



A powerful strategy to invite God's presence

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FORWARD

We began this book after these difficult times, which seem remarkably like the "birth-pains" that Jesus talks about. (Matthew 24:8) This is just as much to preach to ourselves as to other readers. 'Rejoice' is a descriptive word, not just conveying happiness, but 'voiced' happiness, and usually followed by the actions like we have on the cover. Yet happiness is a word we use when things are happening well, but Biblical joy is for all occasions, even in the worst situations.

The Wisdom books, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, are pragmatic about this. "Rejoice in the wife of thy youth...captivated by her love" (Proverbs 5:18)

Rejoice when your children are wise. (Proverbs 23:15&25)

Rejoice in beautiful things. (Proverbs 27:9)

Rejoice in the success of others (Proverbs 29:2), but not their failures. (Proverbs 24:17)

Rejoice when we can do good to others, especially when we have the wherewithal. (Ecclesiastes 3:12 & 5:19)

Rejoice just to be alive. (Ecclesiastes 11:8)

Rejoicing then is a strategy from God for all people – and from His heart from the beginning of His revelation.

Because the Old Testament tells us about God's ways and His intentions for His creation, from His ideals in the Garden of Eden and how His man and woman destroyed their most beautiful relationship with Him, there are valuable strategies written right through the His-story (the Bible) to help mankind down through the years to be restored into that ideal. This is just one of them, and we have chosen

Bible verses to fit with seven topics in which we can choose to agree with God's recommendation to rejoice, even in spite of circumstances.

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SECTION 1. The Old Testament promises.

1. Spiritual comfort.

"Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him". (Psalm 126:5&6)

"I remember...how I used to go with the multitude...to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving". (Psalm 42:4) "I will go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise You...O God, my God". (Psalm 43:4)

David wrote these words because of his experiences, attacks from enemies and his own doubts and mistakes.

2. Spiritual strength.

"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will rejoice in God my Saviour. The Sovereign Lord is my strength". (Habakkuk 3:18&19)

"The joy of the Lord is your strength. Celebrate with great joy."

(Nehemiah 8:10 &12)

"In the day of trouble He will keep me safe...He will hide me in the shelter of His tabernacle...there I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord". (Psalm 27:5&6)

"Sing to Him, sing praise to Him; tell of all His wonderful acts. Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always" (Psalm 105:2-4)

Each of these writers had found the truth of rejoicing to lift our hearts to God to overcome our problems.

3. Spiritual power.

"The Lord had given them cause to rejoice over their enemies". (2

Chronicles 20:27)

"Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God ...the joy of the whole earth. He has shown Himself to be her fortress."

(Psalm 48:1-3)

Samson's life is an interesting one. He was conceived by God's grace and born for a purpose. He was given supernatural strength, which was "tied" to his obedience to the Nazirite vow, where he would not cut his hair. (Judges 13) The Spirit would come upon him when he needed to use that strength against God's enemies. But he was enticed to break that vow. He realised eventually and, as he surrendered to God, and asked Him to give him that strength once more, he gave his life so that God could deliver His people from their enemies. (Judges 16&17)

4. Opens the way for revelation.

"You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence". (Psalm 16:11)

It was Joseph's attitude, and his trust in God, while in prison in Egypt that brought him into Pharaoh's presence, and by God's grace, into a position of leadership, through the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams.

(Genesis 41)

When Solomon first became king he "showed his love for the Lord" (1 Kings 3:3-5) and God came to him in a dream, and said, "Ask for whatever you want Me to give you". Solomon asked for wisdom and God granted this request so that Solomon became the wisest man, able to discern with "wisdom from God to administer justice". (1 Kings 3:28)

5. God's favour for blessings and answered prayer.

"The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing". (Zephaniah 3:17)

Volunteers serve David, desirous of his promotion to be king, which is God's will, and this unity brings favour and generous gift giving, "and there was joy in Israel". (1 Chronicles 12:40)

