

Unquenchable Joy: Our Motivation

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Unquenchable joy in the Glory of God through Christ Jesus should be our ultimate motivation and should flavor every decision we make and emotion we have in our lives. This same unquenchable joy should be the message we present to the unsaved world. Why would anyone choose temporal pleasures which ultimately lead to hell when unquenchable joy is being freely offered? Why substitute the most excellent for anything less?

Hypothesis

God—the ultimate and most excellent object to be treasured—has assigned each believer a measure of faith in the ultimate saving sacrifice of his son Jesus. Through this faith in the saving work of Christ God bestows upon each believer a measure of hope for ever expanding and unquenchable joy through the ongoing experience of the God's awesome glory. It is through faith and hope that we can experience unquenchable joy in all kinds of situations, not just in heaven, but today if the Glory of God will be our greatest and most excellent treasure.

Biblical Context

Overview of Psalm 40

David is talking about how he waited on the Lord and was rescued and because of this he is made joyful to the point that other people will put their trust in the Lord. He goes on to talk about how great the Lord is and how God's will is his desire. David speaks about the many threats and troubles that are around him and asks the Lord to preserve and rescue him from them. David closes the chapter with a summary of how poor and needy he is and asks for God to deliver him right away. But just before David gives the summary he says this...

Psalm 40:16

Psalm 40:16—But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!"

Paraphrase

My personal paraphrase of Psalm 40:16—May believers in God's grace through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ be violently joyful; may they continually praise and glorify the LORD.

I like the phrase, “violently joyful” because I think it absorbs the repetition of rejoice and be glad, which is essentially saying, “be joyfully joyful” or “be super joyful”. Plus, it's a bit shocking and I think God likes shocking (e.g., the flood, burning bushes, parted Red Sea, turning people into pillars of salt, etc).

Definitions

FAITH: When I talk about **faith** I'm talking about it in the Romans 4 sense: being fully convinced that God is able to do what he has promised (Romans 4:13-25)

HOPE: When I talk about hope I'm talking about a combination of Deuteronomy 7, 1 John 1:9, and Jude 1. That is to say, **hope** in the covenant and steadfast love of God (Deuteronomy 7:9); that He will be faithful to forgive us (1 John 1:9) and bring us into the presence of His Glory (Jude 1:24-25).

JOY: When I speak of **joy** I'm talking about a combination of 1 Peter 1, 1 Peter 4, and 1 John 1:4. It's the unspeakable (1 Peter 1:8), exceedingly (1 Peter 4:13), and full (1 John 1:4) pleasure in the Glory of God.

The relationship between faith, hope, and joy

It is through **faith** that we are fully convinced that Jesus (being God) is the most worthy object of our **hope** for the future. It is through **hope** in his supremacy, faithfulness, and his unchangeable attributes that we are able to experience **joy** in the midst of trials and to look forward to a time when we will experience the **joy** in an unhindered and ever increasing way, a time when we will be forever in the presence of God's glory.

My Journey

As I read the Bible I found myself asking, "What's in it for me?" Of course, every time I did this I felt guilty. As though the idea that I should get something out of a relationship with Christ was a bad thing. Yet the message of the Bible seems pretty clear. Jesus wants to bless those who are his. He is the High King who came to earth as a servant.

God has high demands for us. So high, in fact, we cannot measure up. He has put us in this position so that we will recognize that we need him. Before we are saved, when we are still at war with God, we think we are fine. But in reality we are paralyzed and can do nothing for ourselves.

The more I began to identify with the paralytic the more I realized that this union of helpless human with all powerful God was an unequal relationship. I was the one who needed all the help and God was the one with all the resources. It was as if God was saying to me, "Whatever you need I AM."

I used to struggle with the concept of Joy in Christ. It didn't make sense to me. Even after being a Christian for more than 20 years what made more sense was Christian duty. But as I asked the Lord to clarify my priorities and to help me experience the Joy of the Lord I realized that doing my duty as a Christian wasn't enough, in fact it might have even been detestable to him. God began to show me that he was concerned with my heart attitude much more than with works done out of a sense of duty. He wanted me to be constantly looking for his glory and to be in need of his help. The bottom line was that God wanted me to be God-centered, not self-centered.

At the same time I was wondering what my motivation as a Christian should be? God began to reveal that the only motivation that seemed to hold up was the enjoyment of Christ. Christian duty absent an underlying motivation to see God glorified and the experience of joy in Christ is just vain work. That's when I realized that the Joy of the Lord was to be my motivation as a Christian.

