

January 1, 2016

May you all have a Blessed, Prosperous and Fruitful New Year!!

As we look forward to 2016, we will all face many challenges and opportunities, not only for personal spiritual growth but also for greater fruitfulness as we endeavour to expand the Kingdom of God.

As I prayed about what to share with you for the new year, the Lord spoke to me about how we will all need to constantly experience the “Power of the JOY of the LORD.” He wants us all to have a continual deep abiding Joy despite any and all circumstances we might face. This Joy not only “*strengthens us*” (Nehemiah 8.10), but also works to empower our faith. Many people don’t realize the profound connection between Joy and Faith.

Satan knows the intimate connection between our Joy and a Living Faith that functions as a powerful shield which is able to “*extinguish all of his flaming arrows*” (Ephesians 6:16). This is why he constantly seeks to weaken our Faith by robbing us of our Joy. When our Joy is minimized or even removed, it is replaced with negative thoughts and feelings that actually attract more demonic activity to further “weaken” us spiritually, emotionally and physically (Matthew 12:44). Satan knows that when we are filled with Joy and Faith, not only can he not defeat us (Isaiah 54:17; Luke 10:19; 2Corinthians 2:14), but we bear much fruit for the Kingdom of God.

Biblically speaking Joy is more than “feeling good.” Feelings are fickle. Like the weather, they can change in a moment. We have all experienced that. The Joy the Bible teaches us about, the “JOY of the LORD,” the Joy that Jesus personally lived in, and which He promised to share with us, (John 15:10-11, 17:13), is a powerful spiritual reality. This JOY transcends our feelings because it abides in our spirit, not our emotions. You might “feel” it as an emotion, but it is actually a spiritual power that is imparted into you and abides in your spirit.

Because the Kingdom of God is a supernatural realm of reality, and Joy, like Righteousness and Peace, is a major part of this Kingdom (Romans 14.17), we can learn how to experience greater and deeper Joy as we grow to maturity as disciples of the Kingdom of God (John 15:2; Colossians 1:28-29). Many believers live spiritually superficial lives because they either don’t know about this aspect of their spiritual inheritance or are unwilling to do what is necessary to experience this kind of JOY!

One of the most common experiences of someone who is newly “Born Again” - or more accurately “Born of the Spirit” - is the sense they have of this JOY! They revel in this new inner reality they are experiencing. I certainly did. This Joy was for me an inner evidence of the authenticity of my initial encounter with God. It was abiding. It did not fade with time, as my artificial feelings of well-being produced by drugs always did.

I found that the more I read my Bible and shared my heart with God in prayer, the stronger it got. In fact, I discovered that when I shared my new faith in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah with my friends and family and was mocked and rejected, instead of “feeling bad” my Joy strongly increased. It was as if the evil, the blasphemy, the cursing and the mockery was fuel for my inner fire. I remember thinking when this first happened, “Wow, I should be feeling hurt and rejected. Instead, I feel wonderful.” I realized that this must be what the Bible calls the JOY of the LORD because it certainly was not my natural feelings. I began to understand that God’s Joy was His natural state of being and that I was beginning to “*taste and see*” who God really was (Psalm 34:6).

The Presence of God

True abiding Joy does not come from riches, friends or family. They, like everything else on earth, are fleeting and temporary. The “happiness” we derive from them is transitory. Happiness is built on happenstance. If things are going well, we are “happy.” If things are not, we are not.

The only thing on earth that is not fleeting and temporary is God. Only He abides forever. God never changes. He is eternally the same!! (Numbers 23:19; Psalm 102:27; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17).

Psalm 16:11 teaches us that *“in the presence of God is fullness of Joy, and at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”* (See also Acts 2:28, quoting Psalm 21:6). We learn from these verses that Biblical Joy, the JOY of the LORD, the Joy that Jesus imparts comes from the “Presence of God.” This is not merely a theological concept but an actual reality that is available for us to experience. The JOY of the LORD is a spiritual reality that goes beyond our ability to explain or express (1Peter 1:8). Wherever God is, there is JOY! Wherever the Kingdom of God is manifested, there is JOY!

God promises us that if we *“seek Him with our whole heart, we will find Him”* (Deuteronomy 4:29; Jeremiah 92:13) and if we *“draw near to God, He will “draw near to us”* (1Chronicles 28:9; James 4:8). As you endeavour to be an obedient and faithful disciple, and “draw near to God” in thoughts, words, and actions, as well as in study, prayer and worship, you will feel His presence, and you will experience His JOY!

