

**JOY --
HEAVEN'S
SERIOUS
BUSINESS!**

C. S. Lewis: "Joy is the serious business of heaven!"

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to Angie Attaway, my administrative assistant for the past twelve years. Angie's editorial skills have made me look more intelligent and polished than I really am. She has gone far behind the basics of her job description to labor, often unrecognized and unpaid for me and with me – and always with a genuine servant's spirit. She is a faithful co-laborer in the gospel ministry, a fruitful disciple, a daughter-in-the-faith, and my friend. Thanks, Angie, for hanging in there with me all these years! I love you!

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JOY – HEAVEN’S SERIOUS BUSINESS!

Chapter One

The Door to Joy Unlocked

The brilliant English author, C. S. Lewis, said, "**Joy is the serious business of Heaven.**" Robert Lewis Stevenson said, "**To miss the joy is to miss everything!**"

Multitudes of people around the world today, and throughout history, have proven the above statements to be true time and time again. Failing to discover real and lasting joy, they have taken it upon themselves to create their own version of joy by substituting worldly happiness. After all their expensive, emotionally-draining, enthusiastic, self-centered, pleasure-laden humanistic efforts, there is only more emptiness. The door of joy remains locked to them and they refuse to acknowledge that they cannot discover the key that opens to a joy-filled life on their own.

As C.S. Lewis wrote, "God created us for joy but some don't know what to do with their yearning for joy. If you have God's joy in your heart, then you can mingle that joy with food, drink, fellowship, laughter, sex. Real joy makes those things even better. If you do not have any real joy, though, then

you grab hold of these other things to take the place of joy. Lacking real joy, you look for happiness in a bottle of whiskey, in watching the James Bond marathon on TNT over the weekend, in the brief bliss of a sexual ecstasy. As Lewis wrote, "Joy is not a substitute for sex; sex is often a substitute for Joy, however."

Ken Williams, in his book, *The Door to Joy*, shares a story of a company of army recruits that was marching around the base when suddenly one of the recruits bolted out of formation and ran over to a nearby door, flung it open and shouted, "**That's not it!**" and got back in line. For one week every time the formation passed a door the recruit would break rank, fling the door open and cry, "**That's not it!**"

Finally the drill sergeant could take no more, so he sent the soldier to the psychiatrist. While in the medical building, the recruit ran down the hallway throwing open every door, screaming, "**That's not it! That's not it!**"

After two weeks of intense observation, the psychiatrist treating the young man called him into his office and said, "I'm sorry, but you have some really serious problems and for this reason we're going to have to discharge you from the service. Here are your papers. You're free to go." Opening the outside door the man stepped out with a shout that rang across the base – "**THIS IS IT**"

Throughout the teenage years of my life, I opened a lot of doors and discovered that after each experience behind that door, "**That wasn't it!**" Then on October 3, 1966, the Spirit of God opened my eyes and enabled me to see through the scriptures an open door that had a sign on it that read, "**Jesus said I am the door.**" And when by repentance and faith, the Holy Spirit enabled me to walk through it and Jesus became my life, my joy, and my all, I knew then that "**THIS IS IT!**"

Jesus said in John 10:9, "***I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.***" We must be very careful as we talk about opening the door to joy, for the essential truth of the Christian faith is that Jesus is not a door into joy, but is the Door. Jesus is not a way into life, He is the life!

Octavious Winslow eloquently describes "what a ground of joy is our possession of Christ!" -- "There is everything in Christ, and in the knowledge and possession of Christ, to make the believing heart joyful. You may have strong corruptions, powerful inbred sins, sore temptations, deep trials, heavy afflictions, yet if you know Christ, and have Christ in the midst of all, you have ground for the deepest, holiest joy. All joy apart from Christ is but the inspiration of the wind. The man who seeks the element of joy in his baptism, in his sacraments, in his church, in his religious duties, in his zeal, in his usefulness, yea, in anything out of Christ, is

building upon that which hath no foundation. It is a false, a spurious, a fatal joy, a joy which will prove but as the crackling of thorns under a pot. But, beloved, we hope and speak better things of you. You have found Christ, or rather, Christ has found you, and you have in Him the substance, the essence, the fullness of all holy joy.

