Finding joy when facing the turbulent waters of life can be difficult. In fact, it can seem like an impossible task at times!

Thankfully, God has promised that He will never leave you or abandon you. He does have a plan and purpose for you. And He even has a reason for those trials you may be going through.

In this booklet, *JOY! Experiencing God's Grace and Peace in Turbulent Times*, Dr. Ed Young shows you how refocusing your attention on God's promises and His Son…and not on your circumstances…will help you find true joy and enduring peace no matter how overwhelming the waves in your life may seem today.

For more information about the Winning Walk with Dr. Ed Young, visit www.winningwalk.org


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Joy! Experiencing God's Grace & Peace in Turbulent Times *by Dr. Ed Young*

# JOY!

## Experiencing God's Grace & Peace in Turbulent Times

By Dr. Ed Young

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**JOY!**

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PO Box 1414

Houston, TX 77251

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# JOY!

## Experiencing God's Grace and Peace in Turbulent Times

By Dr. Ed Young

## Introduction

Not too long ago, I read a magazine article entitled "The Best Things in Life Aren't Things." In it Joann Davis, the author, lists some of the little wonders that make life so great.

Her list includes things like grass tickling your toes, a puppy

sleeping on your shoulder, coming home, and smelling freshly baked bread. She goes on to list 35 things which illustrate that the best things in life are not really "things."

So I thought, "What is the best thing in life? What is the ultimate thing that every human seeks?" If you were to survey any group of people, the answer would boil down to that very popular word: "happiness." We all want to be happy.

*What is the best thing in life? What is the ultimate thing that every human seeks?*

Happiness comes when we're promoted. Happiness comes when we are in good health. Happiness comes with children and grandchildren. And happiness erupts in that greatest moment of all…when your children leave home for the first time!

*We all want to be happy.*

But there's a problem with each of these scenarios. They are nothing more than circumstances. We can lose our job, we can lose our health, and we can lose our loved ones. We can fall prey to all kinds of problems…leading to the loss of our happiness.

Which means that happiness cannot be the chief purpose, the

chief end of life.

So what is it that we really seek? It's called joy. And in contrast to happiness, joy doesn't depend on circumstances. Joy depends on God, and joy comes from God.

Happiness can be a by-product of joy, but joy—when it is God-given—is independent of what is transpiring in your life. Whether you are on the mountaintop, or in the valley, or whether you are experiencing abundance or privation…joy lasts.

*Joy depends on God, and joy comes from God.*

The Apostle Paul said it best in Philippians 4:12 (and this is my translation), "I know how to be on top, I know how to be on the bottom, I know how to abound, I know how to be abase; but in all circumstances, I've learned to be content."

*To find that joy you need only to look to the Word of God. And, there is no better book than the book of Philippians.*

Why? Because Paul had joy!

To find that joy you need only to look to the Word of God. And, there is no better book than the book of Philippians. Philippians is a book of "ecstatic joy." The whole book is about joy. In fact, 16 different times in

four chapters, the words "joy" or "rejoice" are mentioned. All the way through, wherever you turn in the 104 verses of this book, you run head-on into this most desired quality of life…JOY!

*All the way through, you run head-on into this most desired quality of life…JOY!*

In Chapter 1, Paul talks about the joy of suffering. In Chapter 2, he talks about the joy of serving. In Chapter 3, he talks about the joy of believing. And in Chapter 4, Paul talks about the joy of giving.

Perhaps the key verse in the entire book is Philippians 4:4: "*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice*!" When you and I have real joy in our lives…when we have the wonderful, supernatural joy that God gives, whatever our situation might be, we are content.

And that's joy! That's real joy!

*"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"*

In the next few pages, I want to focus your attention on the scene taking place behind the book of Philippians. This book, written by the apostle Paul from a Roman prison, helps us understand God's plan for real joy.

I pray that as you read on you will discover what your heart has always longed for…true and abiding joy.

Real joy!



## The Key to Real Joy

I would like to focus our attention on Philippians 1:1-7. In this passage, verse 6 gives us the key to finding real joy. We need to fully understand this verse and hold it in our hearts as a clear promise from God.

Philippians 1:6 says:

*"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."*

Did you read that? Do you

know what that verse means? It means this:

***What God starts, God finishes.***

That's the foundation of true contentment: knowing that God has a perfect will…God has a perfect plan…God is leading you…God's hand is on your life guiding you. That, in fact, God delights in speaking to you and me.

*That's the foundation of true contentment. Knowing that God has a perfect will.*

I can tell you God speaks in an infinite number of ways to all of us. If you haven't heard God speak to you lately, something has broken down in the communication process; and it's not on God's side of things!

Now, when God speaks to us, He speaks the truth. He does not redefine truth. The inerrant truth He's already spoken clearly in His Word **never** changes! God does speak, and God does lead. And many times He does so through prayer. There are many times God will bring a name to me—out of the blue—and He will tell me that this person needs to be encouraged or

*The inerrant truth He's already spoken clearly in His Word **never** changes!*

that I may need to make contact with him or her. And so many times when I've done what He has prompted me to do, it has proven to be just what that person needed.