Simply stated: The more you obey the Lord, the more you will experience God’s presence. The more you experience God’s presence, the more of HIS JOY you will have.

It is the person of the indwelling Holy Spirit who manifests the actual “Presence of God.” The Holy Spirit, the “Comforter” was sent by the Lord to dwell in us, teach us and lead us into all truth (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

It is so sad that so many churches do not teach about the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. They do not welcome Him into their services, but rather ignore or minimize His activities. Without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, we do not have the authentic Body of Christ in Biblical manifestation. We have non-Biblical churches that practice aberrant forms of the Christian religion (2Timothy 3:5).

I often wonder what will happen to the leaders of such churches when they stand before the Holy Spirit on the Day of Judgment. What if He says to them, “You did not want me in your church, what makes you think I want you in my Heaven?” Scary thought, isn’t it?

The Faith Creating Word of God

When you are “Born of the Spirit” the “Seed” of the Word of God is planted in your heart (John 3:3-8; Matthew 13:1-43; Mark 4:4-31; Luke 8:5-15). This “Seed” creates Faith in your spirit because it is the “Word of God” that has the power to create Faith (Romans 10:17). This “Faith of (or from) God” (Mark 11:22) is very different than intellectually “believing” a set of theological doctrines. Because it is created by the very Word of God, which created the universe (Psalm 33:6; Hebrews 11:3), it is “alive and active” (Hebrews 4:12). As you obey the Lord, you will discover that this “Faith” has the power to “move mountains” (Matthew 17:20, 21:21; Mark. 11:23) and change your life and destiny.

As you continue in your walk of faith, you will discover that Faith creates Joy, and they work together (Psalm 13:5; 21:6-7; 33:21; Romans 15:13; 1Peter 1:8). This Joy is an inner testimony that Faith is alive and working in your life. This inner witness of Joy is powerful. It energizes you to continue to believe and obey what you believe is the will of God. Because Joy can so inspire your Faith, Satan does his best to try to steal it.

As this “Seed” comes alive in the “good soil” of a believing and obedient heart (Matthew 13:23; Luke 8:15), new “spiritual instincts” begin to function. They inspire you to pray, read the Scriptures, fellowship with other believers, trust and obey God. These new “I want to’s” are evidence that you are now truly in the Kingdom of God. As you cooperate with this imparted Faith by obeying the Lord, your faith will grow, and you will mature spiritually and increasingly bear fruit for the Kingdom of God.

Simply stated: You will trust God more, believe God more, obey Him more and bear more fruit.

As your desire to hear His Word increases, you have to learn how to “listen” to the “Voice of the Shepherd” (John 10:16,27). Learning to “listen” is the essence of prayer. Of course, “asking for things” is part of Biblical prayer, which we are strongly encouraged to do (Matthew 7:7-11). But the pathway to deeper intimacy with the Lord, greater fruitfulness, increasing spiritual maturity and authority, is listening to the Lord and obeying what He says. The Holy Spirit has been sent to help us learn. Learning to listen to His voice is a spiritual discipline that, like discerning good and evil, increases with practice (Hebrews 5:14). One of the reasons you are alive on this planet is so you can practice learning how to walk with God by Faith (2Corinthians 4:18; 5:7). For more about this subject, we recommend two albums, "Listen to Your Spirit" (CDA-211) and "The Voice of the Shepherd" (CDA-171). You can order them on our website, HMMin.com

This is a central aspect of being a disciple, which is simply being a student. God is our teacher, the Holy Spirit is our tutor, and we are all classmates in the School of the Spirit called Planet Earth. If we see our lives in this perspective, we stop asking the “why” questions and start asking the “what” questions. We stop asking “Lord, why is this happening?” and we start asking “Lord, what do you want me to learn?” Now you can begin to live life on an entirely new level. On this level, you will find that God gives you great Joy for your journey of learning, changing and growing into “His Image” (Romans 8:29; 1Corinthians 3:18).

By the way, if you don’t obey what He says, He will stop speaking to you. This is one reason many no longer hear the Lord speaking to them. You have to go back to the place where you said “no,” repent and now do what He told you to do. Then you will begin to “hear” again.

Surrender, Obedience, Faith, Joy and the Challenges of Life

Jesus taught us that everyone (God has no favorites who get special treatment), who “*hears the word of God and does it*” is like a person who “*builds his life upon a solid foundation*” (Matthew 7:24-27). Such a life is built as you surrender yourself to obediently fulfil God’s will. The “seed of faith” that inspires those choices also inspires confidence that God is God and can overrule every problem, person, and challenge.