You possess in Christ a Divine Redeemer, a loving Friend, a sympathizing Brother, an ever-interceding Intercessor, a powerful Advocate; One whose presence is with you always, encircling you as an atmosphere in all places and under all circumstances—truly this is a ground of the deepest, holiest joy. Oh, what a rest is Jesus in a restless world! What a joy is Jesus in a joyless world! What a hope is Jesus in a hopeless world! Beloved, we too little and too imperfectly realize what we possess in possessing Christ.

Throw into one scale all the good of the world, its rank, its honors, its wealth, its pleasures—all the love, the kindness, the sympathy, the power of the creature and of all creatures; and place in the other scale, CHRIST—Christ as your Savior, Christ as your Friend, Christ as your Portion, and Christ as your all,—which kicks the beam? which sinks, and which rises? Nay, more—cast into one scale poverty, and sickness, and affliction of every kind, and sorrow of every form—the adversity that swept from you affluence, or the bereavement that tore from you the creature—and place JESUS in the other—Jesus in

His deathless love, Jesus in His human sympathy, Jesus in His boundless fullness, Jesus bearing you upon His heart in heaven, and receiving you into His grace on earth,—and then decide what should be the nature, the depth, the music of your joy. “This is my Friend, and this is my Beloved.” **Oh, be joyful, then, believer in Jesus!** There breathes not a being in the universe—tried, tempted, sad though you are—who has greater reason to be of a gladsome spirit than you. Rejoice, then, in what Christ is in Himself—in His preciousness and fullness; rejoice in what Christ is to you, and rejoice in what you are to Christ. Truly, “we rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

One commentator said, “The New Testament is the most joyful book in the world. It opens with joy over the birth of Jesus, and it ends with the superb picture of a great multitude singing Heavenly Hallelujah Choruses. No matter where you open it, amid fortunate or discouraging circumstances, you always hear the note of joy.”

The first Christmas was the occasion of God's opening the door of Heaven and allowing His joy to go public! Through that door the angel of the Lord appeared to a group of lowly shepherds and said, in essence, “**This is it!** I bring you the greatest news this world has ever heard -- **Joy to the World the Lord Has Come!**” And suddenly the doors of Heaven were flung wide open and there was with the angel of the Lord a choir made up of a multitude

of other angels singing, "***Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace toward men with whom He is well pleased!***"

Joy to the world still remains God's goal. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (*I always add, "beginning right now"!*). Paul says in 1 Tim 6:17c, "... he gives us richly all things to enjoy." We will one day fully and finally enter into the joys of the Lord. Jesus came as a man of joy and accomplished His mission because of the joy that was set before him (Hebrews 12:2). He said to his disciples, "*My joy I leave with you.*" In John 17:13, Jesus said, "*And now I come to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.*"

The gospel as recorded by the beloved physician, Luke, begins with John the Baptist leaping for joy in his mother's womb. The joy increases in the presence of a baby born in a cow stable and ends with joy at an empty tomb in the presence of a risen, living Lord. *Luke 24:51-53, "While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God."*

Luke continues to unfold the goal of God in the experience of bringing joy to the world in the book of Acts. The disciples, filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, were so exultant, so excited, so

joy-filled, that the people accused them of being drunk with new wine! The converts at Pentecost came together with *"gladness and singleness of heart."* Wherever the gospel came in power there was "great joy in that place." Paul writes, *"Rejoice, (i.e. literally, celebrate!) in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice, celebrate."* Peter writes about *"joy unspeakable and full of glory."*

Little did outlaw Bill Stiles realize that the day he walked through the doors of the Union Rescue mission, he would soon be opening the doors of his heart to joy unspeakable. Bill Stiles, one of the last members of the Jesse James gang, was planning another train robbery in 1913. On the day before the "hit," as he walked on Los Angeles' Main Street, he saw a policeman coming toward him and ducked into the Union Rescue Mission nearby. To avoid being followed, he walked clear to the front and sat down.