Let me be clear. I am not saying that I am to do only things that make me feel good in a carnal, ephemeral, temporary way. Instead I am to seek the enjoyment of Christ in all things. This is very

different. If the joy of Christ is my motivation I will be compelled to do and to persevere through many many things that do not make me feel good at all because I will have joy in seeing God's elegant provision and witnessing first hand his faithfulness and steadfast love. I say this to mean that in everything I do I should be looking to experience God's glory above all else knowing that this is the only lasting joy. This is what it means to build up treasure in heaven. All other pursuits will end in disappointment.

The practical side of this was that I began realizing that I did not have to fix everything I hated about myself. I didn't have to fix my attitudes. I didn't have to fix my sinful desires. I didn't have to fix my prideful tendencies. What I had to do was to recognize them, hate them because I was exchanging God's glory for them, turn them over to the Lord, and ask him to do the work. I also realized that I did not have to fix situations that made me aggravated or uncomfortable. I could recognize them, recognize that Christ was sovereign over all things, and relax into the faith in the hope that I have as a Christian. The hope that Christ will bring me into the presence of his glory! The hope that God will work all things for his glory and our (Christians) good.

As I continue this cycle of recognition (my attitudes, my situations, and Christ's sovereignty) my view of Christ inflated and my view of myself deflated. I moved more toward being Christ-centered and away from being self-centered.

Argument

The Apostle Paul tells us that as believers in Christ we're supposed to be violently joyful in the glory of the magnificent God of creation.

Philippians 4:4—Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Pleasure Seekers

But why should we rejoice in the Lord? What is in it for us?

Blaise Pascal, the Christian French genius said, "All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves."

When motivation by pleasure is considered in a world without God it is terribly destructive and self-centered. However, once God is introduced as the ultimate object of pleasure it is no longer self-centered, it is God-centered. I have noticed that the more self-centered I get the more I wrongly inflated my view of myself and deflated my view of God. But when I am more God-centered my view of myself is deflated and my view of God is inflated. John the Baptist was right when he is quoted in John 3:29 & 30, "Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease."

The longer I live the more I believe that everything humans do comes from their desire for pleasure. Humans look for love from parents and the opposite sex because they want to be happy. They earn money to buy stuff so that they will be happy. They drink alcohol or take drugs so they can experience the pleasurable highs. They look at pornography because it's pleasurable arousing. However many miss out on all that a relationship with Jesus Christ brings, the most lasting pleasure of all—joy in the midst of trials and eternity in the presence of Almighty God. Even Christians miss out on this by exchanging the Joy of the Lord for temporal pleasures.

What many Christians don't even realize is that pleasure from God has two side effects: more pleasure from God and a desire to praise him. Compare this with all the other pleasures and you will find that all other pleasures eventually have a negative effect. People will let us down. The money will run out or distract us so much that it consumes us. Alcohol and drugs lead to addiction which leads to a wasted life and death. Pornography leads to addiction which leads to broken relationships. All of these end in destruction. But joy in God leads to renewed hearts and the desires of them: more joy in God!

So far I've said that humans are motivated by pleasure. Now I'll take this a step further and say that God uses our desire for pleasure as motivation to chase after him. The entire Bible is filled with proof of this. Here are a few examples.

Matthew 6:33,34—But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, [WHY?] and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow...

Proverbs 3:5-8—Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, [WHY?] and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. [WHY?] It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

Psalms 37:4—Delight yourself in the LORD, [WHY?] and he will give you the desires of your heart.

I should note that delighting oneself in the Lord results in one desiring the Lord. So when David says that God will give us the desires of our hearts he means that he will give us himself, not temporal things.

Matthew 6:19,20—Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, [WHY?] where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, [WHY?] where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

We seek the things that give us pleasure. But we are short sighted and get enamored with temporal pleasures. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, we're content to make mud pies in the sandbox because we have no idea what it means to go to Disney World. So we watch TV, take drugs, drink alcohol, etc when we could be storing up treasure in heaven and experiencing the unquenchable joy in the glory of Christ right now!

Joy in God is Most Valuable

John Piper says, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him" and that God's highest pursuit ("his glory") and man's deepest and most durable happiness come together in one pursuit – namely, the pursuit of joy in God.¹

I agree and I believe King David did too. I believe he knew this when he wrote Psalm 40:16 and Psalm 16:11, and Psalm 37:4. As king he was constantly under attack and yet he was writing about God being his joy.

