

10 Choose Joy: What to Do When You're Putting on Armor Begrudgingly

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I often write about something one week and then get challenged on it the next. This week was no exception.

Last week I wrote about living above the circumstances, using Peter's experience of walking on water and then being overcome by the storm around him. I wrote about keeping your eyes on Jesus even when the waves are crashing.

This week, I failed at my own advice.

The circumstances around us felt like waves crashing from every direction. And somewhere in the chaos, I took my eyes off Jesus and focused on what was going on around me. It robbed me of my joy.

And isn't that exactly what the enemy wants? Those fiery arrows spoken about in Ephesians 6 - they're designed to do exactly that. To overwhelm. To distract. To steal joy.

The Armor I Put On Begrudgingly

Most every morning for well over a decade, I get up and pray Ephesians 6:10-18. The full armor of God. It started years ago when my wife and I were reading through Ephesians in our nightly Bible study time before bed. But instead of moving on to the next passage the following night, the Holy Spirit wouldn't let it go.

So we read it again. Then the next night. And the next.

He wouldn't release us from those verses until we had both memorized them from reading them so frequently - maybe a couple weeks' time. Since then, I've made it part of my morning prayer.

Belt of truth. Breastplate of righteousness. Feet fitted with the gospel of peace. Shield of faith. Helmet of salvation. Sword of the Spirit.

But here's what the Lord revealed to me this week: **I can still grumble and complain while putting on the armor.**

Can you relate?

Do you put on the full armor of God but do it begrudgingly? Maybe you're exhausted - kids, work, out of work, family, marital stress, depression, anxiety, financial pressure and so forth. All these things serve to rob us of our joy.

And so we go through the motions. We pray the prayers. We put on the armor. But our hearts aren't in it.

We're widening the moat - creating distance between us and God even while we're talking to Him. We're doing the spiritual disciplines, but we're doing them with gritted teeth and resentment that we have to do them at all.

The Verses I Struggle With

There's a Bible verse I struggle with. Actually, a few of them. And yes, I struggle with some verses of Scripture, and that's okay.

Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: *"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

And in Philippians 4:4: *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"*

And I've often thought: "Really, Paul? All things? Even the terminal diagnosis? Even a spouse leaving? Even a sudden accident that takes the life of someone close? Even financial collapse? Even depression that won't lift?"

Notice that Paul doesn't qualify it with "rejoice as long as everything is going well for you" or "rejoice unless some of these bad things happen."

No. He simply implores us to rejoice in any given situation. **Rejoice always. In all circumstances.**

James goes even further. James 1:2-3 says: *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance."*

Consider it pure joy... whenever you face trials. Really?

Not after the trial is over. Not when you've learned the lesson. **Whenever you face trials.**

James isn't telling us to pretend the trial isn't painful. He's telling us to choose joy in the middle of it because we know - we KNOW - that something is being produced through it. Perseverance. Character. Endurance. Strength we didn't have before.

The problem is, for most of us, we've never learned how to actually do this. This runs counter to what our culture teaches us, even within many churches. I understand the concept. But I have great difficulty applying it when the storms of life come crashing around me.

When the Waves Overwhelm

This week I was overwhelmed. Actually, this past year, but especially this week.

Sure, I was putting on the full armor. Or maybe only part of the armor - and guess what? Only part of the armor still leaves you vulnerable. Keep that in mind.

I was putting on the armor but I was doing it begrudgingly. Going through the motions. Praying the words without meaning them. Asking God for help while resenting that I needed help in the first place.

I was asking the Lord to help me out of the pit I found myself in. Another hidden room in my castle - the moat widening with every resentful prayer, every grumbled complaint, every "why is this happening again?"

And then He spoke.

Not while I was quiet in prayer somewhere. Not at church. Not in a place of solitude and stillness.

It was while I was shopping at a large warehouse store, pushing a cart through the aisles, probably looking like I'd walked into a room and forgot what I came there for (which happens way too often, by the way).

And He simply said: **"Why don't you choose joy?"**

I stopped. Stared into that middle space. And it hit me like a ton of bricks.

Could it really be that easy?

It's Not Easy - But It's a Choice

Let me assure you right now: there is nothing "easy" about choosing joy, especially when the storms of life are crashing around you.

But... it is a choice.

It's like a kid who's finally decided they're tired of being bullied. They've been shoved down, pushed around, beaten up over and over again. And one day, they've just had enough.