He said later, *"I did not hear much of the service, for my mind was upon the work for the next day. I felt a little uneasy, for I had left my suitcase in my room, and in it some of the `soup' (nitroglycerine), some high explosives, and my guns. I was just getting up to leave the mission when one worker came to me and asked me to give myself up to God.*

"I told him that I did not believe in a God. I don't remember his reply, for when I attempted to get up I had no control over my legs. They were fastened to

that floor by a power not of this earth. A woman came and sat down beside me and urged me to go up to the altar. I listened to her for a time and consented to go, thinking it would do me no harm. As soon as I gave my consent my legs were released and I went up and knelt at the altar.

*"I heard them praying and a strange feeling came over me. It seemed as though something on my heart was loosening up, and I began to feel happy. How sorry I began to feel for my past life of crime. I could not keep back the tears—tears of real repentance. I heard them tell me to repeat a prayer, but I had found the Lord before that. **Oh, what a joy came into my heart!"***

Question? Where has all the joy gone? Sherwood Wirt asks, *"Is Christianity nothing more than a sorrowful and woebegone Via Dolorosa, i.e. a pathway of sorrows? Is our existence on this planet a cosmic tragedy, and is the Bible a moralistic stepmother, a Miss Manners directing us to quit whatever we are doing and do something else?"* No! Ten thousand times NO!

Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie, former pastor and honorable chaplain of the United States Senate, accurately diagnosed modern day Christianity's greatest problem: **"Joy is the missing ingredient in contemporary Christianity. The problem is our powerless piousness and grim religiosity."**

Author Dorothy Sayers has pointed out that while "the Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man," we today have managed to "show the world the typical Christian in the likeness of a crashing and rather ill-natured bore — and this in the Name of One who assuredly never bored a soul in those thirty-three years during which He passed through the world like a flame."

The enemy of our souls has deceived far too many Christians into believing that they should spend their days sorrowing and weeping either over their own sins, the sins of the Church, or the whole world. Hendrik Kraemer, the Dutch Christian leader whom the Nazis tortured in a concentration camp, exposed such deception with a passionate "NO!" Speaking in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1951, he cried, **"We Christians must get the joy of Christ back into our religion. We are denying Christ by losing it!"**

In light of the pressing, oppressing, and depressing world events, Christians are not meant to be flippantly unconcerned about a lost, suffering, and dying world, but are to live in the light of what has been done by Christ and is and will continue to be done to roll back and remedy a fallen race and reverse the curse sin brought upon all creation — and in this light there is joy unspeakable!

Elton Trueblood wrote, "The Christian is joyful, not because he is blind to injustice and suffering, but because he is convinced that these, in the light of the divine sovereignty, are never ultimate. The Christian can be sad, and often is perplexed, but he is never really worried, because he knows that the purpose of God is to bring all things in Heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

Dear fellow-believers, is it not time that we asked the Lord to restore unto His people the JOY of His salvation?

Judson Cornwall was correct in his view that "the entire Bible shows that God's glory is not released in power, although, obviously, God is a powerful God. His glory is released through His saints as they joy in Him and express that joy to others. Joy releases God's glory on earth."

This is the theme of this book – **Joy – Heaven's Serious Business!** Where does joy originate? How does one experience it consistently? What does it look like when it comes out of the closet of the believer's heart? What are some of the subtle, but often successful joy-robbers? These are some of the questions we hope to answer as we seek to open the door to the joy of the Lord! So, let's walk through the DOOR into the joy of Jesus and expect to experience and express the joy of the Lord as our strength for the glory of our great God!

Chapter Two

Salvation – God’s Open Door to Joy!

Leander Keck shares the following insightful observation regarding joyless Christians: “I do not know why so much of mainline Protestantism has become a joyless religion. Perhaps we are more impressed by the problems of the world than by the power of God. Perhaps we have become so secular that we indeed think that now everything depends on us; that surely ought to make us depressed. Perhaps we have simply gotten bored with a boring God whom we substituted for the God of the Bible.

We sometimes sing the Doxology as if it were a dirge. Even the Eucharist, despite the words of the Great Thanksgiving, is rarely the thankful, joyous foretaste of the Great Banquet with the One who triumphed over Death, but mostly a mournful occasion for introspection. A joyless Christianity is as clear a sign that something is amiss as a dirty church.”

After being in the faith for forty-two years, pastoring churches for thirty-five of those years, it is obvious to me that for the most part, God’s people have lost the key to the door of joy and have been looking for it in all the wrong places.