There is a wonderful story (Ezra 6) where a Persian king (Darius) who had been impacted by Daniel's trust in his God (Daniel 6:25-27) to proclaim, "May you prosper greatly! I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For He is the living God and He endures for ever; His Kingdom will not be destroyed, His dominance will never end. He rescues, and He saves; He performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He

has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions". This same Darius was moved to supply every need to rebuild the temple, to be called the House of God in Jerusalem. The foundations were laid and with praise and thanksgiving they sang and shouted for joy. (Ezra 3:13) Under the preaching of Haggai, who challenged them (Haggai's prophecy), the temple was completed and the people of Israel celebrated the dedication with joy. (Ezra 6:14-16&22)

Another story concerns the building of the walls of Jerusalem. (Nehemiah) It was Nehemiah's vision and he gained the favour of the king of Persia and he set out to obey his heart's stirrings. There were many problems with many enemies, stirred up by just three who had been against God's people for a long time. But with faith and persistence the walls were completed. The people were able to dedicate their work with great ceremony "and on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away". (Nehemiah 12:43)

In Job's story, because of what he suffered at Satan's hand (Job 1:12 &2:6) he found it too hard to rejoice and three of his friends made it harder because of bad advice, or even good advice given without love. But Elihu, the fourth friend, saw his God in a different way. Job did not need human advice, but needed to hear God's point of view, rather than try to justify himself. "God does speak... if there is an angel, a messenger on His side as a mediator, an interpreter, one out of a thousand, to tell a man what is right for him (how to be upright and in right standing with God) , to be gracious to him and say, 'Spare him from

going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him' – then his flesh is renewed like a child's, it is restored as in the days of his youth. He prays to God and finds favour with Him, he sees God's face and shouts for joy; he is restored by God to his righteous state". (Job 33:23-26)

David echoes this story. (Psalm 30:2&5) "O Lord my God, I called to You for help and You healed me... His anger lasts for a moment but His favour lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning". After being reminded of grievous sin he asks, "Cleanse me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me...Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones You have crushed rejoice. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me". (Psalm 51:7,8&12)

"May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for You rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth". (Psalm 67:4) "God remembered His holy promise given to His servant, Abraham. (Genesis 12:2&3) He brought out His people with rejoicing, His chosen ones with shouts of joy". (Psalm 105:42&43)

Although the name of God is not mentioned, it is clearly implied in the story of Esther. God's principles of respect and obedience brought about justice and God's favour. The resulting victory then brought "happiness and joy, gladness and honour". This victory (which God had given the Jews) was to be celebrated as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor". (Esther 8:16 &9:22)

This story is echoed in one of the Psalms (120-134) that Jewish people use when they go to worship. "When the Lord restored the fortunes of

Zion we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy...The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy". (Psalm 126:1-3)

6. To be a blessing to others with joyful countenance, acts of generosity and kindness.

"Those who look to Him are radiant". (Psalm 34:5) "One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek...to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, and to seek Him in His temple...sacrifice with shouts of joy". (Psalm 27:4-6)

"The Lord gave David victory wherever he went". (2 Samuel 8:6&14) This joy and the memory of past things prompted David to enquire about anyone left in the family of his enemy to whom he could show kindness. (2 Samuel 9:1-13)

Joseph had experienced God's blessing throughout his trials after his brothers had wronged him. But when they met again he told them not to be afraid. "You intended to harm me but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children". (Genesis 50:20&21)

7. To be a blessing to God.

As acknowledgement of His goodness and faithfulness, the women of Israel came out with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes, to meet David, who had come from a successful mission, "because the Lord was with him". (1 Samuel 18:6&14)

As the Ark of the Lord was brought to the place David had prepared for it there was great rejoicing. The Levites had not understood the commands of the Lord concerning this sign of God's Presence with

them and it had been placed in Obed-Edom's house, but they now had revelation of the power in God's presence. (1 Chronicles 15:16-25)

David wanted the people to give to the building of the Temple and the people responded. "The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord". This quality leadership had brought joy and rejoicing to "the whole assembly", because they had shown their loyalty to God. (1 Chronicles 29:9-20)

"Let the saints rejoice in this honour and sing for joy on their beds". (Psalm 149:5)

Song of Songs is a picture of the relationship between the lover (Jesus, as the human representative of God by the Holy Spirit) and the beloved (the one who chooses Him as first love). This book is full of love words and rejoicing in each other. "We rejoice and delight in You." (1:4). We have capitalised the word "You" because the love is bound and enhanced by the blessing of the Father.