With all their strength, they pick themselves up off the ground and face their fears head-on because they've made a conscious decision: **"I will not be afraid of you anymore."**

Yes, the bully might be bigger. Stronger. Meaner. The punches still hurt. The shoves still knock you down.

But something shifts when you decide: **I'm done running. I'm done cowering. I'm done letting fear control me.**

You get back up. Again. And again. And again.

The bully might knock you down five times. Ten times. A hundred times. But every single time you stand back up, you've won a victory. Not because the bully stopped hitting you. But because you refused to stay down.

You clench your teeth. You face the pain. You absorb the blow. And you stand back up and say: **"No more."**

And here's the secret to standing back up: Nehemiah 8:10 says *"The joy of the Lord is your strength."*

Not your own strength. Not your own willpower. Not your ability to positive-think your way through.

His joy. His strength.

When you choose joy in the middle of the storm, you're not choosing a feeling. You're choosing to tap into the strength of the One who's already overcome the world. You're saying: "This bully - this circumstance, this fear, this depression, this storm - doesn't get to win. Because the joy of the Lord is my strength."

And that strength is what gets you back up. Again. And again. And again.

That's what choosing joy feels like in the middle of a storm.

It's not pretending the storm isn't real. It's not denying the pain. It's not false positivity that says "everything's fine!" when it's clearly not.

It's standing in the middle of the chaos, feeling every wave crash over you, and saying:
"This will not defeat me. This will not steal my joy. I choose Jesus. I choose hope... I choose joy."

This Day, This Moment - I Choose Joy

You won't always feel it. Let me be clear about that.

There will be days when joy feels impossible. When the diagnosis is too devastating. When the loss is too fresh. When the depression is too heavy. When the circumstances are too overwhelming.

But you make the conscious effort to choose it anyway. And you keep choosing it. And you keep crying out to Jesus - Just like Peter did when the waves overwhelmed him: **"Save me, Lord."**

And it may not come swiftly. The rescue might take longer than you want. The storm might rage for days, weeks, months, years.

But if you keep facing the storms of life - if you keep picking yourself back up after that bully shoves you down - if you keep looking to Jesus for your strength and salvation (sometimes from the circumstance, but always for eternity) - then I promise you something will change.

It might be small at first. Maybe even imperceptible. But every time you choose joy, you have a victory.

You may lose some battles. But Jesus has already won the war. You do realize that, don't you?

Jesus told His disciples in John 16:33: *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

Notice He didn't say "you might have trouble" or "if things go wrong, you could face trouble." He said **you will** have trouble. It's guaranteed.

But so is His victory. **I have overcome the world.**

Past tense. Finished. Done.

The war is already won. We're just enduring the battles until the final trumpet sounds.

The Key to Rejoicing Always

I believe this was part of the key to Paul being able to rejoice in all things. Not because his circumstances were easy - he was beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned, persecuted.

Because he had learned to choose joy regardless of his circumstances.

He didn't wait to feel joyful. He chose it. Actively. Consciously. Daily.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4)

He said it twice because he knew we'd need the reminder. He knew joy doesn't come naturally in the storm. He knew we'd have to choose it over and over and over again.

Whatever Fight You're Facing

So I want to encourage you today.

Whatever fight you're facing - choose Jesus and choose joy.

Whatever illness has affected you - choose Jesus and choose joy.

Whatever condition impairs you - choose Jesus and choose joy.

Whatever storms rage around you - choose Jesus and choose joy.

Not because it's easy. Not because you feel like it. Not because the circumstances have changed.

But because the bully of despair, depression, and defeat doesn't get to win.

You get back up. You face the storm. You cry out "Lord, save me!" And then... you choose joy.

This day. This moment. Right now.

I choose joy.

Will you join me? And will you help remind me when I forget, and I'll do the same for you.

If you're struggling:

- Christian Faith-Based Resources: <https://mentalhealthhotline.org/christian-faith-resources/> or call 1-866-903-3787 (24/7)
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988 (call or text)

You matter. Your life matters. Please choose to stay. Choose joy.

William James Meyer is the author of "Do You Live in a Castle? Breaking Free from the Walls That Hold You Hostage." He writes from a Christian perspective as someone who's learning to choose joy in the middle of the storm - not because he's figured it all out, but because he's tired of the bully winning.

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