God speaks, God leads, God has a plan, God has a will, and God has a purpose. And when you grasp these truths, you will understand the first ingredient to joy. You can be reassured that God is, indeed, at work, accomplishing His plan in your life. And with that knowledge comes contentment…regardless of your circumstances.

*God speaks, God leads, God has a plan, God has a will, and God has a purpose.*

## An Example of Real Joy

In Acts 16, we discover the details of how Paul came to Philippi and the trouble he and Silas encountered as they began their ministry in that small city. Let me give you just a little background on Philippi.

Philippi was a Roman city, which meant it strictly followed Roman law, Roman procedures… and the population was primarily Roman. The government was Roman, the highways were Roman, the laws were Roman. You would have also found the agora, the center of the city—the

nexus of politics, commerce, religion, culture, social activities, and administrative and judicial power.

When Paul entered this city—as far as we know—he was the only one in the city to know Jesus Christ. And as he and Silas began to wander the city, they found that there was no synagogue and very few Jews.

*When Paul entered this city, he was the only one in the city to know Jesus Christ.*

We don't know how long Paul had been there, but on the Sabbath, Paul went to a small river in town and found a group of women meeting together. He began to share that he knew God. Now, can you imagine how startling and amazing that would sound to a pagan audience who worshipped all sorts of gods, idols, and Caesars? They would have been blown away by the idea that a mortal could know God.

*They would have been blown away by the idea that a mortal could know God.*

But Paul boldly proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus Christ and how through Him they could know God. To these pagans that was also good news! Fabulous, astounding, and

amazingly good news!

One person in the group was a woman by the name of Lydia. She was said to be a seller of purple cloth, and someone who was very affluent. The Bible tells us she was a God-worshipper.

*Lydia, along with Paul and Silas, started the Church in Philippi.*

Lydia, having heard Paul's message, received Christ and was baptized. And then she, along with Paul and Silas, led her whole family to faith in Jesus Christ, which was the start of the Church in Philippi. But trouble was coming!



The next day, Paul met a young girl who the Bible says had the spirit of a demon. She began to follow Paul and Silas, and everywhere they went she would proclaim, "*These are the servants of the Most High God and they have the way of salvation*."

Now you might say that's a plus, but it wasn't. This girl ran the "psychic hotline" of Philippi. She read fortunes, and she made money for those who profited from her demonic giftedness. People, of course, knew of her psychic capabilities, and by her endorsement of Paul and Silas, she was negating their witness

for God.

We read in Acts 16 that day after day she would continue to proclaim, "*Here are the servants of the Most High God. They'll tell you the way of salvation*." And everywhere they went she was ruining their witness.

*Instantly, this young girl was set free!*

Finally, Paul got fed up and, in the name of Jesus, cast the demons out of this woman. Instantly, this young girl was set free, and she lost her psychic powers…which didn't make those who were profiting from her all too happy!

So they took Paul and Silas before the magistrate and claimed that they were teaching something contrary to Rome—that the religion they were proclaiming was not "state approved." The magistrate and the city council found them guilty and ordered Paul and Silas stripped and beaten with rods. Then they had them thrown into jail and told the jailer to make sure he did not let them escape.

So the jailer put them down in the lower dungeon in stocks. Picture them: Paul and Silas were beaten, naked, disgraced, and in stocks.

Now, I don't know about you, but I wouldn't exactly see this as a time of great joy! If you or I were arrested, stripped, beaten, disgraced and then thrown into a dark and dingy dungeon and placed in painful stocks, I don't think we would be singing the "Hallelujah Chorus!"

*If we are honest, we would probably allow our misery to overwhelm us, and we might even begin to be angry with God.*

If we are honest, we would probably allow our misery to overwhelm us, and we might even begin to be angry with God. After all, we had been doing His work…how could He do this to us? We would probably be quick to remind Him how unfair this was! And most likely we wouldn't be filled with joy.

As long as we are being honest, we would need to admit that when life goes "south" on us…when things don't go our way…when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances…we aren't normally filled with joy. In fact, we're probably filled with anything *but* joy!

*We would need to admit that when life goes "south" on us, we aren't normally filled with joy.*

This is where we learn such a valuable lesson from Paul and Silas—what real joy looks like—and the basis for that joy. Paul and Silas knew they hadn't been abandoned. They knew that what God was starting through them in Philippi He was going to finish.

*Even though they were suffering, they knew Jesus was there with them.*

Even though they were suffering, they knew Jesus was there with them…that they could trust Him through the pain…and He was working out a plan that went beyond the pain of the moment to something much greater than the struggles they were experiencing.