The prophets – those who speak on behalf of God to those who do not hear Him for themselves – offer us advice. This advice is based on the precepts of God, written so that we can avoid learning the hard way – bitter experiences.

Isaiah warns us against rejecting God's blessings to rejoice and enjoy worldly pleasures (8:6) then he writes of the greatest joy we can have to rejoice over (9:3-7). In that day we will not only rejoice at our salvation, but that the rule of the evil one is at an end. (14:8) This Saviour who comes to redeem us will accomplish such a mighty work that, not only the saved will rejoice, but even the land, even the created world will rejoice. (35:1&2) But again Isaiah warns that those who

are not cleansed from their sins will not receive the blessing. God's people will rejoice in their inheritance with everlasting joy because of the favour they receive through the promised Saviour. (61:7) But this will overflow because God Himself rejoices over those who put their trust in Jesus. (62:5) Isaiah finishes his message with a comparison of those who receive God's favour and those who choose not to, because it is **God who gives us the gift of joy through the Holy Spirit.** (65:13&19) This supernatural joy enables us to flourish. (66:14)

Jeremiah writes about God loving His people so much. He longs to restore His relationship with them so that they will sing and dance for joy. (31:4,6&13) This gives God a reason to rejoice. He loves to do good and see His people prosper in every way. (32:38-42)

Hosea's message is to a people who have been unfaithful and he tells them not to rejoice. Rejoicing in rebellion deserves God's punishment. (9:1) Jesus has removed the curse which rendered us as enemies of God, but if we have not been willing to receive Him we are still under the curse. "If we disown Him (and trust in our own abilities, our own flesh), He will also disown us; if we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for he cannot disown Himself." (2 Timothy 2:12&13)

Habakkuk, when he receives revelation from God in answer to his question about what God will do about injustice, purposes to rejoice, no matter what happens. He understands that "the Lord is in His holy temple". (2:20) He can rejoice because God has everything under His control, even though bad things are happening. (3:18&19)

Zephaniah writes (3:17) that it is God Himself who rejoices over us. He has created us to be in His image and He declares that it is very

good. God sings over us in the same way a mother lulls her baby to sleep, quieting us with His love.

Zechariah (9:9) prophesies the coming Saviour who will be our King. This is such good news that everyone can rejoice greatly. God's compassion is so great that eyes will be opened to see and people will rejoice in the Lord. (10:7)

Malachi finishes his message with what the Day of the Lord will look like. "Those who revere My name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing...and you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall". (4:2)

God loves to bless us because, as the psalmist writes, "our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it will be said among the nations, 'the Lord has done great things for them'." (Psalm 126:2)

We have majored on Old Covenant references to rejoicing – **re-** (concerning) **-joice** (vocal joy). The Old Covenant is God's revelation of how to relate to Him and particularly to carry out, with Him, His rule on earth. But these directions and testimonies are only type and shadow of God's ultimate plan which was stymied by the sin and fall of Adam and Eve. Everything in the Old Testament points to the New Covenant with people on the earth. The reality is fulfilled only in Jesus Christ, and depends on the Holy Spirit working in and through us when we are surrendered to Him.

SECTION 2. Putting God's Word into action.

Therefore if all these examples and testimonies are type and shadow of what Jesus would accomplish, the study of His life and example will demonstrate the power of rejoicing to bring the presence of God.