Where did we lose it? In my humble opinion, we lost it as the gospel got distorted and truncated.

William Tyndale described the Christian gospel as **"good, merry, glad, and joyful tidings that makes a man's heart glad, and makes him sing, dance, and leap for joy."**

If this is the biblical meaning of gospel, then why do so many professing Christians live as "Bad News", rather than "Good News" Believers? Why do they live gloom-filled lives instead of gospel-filled? Why do they live so uncertain of their acceptance before God, unconvinced of the victory of Christ, undecided about the power of the Good News to make believers eternally joyous in Jesus, beginning right now, and uncommitted in regard to sparing no expense or effort so that everyone can hear the good news?

The main reason for such a joyless life is that far too many believers have a truncated view of the gospel, tending to see it only as a door that they walk through to become a Christian. As a consequence, they see the gospel as being only for unbelievers. Once you become a Believer, you don't need it anymore except to share with people who are still outside the door. What you need to hear instead are the challenges and how-to's of discipleship for Christian growth. To embrace this view is to forget that Christian growth isn't stepping out from the gospel, but rather stepping out with, in, and by the

gospel. We need to recover the whole gospel that reveals what God's salvation provisions in the gospel include. We begin this rediscovery by realizing that:

God is the Original Source of Joy

*Isaiah 12:2 -3, "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation. **With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.**"*

Psalm 13:5, "But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation."

Psalm 35:9, "Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD, exulting in his salvation."

God has always been perfectly joyous!

Professor Dallas Willard, in his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, challenges us to think rightly about God: "We should, to begin with, think that God leads a very interesting life, and that he is full of joy. Undoubtedly he is the most joyous being in the universe. The abundance of his love and generosity is inseparable from his infinite joy. All of the good and beautiful things from which we occasionally drink tiny droplets of soul-exhilarating joy, God continuously experiences in all their breadth and depth and richness."

When you think of God, which of these words represents your thinking? -- sternness, wrath, solemnity, gloom -- or joyousness, gladness, delight, pleasure, jubilation? True, holiness is a perfect and essential attribute of God, but so is love and joy. John Piper said "the chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy God forever." God has always been overflowing joyous, happy, and exuberant. He has never been lonely, or needed some one to talk to, or someone to love. Why? Because from all eternity God has always beheld with indescribable joy, satisfaction and love the magnificence of his own radiance, image, and glory in the face of his Beloved Son. Jonathan Edwards said, "The infinite happiness of the Father consists in the enjoyment of His Son!" And while his Son was on earth he said over and over again, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Concerning our joyous God, Pastor John Piper declares, "From eternity, God has been supremely joyful in the fellowship of the Trinity, so that he has no discontent or defect or deficiency that would prompt him to create the world."

God does not act out of need. He acts out of fullness and ultimate self-determination. So Paul says in **Acts 17:25**, "He [is not] served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." And God says it like this in **Psalm 50:12, 15**, "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its

fullness are mine. . . . Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

God says: You don't deliver me. You don't supply my need. I am not served that way. I give, I make alive. I sustain. I deliver. Whether I create or sustain, I act from fullness, not need. I did not create you because I have need. God is joyful in the fellowship of the Trinity. “This is my *beloved* Son, with whom I am *well pleased*” (Matthew 3:17). I love my Son. I am supremely delighted with my Son. And my Son has been with me from all eternity. And someday, if you trust him, he will say to you at the judgment, “Enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:23). That is my Son's joy in me and my joy in him. And the Spirit of the Father and of the Son—the Holy Spirit—carries our joy completely from all eternity. We are a happy God. We did not create you out of need.”

What does God's joy and infinite happiness rest in?” The answer is in the enjoyment of His Son. The Bible teaches that the eternal God has always had a perfect image of himself-- Jesus (Col 1:15); a perfect radiance of his essence -- Jesus (Hebs 1:3); a perfect imprint of His nature -- Jesus (Hebs 1:3); a perfect form or expression of His glory -- and his name is Jesus (Philps 2:6).

The book of Luke begins with great joy (2:10) and ends with great joy (24:52). In Luke 2:10, the angel