Living this way is so much more than just believing a particular theology or set of doctrines. It is a supernatural reality. But you will never experience the power of faith working in your life until you step out in faith and obey what you believe God is speaking to you. Then you discover that God can “*cause all things to work together for good*” (Romans 8:28). This kind of “faith-filled” thinking and living will fill you with the Joy of the Lord.

When difficulties come, not if they come, for they surely will, but when they come, you will be able to stand strong. And not only will you stand strong, but you will actually mature and bear more fruit if you, as a disciple of the Kingdom of God, learn the lessons the difficulties can teach you.

When you make the choice to “live by faith,” you are declaring that you want to learn how to walk with God for the fulfilment of His plans and purposes, not your own. When you take “self” off of the throne of your life and make Jesus Lord, you open yourself to the realities of the Kingdom of God and the process of discipleship truly begins.

One of the first lessons of Faith comes when you face your first obstacle, difficulty or trial. You now can learn how to apply your faith to your problem. The “Seed of Faith” inspires you to make new choices. Exercising your faith, you begin to think about and speak to your situation and circumstances, declaring that they are under God’s control. You decide to trust God to take care of you and deliver you. You determine that whatever you are facing no longer has authority over your life. It is not bigger than God. This moves your problem away from its place of

authority and influence in your life. Thinking this way is an act of faith. It allows faith to operate in your heart and mind. By minimizing the problem in your heart and mind, you create an inner space for Peace and Joy to emerge.

Trusting God and surrendering your life to Him puts God in His rightful place as your Lord. Now you can begin to “magnify” the Lord (Psalm 34:3, 69:30). You start to see Him bigger than your problem. As He is “magnified,” your problems are automatically “minimized.” Your “Goliaths” no longer intimidate you. You tell your problems that they will not rule over your life, God will! You declare that they will not overcome you, but that you will overcome them! (Read the promises to the overcomers in Revelation chapters 2-3).

Living by faith does not mean that your problems will immediately be resolved. But their power to influence your inner world and rob you of your peace and Joy will fade. As you persist in your “Battle of Faith” (1 Timothy 1:18, 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7) your faith will grow stronger. The ability of difficulties to influence you will grow weaker and weaker and ultimately disappear.

Remember this! Surrender to God will never breed laziness nor passivity. Surrender does not mean doing nothing. On the contrary, those who are “led by the Spirit” (Romans 8:14), are **very busy** doing the Master’s business (Luke 2:49, 19:13).

Right Thinking - Right Feelings

It is important for you to understand that your feelings are created by your thoughts. Your feelings do not have a life of their own; they do not exist independently of your thoughts. If you want to feel good, think good thoughts. If you are feeling bad, anxious, nervous or depressed, examine what you are thinking about. You are not the victim of your thoughts. You can control your thoughts. You can take authority over your thoughts and create the kind of inner world you want to live in (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Faith filled thoughts create Faith-filled feelings.

Joy filled thoughts create Joy filled feelings.

Positive thoughts create Positive feelings.

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, THINK on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

For more about this subject we recommend "Right and Wrong Thinking" (CDA-153).

A Personal Testimony

I would like to end this teaching with a short testimony of one of my initial experiences of the JOY of the LORD.

During my early and formative years of learning how to walk in the spirit, God sent me to work in a paint store in New York City. During one particularly difficult season (of which I had many), when the Lord was doing a deep work in my heart and character, calling me to a deeper life of surrender, obedience and death to self, I had this life changing experience which I remember so clearly.

I was standing behind the counter in the store taking an order from a well-dressed affluent young couple. As I was writing out what paint they wanted, I began to get filled with an extreme intense sense of the JOY of the LORD. The Joy continued to fill me so much that I began to feel like my body had seams along its sides and the seams were beginning to rip apart. I had to say to the couple, “Excuse me,” and I put my head down on the

counter. I imagine they thought I wasn't feeling well. I silently prayed, "Lord if you don't stop this expanding Joy filling me so much, I think my seams will rip apart and I will explode, and this couple will be totally freaked out." Then the Joy subsided to a "normal" level, the "seams" stop spreading, and I continued to help the couple. That Joy has sustained me, and thank God, continues to!

I am so grateful to the Lord for the continual sense of His Peace and Joy. Sometimes it is very intense; mostly it is just like calming music in the background of my soul.

May this teaching help you to learn how to do the things necessary to experience more and more of the JOY OF THE LORD.

Our prayer for you for 2016 is Romans 15:13 –

"Now may the God of Hope fill you with all Joy and Peace in believing, that you may abound in Hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."