of the Lord. Then we know we have really participated in something worthwhile. We've passed on the faith to the next generation of believers. Paul's joy came from seeing the people he gave his life to following Christ and passing that faith on to others. Churches where people grasp that kind of love are filled with joy.

**The final letter in our JOYFUL acrostic is the letter L which stands for LEARN – learn to be content in all circumstances.** From prison Paul wrote, *“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.”* (Philippians 4:11) Paul's point is this – it doesn't matter where you are or what the conditions of your surroundings are, you still have a choice. Paul could have chosen to be miserable. He could have chosen to be filled with self-pity and resentment. Instead, he chose to learn how to be content in plenty and in want. Have you ever noticed that the people who have the most can be the least content, and those who have the least can be the most content. The joyful life is a choice. It's a decision of the heart. Paul tells us, *“Always be full of joy in the Lord; I say it again, be full of joy!”* (Philippians 4:4)