The story of Jesus' birth brought rejoicing by angels to the shepherds (Luke 2:14) and to wise men who had sought guidance based on seeing a prophesied star. (Numbers 24:17) Then Simeon and Anna rejoiced because they had seen the longed-for Messiah, born as promised to the virgin, Mary. (Luke 2:28&38)

It had already been promised to Zechariah that their miracle son, John, that "many shall rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord." (Luke 1:14) Then John the Baptist rejoiced. First he was in awe when Jesus came to him to be baptised (Matthew 3:14&15) but then he was filled with joy because he recognises Jesus as greater than he. (John 3:29&30) Nevertheless John's message was a solemn call to repent and have their sins washed away by the waters of baptism.

As Jesus came into Jerusalem, the King who comes in the name of the Lord, righteous and having salvation, (Zechariah 9:9) the whole crowd of disciples began to rejoice, to praise God with loud voices for the miracles they had seen." (Luke 19:37) They called out "Hosanna" which means "save now". They were reminded of the last "hallel" (praise) psalm which they sang after the Passover. (Psalm 118:26)

But Jesus, the Son of Man, came to seek and save what was lost. (Luke 19:10) And what was lost? – Humankind's connection with the Heavenly Father. That had been lost when Adam was sent from the presence of God in the Garden of Eden, because the punishment for

sin – going our own way instead of following God's plan for our lives – was death, first spiritual and eventually physical or bodily. So He tells the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. "Rejoice with me for I have found my lost sheep." (Luke 15:6) "Rejoice with me for I have found my lost coin." (Luke 15:9) He goes on, "I tell you there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner that repents" and "there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

There are more words on this matter. A lost son came home repenting for his folly and the Father greeted him, not only with compassion but with honour and great rejoicing. (Luke 15:20-24)

When Jesus sent out seventy (two) they came back full of joy (Luke 10:17) and Jesus asked them, "do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in Heaven." (Luke 10:20)

This subject is so close to Jesus' heart that He can't help but see opportunities for bringing in the lost. "The fields are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper...harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may rejoice together. Thus the saying 'one sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour." (John 4:36-38) This had been prophesied by Amos. (Amos 9:13-15)

Matthew writes the story of the lost sheep too. He adds that the Father in Heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost, and that the truth is that the Shepherd rejoices more about rescuing that one than He does about the ninety nine that did not stray. (Matthew 18:14) This might seem a bit strange but all of us need to

recognise that we are lost until we meet the Good Shepherd and experience His love and compassion and allow our wounds to be healed. This touch from the Shepherd evokes His love in our hearts, and love and joy are closely linked.

This brings us to the topic of **Spiritual comfort**.

We are by our fallen nature selfish and self-centred, which makes it hard to obey Jesus' command to love our neighbour. We therefore actually need an infusion of God's love to activate us to love others. Truly loving God is even harder until we become aware of His unconditional love for us, His lost sheep. As we read the gospel accounts we might be tempted to think that all this was past history but the Bible makes itself plain – the Scriptures are God-breathed – they are alive – and are useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in right living (righteousness), or living according to the way the Maker made us. (2 Timothy 3:16) So Jesus' love and compassion extended to all He met who would receive Him, and He performed signs and wonders and miracles every day. The Bible does not record that everyone who was healed went away openly joyful, but the crowds gathered expectantly on so many occasions. But there are records of those who did respond with thankfulness and joy, and it was this response that gave them true revelation of who Jesus is, and that He is the truth in which we can put our trust. He is God's Word in action. "No one has ever seen God, but God's One and Only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known". (John 1:1&18)

Yet there are testimonies written for us. A crippled man who was brought to Jesus by his friends was healed and "went home praising

God". (Luke 5:25&26) All those who were mourning the death of a young man who lived in Nain were filled with awe and praised God when Jesus raised him from death. (Luke 7:16) A man who was delivered from multiple demons was so excited to be restored that he "went away and told all over the town how much Jesus had done for him". (Luke 8:39) The story of the ten lepers is interesting because only one came back to thank Jesus and praise God. Jesus told him his faith had made him whole. (Luke 17:15&16) Groups of people also were moved to praise God when miracles were done. (eg, Matthew 9:7)

