

Songs and Laughter
in the Battle

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

During wartime, some unusual songs are written, and many of them become very popular. Soldiers tell stories about how certain songs (like “K-K-K-KATY”) got them through long days and nights when they were hunkered down in foxholes, with bullets flying around their heads.

One tune that I remember was sung by Jimmy Durante during World War II:

*“You gotta ac-cent-u-ate the positive,
Eliminate the negative,
Latch on to the affirmative,
And don’t mess with Mister In-between.”*

It was a catchy tune with a great message of how to think happy thoughts all the time.

Another thing that has been very important in wartime is humor. Comedian Bob Hope organized shows near the scenes of the battles, just to provide some comic relief for soldiers.

Really, it's all right to laugh. Try it sometime! It will not make lines on your face. Old age will, but laughing will not. Laugh a little bit now; you may not be alive tomorrow. Somebody said he could laugh because he can pay his bills, and somebody else said he could laugh because he is alive and still owes them! But it is one thing to laugh, and another thing to have joy beyond the laughter.

This booklet was written to reveal to us just how full our joy can be in Christ. The Holy Spirit lives within every born-again believer. He was sent into each heart because of a decision of faith. Jesus Christ will never leave us, and He will not forsake us. In times of trouble, even in great sorrow, He instructs us to speak to ourselves in "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:19). In these pages, I believe you will see that living this way will bring rejoicing and triumph, no matter how desperate the situation seems.

Chapter One

THE SOURCE OF OUR JOY

“When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.

“Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with

singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them.

“The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.

“Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south.

“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.

“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:1-6).

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

“By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope

of the glory of God.

“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

“And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us” (Romans 5:1-5).

I love this passage. James 1:2 says, “Count it all joy when you enter into divers temptations.” Here, the verb “count” in the Greek means to be led and guided into all joy when you enter into temptations. Good health did not bring joy to George, a man in our church who battled leukemia for several years and received over one hundred blood transfusions in the process. He thanked God for the medical effort to make him well. But it was Jesus Christ and Him alone who brought joy to George.

I thank God when the sun shines, but the sun shining is not the cause of my joy. Neither is the rain a cause of my losing it. You see, no matter what the situation, this is what the Word of God teaches us: The joy of the Lord is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is

given to us.

Enjoy Your Labors

“Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands” (Isaiah 65:22*b*).

“...Every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God” (Ecclesiastes 3:13).

Someone said to me, “All I do is work.” Well, the Bible says, “Enjoy it!” You are working much of the time you are awake, so you might as well enjoy working. Your work does not bring joy to you, and it is not going to take it away. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, and peace... (Galatians 5:22). Therefore, as the Holy Spirit sheds abroad the love of God in your heart, He also gives you joy: the joy of God—not of your work.

“At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh: neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth” (Job 5:22).

Don't take life so seriously. Do you know that right now, heaven has the date of when you are going to die? It could be interesting to find it out, but that would not bring you joy.

It is a beautiful thing when we understand the privilege that we have in knowing directly from the Word of God that God gives His peo-

ple joy. Because of salvation and our eternal security, because of the Finished Work and the impartation of Jesus Christ, we understand the Father's plan, we see the Son's execution of that plan, and we experience the Holy Spirit revealing to us what the Son knows as He works the details of that plan into our lives (John 16:13-14).

Chapter Two
SONGS SET US FREE

One of our missionaries was on his way home. It was a long trip and he just started whistling on the airplane. He whistled, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and "There Is Power in the Blood." An older couple, both quite ill at the time, started weeping. The husband said to our missionary, "We have to return home from the mission field ourselves because of cancer, and we were so happy that you were whistling 'What A Friend We Have In Jesus.'" Then, the man started to weep again, but his face revealed the presence of joy in the midst of his sorrow.

It is so great that God gives us songs in the battle. In Acts 16:19-33, Paul and Silas were beaten and locked up in a prison, but at midnight they prayed and they sang. Paul did not have the best voice in the world. The Greek texts indicate that he probably had a raspy, squeaky voice. There he was at midnight, singing with

that squeaky voice. They were locked in stocks, facing judgment that would come the next day, and both Paul and Silas were praying and singing. The guards heard them, the other prisoners heard them, and suddenly, the earth began to quake. God opened the doors of the prison and loosened their bands.

The prison guard was ready to kill himself, but Paul and Silas didn't flee, nor did any of the other prisoners. As a result, the guard and his whole family were saved and baptized.

In spite of a terrible situation, Paul and Silas were just counting it all joy. They were rejoicing in tribulation. Why? Because this is how a Christian derives his strength.