Psalm 16:11—You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 37:4—Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalm 40:16—But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!"

¹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Piper_\(theologian\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Piper_(theologian))

The Apostle Paul knew it when he wrote Philippians 4:4, from prison!

Philippians 4:4—Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

It's Your Strength

The fuel we Christians are designed to run on is the joy of the Lord.

Nehemiah 8:10—...the joy of the LORD is your strength.

Isaiah 30:15—In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength...

Trust in what? The hope of the Lord!

Faith and Hope are Prerequisites

Great, how can we rejoice in the Lord always? How can we get this strength? Faith and hope are prerequisites for joy.

Faith and hope are increased as God becomes more central in our lives. The more God-centered we are the more faithful, hopeful, and joyful we become. The more faithful, hopeful, and joyful we become the more God-centered we will want to be.

“Self-centeredness” is the enemy of “God-centeredness” Seeking joy anywhere but in God leads to self-centeredness which is itself sin (idolatry) and leads to many other sins (pride, greed, etc).

Romans 1:21-23—For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Proverbs 10:28—The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing.

Jonah 2:8—Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

The essence of sin is seeing the Glory of God and exchanging it for something lesser.

Jeremy Taylor, the clergyman from the 1600's, once said that, "God threatens terrible things if we will not be happy."

How can we be joyful and praise God in the midst of our trials like David and Job and Paul and many other godly men did? Isn't it through faith in Him and the hope we have that He will bring us into his glorious presence? Isn't that the definition of heaven? I find that when I review my life looking for God's faithfulness it screams at me from my own history. God's glory screams at me throughout history. There is so much evidence of his unfailing and steadfast love to his chosen people that it is undeniable. As I read the accounts of God's provision for Israel I can feel my hope increasing. Surely this same God that rescued them from the Egyptians and gave them power to take over the promised land, surely this God can handle the details of my insignificant life.

Why do believers seek God, if not for the hope of experiencing the joy that only he can provide? Don't we all want to be joyful? What could make us more joyful than God, the most excellent treasure?

What now?

Do you want to experience unending, ever expanding, unstoppable, overwhelming joy? Would you like to begin experiencing it now? What do you need to do to experience this?

Salvation and Baptism

It all starts with salvation. You need to be rescued from drowning in your own sin.

A quick warning: without salvation through Christ this life is as close to heaven and God as you will ever get and when you die you will experience all of God's holy and righteous wrath for eternity. One thing is for certain, you will be spending eternity somewhere. Would you rather spending being punished or showered with God's Glory?

You need to believe and confess that Jesus is the son of God. That he lived a perfect life which he laid down in a terribly painful way and three days later he came back to life and is seated at the right hand of Almighty God. Jesus did all this so that those who believe would not have to experience God's wrath but would experience His joy instead.

Romans 10:9-13—if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

If you have settled things with God through acceptance of his son Jesus you are saved, congratulations, I look forward to spending eternity with you in the presence of Almighty God. Now the Bible says that the next thing you need to do is get baptized. Before you send me nasty e-mails let me tell you what I am not saying. I am not saying that you need to be baptized to be saved. I am saying that if you haven't been baptized since you accepted Christ now is the time to tell the world that you are Christ's. Christ was baptized at the beginning of his ministry and he commanded us to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." (**Matthew 28:19**). See one of the elders and we'll be happy to talk to you about how to get baptized.

Ramifications

Through faith alone you're saved! You've been baptized! What can you expect now?

You'll be different. You will make choices that people will not understand. Hardships will befall you and your reactions will not conform with what the world thinks you should do. But through all these things your faith and hope will increase and so will your joy!

Even though the joy is unquenchable it comes at a price, namely that the world will think you're nuts to charge after something they can't see, don't believe in, and haven't experienced. But I ask you, why would you let peer pressure deprive you of experiencing tastes of unquenchable joy right now. For those of you who have not asked Jesus Christ to wash away your sins and accepted the free gift of his sacrifice, why would you let your pride cost you the ability to spend eternity bathing in unquenchable joy in the Glory of God in heaven? That would be like a seeing person allowing a blind person to convince them that

sunsets are not worth looking at.