There are of course other reasons to need spiritual comfort. Jesus told His disciples, before He went to the Cross, that they would be filled with sorrow but He would see them again and they would rejoice, and no one would take away their joy. (John 16:22) An angel had comforted the women who went to the tomb with fear and they were filled with great joy, yet they had fear as they went to tell the disciples. (Matthew 28:8) But Jesus appeared to them and they recognised Him. The two who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus were at first blinded by grief at what had happened in Jerusalem, but when they returned to Jerusalem to join the other disciples and Jesus rejoined them there they were filled with joy and amazement. (Luke 24:41) When Jesus took the disciples to Bethany they finally understood God's full purpose and as Jesus rose into the heavens they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. (Luke 24:52) Revelation of God's purposes and their role in this gave them a great reason to rejoice. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

So the disciples waited as ordered by Jesus to receive this promised power, which is the **Spiritual strength** we require to fulfil our calling.

"Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose." (Philippians 2:12&13)

"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do". (Ephesians 2:10)

"We are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death and to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?" (2 Corinthians 2:15&16)

"He has made us competent." (2 Corinthians 3:6) Paul writes that he is glad and rejoices because those he has taught shine like stars in a crooked and perverse generation – not grumbling or complaining but blameless and pure. He asks that his disciples rejoice with him. (Philippians 2:14-18) He described himself as poured out like a drink offering, such was the persecution he endured. But he knew the words of Jesus. "Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for great is your reward in Heaven." (Luke 6:23) Even if our witness brings persecution we should rejoice. (Colossians 1:24)

Paul prays a beautiful prayer for the Colossian believers and for all of us who read it. "I have not stopped asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and JOYFULLY giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the Kingdom of Light. (Colossians 1:9-12)

From spiritual comfort we move to **Spiritual power.**

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God". (2 Corinthians 1:3&4) Having endured and triumphed over a problem we are now equipped with a powerful testimony to help others.

Paul knew the power of being disciplined by the heavenly Father. "I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance." (2 Corinthians 7:9)

The writer to the Hebrews also encourages us. "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood (as our Lord and Saviour did!). And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons (and daughters). My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and corrects everyone He accepts as a son." (Hebrews 12::4-6) (Job 5:17&18)

Our growth as a Christian depends on our God and Father speaking His Word to us so that we can put it into practice, to come to the

fullness of the image of Christ that we have already been given by God when we first received Jesus. (Colossians 2:10) Paul explains what our potential in Christ is, and the Holy Spirit is our 'seal', guaranteeing our inheritance. (Ephesians 1:3-14) But we must "work out with fear and trembling" this salvation. (Philippians 2:12) "We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit." (Romans 5:2-4)

We rejoice greatly in the promises that God has prepared for our future, from the moment we received our new birth, no matter what life's circumstances are. (1 Peter 1:3-9) Peter shares with us his amazing perspective from his own experiences of being daily with Jesus for three years. The grief, the problems we suffer have come so that our faith – of greater worth than gold – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus is revealed. "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy." This confidence enables us to not only know Him but to be able to be His ambassador. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Paul writes to the Thessalonians the instructions for victorious Christian living. "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) He prays, "May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (verse 23) This

confidence of our right standing before our God gives us strength and power and Paul assures us that the One who calls us is faithful and He will do it. "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. They overcame (the accuser of the brethren) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." Therefore – all heaven rejoices with the overcomer. (Revelation 12:10-12) In every letter to the churches there is a reward for the one who overcomes (Revelation 2:7,11,17,26 and 3:5,12 and 21) and praise and rejoicing is continuous in heaven.

Jesus asked us to pray, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." It would seem that rejoicing should be done on earth to fulfil this command, and Jesus demonstrated God's power every day.