I thank God for good health, but good health is not the cause of joy. Amy Carmichael, a missionary to India at the turn of the century, suffered an accident that left her bedridden for the rest of her life. For a time, she battled her condition, questioning God and not understanding why. But when she did understand why, she let God put a song in her heart. At the foot of her bed were the words "Every day is sweeter than the day before." She was bedridden, but she came to understand that the joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). She continued to

serve God in India for many years, until she died. Today, we have volumes of poems and encouraging words that she wrote in that time because she let God give her songs in her battle.

A Time for a Song

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

“We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

“For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

“How shall we sing the LORD’S song in a strange land?” (Psalm 137:1-4).

The Israelites put their harps on the willow trees, and the Babylonians said to them, “We want you to sing.” But they said, “How can we sing when we’re in a strange land? We can’t sing here in Babylon. We can’t play our harps. We’re blue. We’re depressed.”

And the Israelites would not sing.

But the Word of God says, in Psalm 126, that when their captivity was turned, Israel became “like them that dream. Then our mouth was filled

with laughter, and our tongue with singing,” and even the heathen saw it and said, “The Lord hath done great things for them.”

The people of Israel said, “The LORD has turned our captivity, and because of that we are glad.” But for us, we can sing in the midst of captivity. Jesus Christ delivers the soul, delivers the mind, and delivers the emotions. *That* will make a person extremely happy in any God-given situation.

Chapter Three

LAUGHTER IS GOOD MEDICINE

“Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

We were on the radio back in 1987, when a woman called from New Orleans and said she had a gun to her head. I still have the letter from that woman, whom we have never met. She was extremely depressed. Everything was going wrong for her, and she was ready to end her life.

It just so happened that on that day we had a “joy” anointing. I mean, you could not say a thing that day that didn’t make us laugh. Everything was so funny to us.

I forget the details of what was said back then, but we were just joking and laughing and saying how good life is, and how good God is,

and how good everything is, and how fun it is to be alive. We spoke of how the Blood delivers us from all sin, and how the power of God cleanses and takes over our life, and how God's strength is made perfect in our weakness, and that Jesus Christ is alive today. We laughed and joked and laughed and joked again.

This woman got on the air and said, "If anyone can have that much fun, then I guess life is worth living." She accepted Jesus Christ as her Savior, and today she is still listening to our program.

Do you know what delivered her? God used songs and laughter in a time of trouble.

Did somebody take your security away so that you are not happy anymore? Your joy was in your circumstances that made you feel secure. Did something go wrong in your life and take away your joy? Is that what happened? I believe Jesus said, in John 15:11, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." That is exactly what He said. He gave us His joy, so that our joy may be full.

Don't walk around feeling sad. Let God give you a song. Laugh a little. Recognize that the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Imagine a person who gets up at five o'clock in the morning to study for his Bible class. Then he goes out, and it's raining and it's cold. He goes to work. He has a mean, ugly boss. He turns on the radio and somebody on the news says the government is corrupt. A new study says there will be a famine within the next decade. Another group forecasts more trouble to come within the next year.

This guy cannot help but think, "My God, what's going on here? Everything about life is negative." Then he goes to the doctor and finds out he needs a test for cancer. He can't pay his bills properly. In fact, he has all kinds of reasons to cry.

He is all beaten up in his mind and emotions, but then this man comes to a Wednesday night church service and hears a sermon about "Everything's All Right in My Father's House." Now that's a great song! And the Word of God revives his soul and renews his strength in the midst of the battle.

God says that *He* is the source of our life. He has an eternal purpose for us. The Holy Spirit guides us and leads us. The Word of God is the mind of Christ. His redemption is real. The Holy Spirit's power over sin is absolutely wonderful.

Whoever you are, wherever you are, you can have the joy of the Lord with songs and laughter. It is a beautiful thing when God's people begin to see that the greatest thing in all the world is to be saved and filled with the Holy Spirit and simply to love God.

Decide to Live in Joy

George, the man with leukemia, said, "Hey, I made a decision. I am not going to die, just not going to die. I'm gonna live." In his soul was the joy of the Lord. And though he eventually died, he never showed any brooding or self-pity. He always had a tremendous spirit of life and blessed anyone who came around him.

I don't know what your situation is, but everything is going to be all right.

Famine and tribulation cannot take away what the Holy Spirit gives me. And the Holy Spirit gives you that joy of the Lord. It is God's joy. And the purpose of that joy is to fill up your joy. Supernatural joy fills up human joy.

Human joy comes from circumstances. It comes from good things that happen. But God's joy comes from the source of Jesus Christ and the Finished Work and the fact that you are a saint, a child of God on your way to heaven.

Your sins are forgiven. You have been redeemed. God is with you. He will never leave you, but He will bless you. You cannot run away from His blessing. Some of you would have much happier lives if you were joyful.