Lifestyle Actions

Eternity experiencing unquenchable joy can start right now. I'm not suggesting that all your circumstances will change, that a Mercedes will appear in your driveway, your mother-in-law will no longer annoy you, or that you'll win the lottery. I'm suggesting something better than all of those things. God who is far more valuable and helpful will take the place of all the stuff you treasure to the point that you will have peace in the midst of life's trials. You will have hope! If I could give my kids anything that would be it. I would give them a passion for the Glory of God because I know if they have that nothing else matters. They won't need to seek after things that rust or can be stolen. They won't have to attach their emotions to what other people think of them. They will be hardwired into the most perfect, highest value, treasure of all.

Here are some things that can help you refocus your attentions on the most excellent motivation of all, the Glory of God.

Increased faith in Christ.

- 1) Pray for God to reveal himself to you.
- 2) Get to know God by reading scripture
- 3) Get a handle on the sovereignty of God and the supremacy of Christ
- 4) Get to know the person of Jesus by reading scripture

Increased hope in eternity with Almighty God.

- 1) pray for hope in the saving work of Christ
- 2) pray for hope in eternity experiencing the Glory of God
- 3) pray for God to reveal the value of himself to you in ways that make it less abstract and more tangible (Perhaps you might ask him to give you peace in a storm through faith in his steadfast love.)

Increased holiness. Sinfulness squashes our hope, changes our focus, inflates our ego, and makes it hard to be joyful.

- 1) Ask the Lord to help you identify areas of sinfulness in your life.
- 2) As these areas become clear to you ask the Lord to forgive you and help you resist these destructive things so that you will not bring dishonor to his name and will be able to experience joy in him more fully.
- 3) If you are struggling to overcome in any of these areas ask the Lord to help you and seek help from godly people.

Make it routine.

If you aren't already, get on a routine of scripture reading and prayer.

George Mueller, the nineteenth century pastor who pastored the same church for sixty-six years, did follow up work for D. L. Moody, preached for Charles Spurgeon, and inspired the missionary faith of Hudson Taylor made it his business to get his soul happy in the Lord each morning.²

In a New Years service Mueller spoke about priorities. He said, "...we shall be engaged... the welfare of our families, the prosperity of our business, our work and service for Christ may be considered the most important matters to be attended to; **but according to my judgment the most important point to be attended to is this: above all things see to it that your souls are happy in the Lord.**

Other things may press upon you, the Lord's work may even have urgent claims upon your attention, but **I deliberately repeat, it is of supreme and paramount importance that you should seek above all things to have your souls truly happy in God Himself!** Day by day seek to make this the most important business of your life. This has been my firm and settled condition for the last five and thirty years. For the first four years after my conversion I knew not its vast importance, but now after much experience I specially commend this point to the notice of my younger brethren and sisters in Christ: the secret of all true effectual service is joy in God, having experimental acquaintance and fellowship with God Himself.

But in what way shall we attain to this settled happiness of soul? How shall we learn to enjoy God? How shall we obtain such an all-sufficient, soul-satisfying portion in Him as shall enable us to let go the things of this world as vain and worthless in comparison? I answer, This happiness is to be obtained through the study of the Holy Scriptures. God has therein revealed Himself unto us in the face of Jesus Christ.

In the Scriptures, by the power of the Holy Ghost, He makes Himself known unto our souls... [Therefore] The very earliest portion of the day we can command should be devoted to the meditation on Scriptures. Our souls should feed upon the Word... This intimate experimental acquaintance with Him will make us truly happy. Nothing else will... In God our Father, and the blessed Jesus, our souls have a rich, divine, imperishable, eternal treasure. Let us enter into practical possession of these true riches; yea, let the remaining days of our earthly pilgrimage be spent in an ever increasing, devoted, earnest consecration of our souls to God."³

George Mueller read his Bible cover to cover over 200 times and lived an incredible life for the Lord, he died in 1898 at the age of 92. I am learning from George's example and that of my grandmother who could be found every morning eating toast, drinking tea, reading her Bible, and writing in her journal. I can tell you that it makes an incredible difference. I find that I am less self-centered, more alert to God's will, and because of these I am more joyful when I am doing this regularly. It is hard to be miserable when you've just spent time with Almighty God, Creator and Sustainer of all things.

Making the joy of the Lord our motivation is key because his joy is our strength to live the lives that he wants us to live.

2 http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Biographies/1531_George_Muellers_Strategy_for_Showing_God/

3 A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Mueller, Written by Himself (Muskegon, Mich.: Dust and Ashes Publications, 2003), pp. 730-732

Closing

Psalm 40:16—But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!"

It is my prayer that the Glory of God will be your greatest affection and treasure because I know that it will produce in you the most satisfying and enduring joy of all, one that must give praise to the Creator.