How does rejoicing **open the way for revelation?**

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing... adopted us as His sons (and daughters) through Jesus Christ...to the praise of His glorious grace...lavished upon us." (Ephesians 1:3-8) "For this reason...I have not stopped giving thanks...I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation." (Ephesians 1:15-17) All of this comes in a context of praise and adoration and appreciation of God's generosity. "Praise of His glory" is stated three times. (Ephesians 1:6, 12 and 14) Everything that God has blessed us with requires revelation from God's heart so that we truly understand His wisdom and His ways; so that we know the

hope to which He has called us – our inheritance – and to know the power for us who believe. We need revelation to understand our standing, our position – seated with Christ in heavenly realms – and we need revelation to inspire our imagination as to the possibilities of His power at work within us. (Ephesians 3:20) Knowledge of God is always by revelation from His heart by the Holy Spirit.

We can more easily rejoice in these glorious promises but Peter warns us to rejoice when we are suffering for being a Christian – rejoicing that we are participating in the suffering of Christ, so that we may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed. (1 Peter 4:12-13) The Spirit of glory and of God rests on us. Peter writes that judgment begins with the family of God. "We endure hardship as discipline; God is treating us as sons (and daughters). God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12: 7-11) We realise that we are becoming more like Christ, to demonstrate His glory and His nature.

On the day of Pentecost Peter quoted David's revelation. "I saw the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body will also live in hope...You have made known to me the paths of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence." (Acts 2:25-28)

Paul had to write to discipline the Corinthian church because he was distressed at the tolerated sin when he should be able to rejoice in their faith. (2 Corinthians 2:3) When they repented he was able to truly

rejoice because they had amended their lives. "I rejoice that I have complete confidence in you" (2 Corinthians 7:16)

But he writes to the Philippians words of great encouragement. "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice! (Philippians 4:4)

The result is that the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. There is supernatural revelation from rejoicing in all circumstances. This readiness of God to reveal His heart and His guidance and even His secrets to His children who have acceded to be born again in accordance with Jesus' command and desire to submit to His will also gives us a consciousness of God's favour.

What does Spiritual Favour look like?

Jesus was always successful when He prayed for people. The Heavenly Father fulfilled through Jesus everything that Jesus spoke into being, because Jesus only did the will of His Father. As Man, Jesus demonstrated what God had said in the beginning. "Let us make man in our image". (Genesis 1: 26) God created the world by speaking and He intended that His man should do this to exercise the rule over all He had created by this same power. This is why re-joicing – speaking with joy – is so powerful. When man rebelled against God in the Garden and lost his connection to this power Jesus won this favour by paying the price for that rebellion. "We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received reconciliation. (Romans 5:11) If we have received this sacrificial gift of God we are again connected to the source of power and should expect to hear from Heavenly Father what His will is, so that we can be

equally successful when we pray. Doing God's will in every situation we meet brings Him glory and honour, in which we share. It therefore does not matter whether our speaking is "the smell of death or the fragrance of life" (2 Corinthians 2:15&16) which results in our acceptance or rejection by the one we pray for, we can rejoice in God's favour. "Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in Heaven" (Luke 6:22&23)

We need God's favour for blessings and answered prayer.

The wise men who visited knew that the star that had guided them had not only proved their astronomy studies correct, but it was favour from God. They also probably had an inner knowledge that their gifts were important, both prophetically and practically, so "They rejoiced with great joy". (Matthew 2:10) It is also certain that the crippled beggar at the Beautiful Gate recognised the miraculous healing was God's favour and he responded with physical and verbal rejoicing. (Acts 3:8) Not only did this healing change this man's life but it was a powerful witness to others who had passed him by many times without the faith to remedy his situation. When Philip proclaimed Christ in Samaria and the people saw the miracles, deliverances and healings that Philip did in Samaria "there was great joy in the city". (Acts 8:8) God's favour for blessings was being poured out because His disciples were believing and doing the work Jesus asked them to do. (John 14:12&13) The Scripture records that when the disciples who had been sent before He went to the Cross returned with joy, Jesus Himself was full of joy. (Luke 10:17&21) The

church in Jerusalem also was filled with joy when they heard testimony of Paul and Barnabas of the favour and blessings from God on their travels. (Acts 15:3)