Because they were able to rejoice in the midst of pain, God did an incredible work that became a part of the foundation of the Church in Philippi. And when you and I can trust Him in the pain…when you and I can see beyond the moment to what God is doing in and through our lives…we, too, can experience joy—real joy!

*And when you and I can trust Him in the pain, we, too, can experience joy—real joy!*

## The Results of Real Joy

It was about midnight in the dungeon. You know that Paul and Silas must have been in pain and incredibly uncomfortable. The dungeon was cold…their wounds were festering…and the stocks were hurting their arms, necks, and backs.

But, in spite of the pain, they began to sing… and they began to pray. Why? Because they had joy! They knew Christ was there with them and

*They were overcome with JOY! They knew Christ was there with them and that He was at work.*

that He was at work. So they were overcome with JOY!

What was the result? Well, first there was an earthquake. Now, I don't know what it measured on the Richter scale; but the gates of the jail flew open, and their chains came loose. They were free! Free from what had imprisoned them!

*They were free from what had imprisoned them!*

The earthquake awakened the jailer and when he saw that all the gates were open, he assumed all the prisoners had escaped. He knew that if they had escaped, it would cost him his life; so he drew his sword to kill himself. As he was about to take his own life, Paul said, "Surprise! (my paraphrase) We're all here. No one has left."

*He needed and wanted what they had…that thing that had given them such joy.*

The jailer was amazed and fell down in front of Paul and Silas and asked one simple yet profound question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He knew he owed Paul his life. And he must have wondered what had inspired them to be singing while in the dungeon. He needed and wanted

what they had…and that thing that had given them such joy…and that had kept them from escaping when they had the opportunity.

Paul and Silas' joy in the midst of suffering had resulted in this jailer's coming to Christ!

*Paul and Silas' joy in the midst of suffering had resulted in this jailer's coming to Christ!*

But that's not the end of the story. The jailer was so excited that he wanted his family to hear about Jesus. That night he and his entire family placed their faith in Christ as Lord, and they were all baptized.



But there is one final, unexpected result of their joy in the midst of such trying circumstances and pain. And it is rather profound.

The next morning, the magistrates ordered Paul and Silas released from prison. But rather than leaving, Paul let the jailer know that just letting them go wasn't going to work. After all, Paul and Silas were Roman citizens and had been beaten and jailed without due process… without a trial. Paul insisted that the magistrates come and escort them out of jail.

When the community leaders

heard this, they were horrified! They had no idea that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens. They had violated Roman law! So they came and escorted Paul and Silas from jail, doing all they could to appease them and then asked them to leave the city.

*The magistrates had gone from beating and imprisoning Paul and Silas to doing all they could to appease them!*

Did you catch it? The magistrates had gone from beating and imprisoning Paul and Silas to doing all they could to appease them! You can rest assured the civil authorities wouldn't hassle Paul, Silas, and those with them again!

As Paul and Silas trusted God through the pain and difficulty of their beating and their dungeon experience, they were able to know joy…real joy. And the result was the advance of the Gospel. In fact, 10 years later when Paul wrote to the Church at Philippi, he was able to begin his letter by saying, "…*to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and the deacons*." The church was well established…and full of saints!

*And the result was the advance of the Gospel.*

## Conclusion

Let me ask you: Are you able to rejoice today? No matter what your circumstance might be, are you able to sing and pray with joy?

If not, remember, what God starts, He finishes. He has not left you or abandoned you. He has a plan, a will, and a purpose for your life. As you trust Him with that, you will know joy. Not the fleeting happiness that comes with the good things of life but the unshakable joy that comes from God's presence in

*He has a plan, a will, and a purpose for your life.*

your life.

My challenge to you today is to refocus your life away from your circumstances to the person of Jesus Christ. As I said at the beginning of this booklet, when you grasp the truth of God's presence in your life and understand that He has a plan for your life, you'll know what makes for real joy. You can be assured that God is, indeed, at work accomplishing His plan in your life. And with that knowledge comes contentment…regardless of your circumstances.

*My challenge to you today is to refocus your life away from your circumstances to the person of Jesus Christ.*

May your life be filled with joy…**real joy!**

## About the Author

Dr. Ed Young was born and raised in Laurel, Mississippi where he accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior at the age of 12. Midway through his freshman year in college, challenged by an atheist in his dorm who questioned his belief in God, he began to seek God's purpose for his life. Six months later, he surrendered to the call to preach the Gospel.

Dr. Young's preparation for the ministry continued at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. His first pastorate was in North Carolina, and he pastored in North and South Carolina until 1978 when he moved to Houston, Texas. He became the pastor at Second Baptist Church where he continues to pastor today. The congregation has grown from 2,000 members in 1978 to over 40,000 members at three church locations. Dr. Young's broadcast ministry, Winning Walk Family, can be seen and heard across North America and throughout the world.

Dr. Young and his wife Jo Beth have three grown sons, Ed, Ben, and Cliff who are all married and have blessed them with several grandchildren.