Glory in Tribulation

The unique thing is that we are justified by faith. We have peace with God. We have access to Him by faith through the grace wherein we stand. The Bible says, in Romans 5:3, that we glory in tribulation. That word "glory" speaks of rejoicing in tribulation, and this is what I believe. I will do everything I can do to be responsible. I will do everything I can do to be accountable. But I am not going to be sad about life.

We sometimes get misunderstood at funerals. Everyone is sad because they are in mourning, then I get up and speak on resurrection. I try to bring in a measure of joy to some funerals. (I'll do it for your funeral if you'll tell me in advance when you're going to die and what you want me to do!) But seriously, the important thing at weddings and funerals is that first I want to honor God and His promises to you, and then to honor you.

One thing is for certain. There are things we

cannot change, so why worry about things we cannot change? Why get depressed about things we cannot change? There are plenty of things we can change and we should change them. But why worry about the things we cannot change? Why not understand that we derive strength from the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit?

Chapter Four

HUMOR AND HALLELUJAHS

In Genesis 18, God visited Abraham and Sarah. She had wrinkles, and she was so old. Abraham was impotent. Then God said to her, "Sarah, you're going to become pregnant," and Sarah laughed up a storm. She looked at those old wobbly hands and she laughed up a storm. She had looked at those wrinkles so many times, wondering what it would be like to be young again. She laughed, and laughed, and laughed as God visited her and said, "You are going to have a child."

Can you picture her in a hospital with twenty-five-year-olds? They say to her, "What are you in for?" And she says, "I'm pregnant."

"Ah, sure you are!" Of course, no one believes her.

But I've always pictured Abraham waiting out in the hallway. He is one hundred years old, and the doctor comes out and says, "It's a boy."

And Abraham remembers the promise of God, and says, "And his name shall be called Isaac."

"Isaac" means "laughter." How about that? Whenever Abraham and Sarah looked at Isaac, the promised child, they rejoiced. The Messiah would eventually be born through his seed. God allowed a wonderful thing to happen through the supernatural intervention of grace. And every time they looked at him, they remembered that his name meant "laughter."

Joy Brings Victories

Heavyweight boxer Evander Holyfield was in the midst of a difficult fight. Now, I know some say that preachers are not supposed to watch fights, but here is one who did and liked it. About the eighth round, it looked as though the other guy had won. But Holyfield came back and had a couple of decent rounds, and the last round was about even. In the end, Holyfield won.

But the difference about that fight was this: If you could have heard the managers in Holyfield's corner, they were saying to him, "We are going to church and praise God tomorrow. Now get this thing over." They encouraged him in the

midst of the battle.

The joy of the Lord brings strength into your bones. A merry heart brings a cheerful countenance, and it does good like medicine (Proverbs 15:13, Proverbs 17:22). But an old, dried-up spirit withers the bones.

I once read the story of a man who couldn't walk. He was all crippled up with pain, and then he started laughing. He looked for reasons to laugh and to be happy every day. Doctors concluded that he was healed through no other treatment than laughter, and he kept getting better. He couldn't walk. His hands were filled with arthritis, the crystallization of waste in his joints. But he found ways to laugh out loud on purpose, and he became well.

There was a Red Sox pitcher who would watch The Three Stooges movies, and then he would go out and pitch a tremendous game. The laughter relaxed him so he could pitch without stress. And if Bob Stanley didn't watch the Three Stooges, he'd get knocked out of the box. I really never appreciated the humor of the Three Stooges. But they helped him!

The Three Stooges can't bring joy in my life. They can make me laugh sometimes. But when it's over, they cannot bring joy into my life. Only

the Holy Spirit can bring joy into my life.

Stop thinking about your problems. Stop thinking about your life and your circumstances and your adversity! Stop thinking about the way things are going, and come to God and receive the filling of the Spirit continually. Use recovery if you fail, get up and go on, and begin to really enjoy the Lord.

Enjoy the Lord! He has promised never to leave you or forsake you. Let God give you songs and laughter in the midst of your battles.

CONCLUSION

When you read the promises of God and receive the filling of the Holy Spirit, you enter into a new kind of derived strength, a new kind of power. It is good for your bones, and it will help you just as medicine helps you. The Word of God makes it crystal clear that this joy not only gives Christians a relaxed mind and relaxed emotions, but that it is also a stronghold against demons.

With a song in your heart, tribulation can come and you can glory in it. Problems come and you rejoice in them. You face difficulties and you rejoice in them.

To me, when Satan tries to come in, it is a lot of fun to go for a ride in the car with my wife. She has a great sense of humor, and we just joke around until both of us are laughing. We see people and things that just make us laugh, and we purpose to relax and be happy.

This world needs to see Christians in a vic-

torious life conquering their problems, overcoming temptation. This world needs to see Christians smile and be happy. As we face trials and troubles of every sort, we ought to be able to relax with God's people and be happy in Christ, through the love and joy of the Holy Spirit shed abroad in our hearts.