Yet joy also has power during times of trouble through prayer. Paul and Silas were in prison, rejoicing (Acts 16:25) and they were supernaturally rescued, which ultimately brought salvation to the jailer's family. Paul testified, "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose". (Romans 8:28)

This story fulfils God's best plan – **To be a blessing to others.** From the beginning God planned that His family are to be fruitful and increase. (Genesis 1:28) We are blessed to be a blessing so that others will be drawn into God's family. Jesus seemingly made a strange statement when He said, "blessed are you when people insult you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me." (Matthew 5:11) Our character is being tested. "We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit." (Romans 5:2-5) This abundance of His love becomes our power and witness to "comfort others with the comfort we have received from God." (2 Corinthians 1:4) Jesus proclaimed that we are blessed when people reject us (Luke 10:16), but He also said that when people receive us they have received Jesus, because we represent Him, and they also receive the Heavenly Father. (Matthew 10:40) "Anyone who receives a righteous man

because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward."

(Matthew 10:41) This interaction causes great rejoicing, both in heaven and in the fellowship of the saints. When the Apostle Paul was explaining about Christ's Body functioning together he encourages us to think and act corporately. "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured every part (all the members) rejoices with it."

(1 Corinthians 12:26) As we bless each other our 'light' shines brighter. Jesus only asked of us two things – Love God and love each other. "By this all men will know you are My disciples". (John 13:35). And this includes loving our enemies. (Luke 6:27)

Throughout church history there have been those whose witness truly shines the Light of Christ which enabled the church to be the blessing that God always intended, but they are also the ones who have been through the fires of persecution. Those who have undergone persecution and other trials should be welcomed with great joy, and honoured for being overcomers. (Philippians 2:28) The people of the world expect that Godly people are 'good' and do good deeds. They watch all the time. The Apostle Paul was always concerned that his converts, those that he had laboured for in the Lord, would continue in faith in spite of persecution. He prayed for and encouraged them to stay true. "You are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you." (1 Thessalonians 3:8&9) Our support of each other is essential to be a blessing and to continue to "spur one another on towards love and good deeds". (Hebrews 10:24)

To be a blessing to God. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1) When our gratitude to Jesus for what He has done for us is demonstrated by our fulfilling his commands this is a blessing to God. We like to meditate on Apostle Paul's words. (Ephesians 1:3-14) He chose us...to be holy and blameless (the Divine exchange – our sin for His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21))...adopted as sons and daughters...for His pleasure...redemption (bought back from the power of the devil) through the blood of Jesus... forgiveness of all our sins...His grace (unmerited favour) lavished upon us...sealed in Him by the Holy Spirit. This is what He offers and as we receive He is blessed. What an extraordinary thing. He is blessed (happy) when we accept His generosity. This shows us the heart of God, whom Jesus wants us to call Heavenly Father. He has the family He prepared for from the beginning. The Bible expresses God's pain when John writes, "He came to His own but His own did not receive Him". (John 1:11)

But the writer goes on – "to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of the will of human decision or a husband's will, but of God". (vv12&13)

Paul writes, "Christ is preached...I rejoice." (Philippians 1:18) Every time the Word goes out and people hear and respond, God's family are gathered in to the Kingdom. "How can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Romans 10:14) This also blesses God that as His Word is sent He may achieve His purposes. (Isaiah 55:11) He asks us to rejoice with the fact that Christ is being proclaimed. (Philippians 2:17&18)

John writes of the expected behaviour of God's family. "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:18) Paul wrote to Philemon (v7) "Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you...have refreshed the hearts of the saints". Jesus said, "the King will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me". (Matthew 25:40) It is a blessing to God when we serve one another.

God has intended Heaven for all who will come. The 24 elders sang a new song to the Lamb – "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve God, and they will reign on earth." (Revelation 5:9&10) So Paul reminds us, "accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God". (Romans 14:7) God's family is not just His originally chosen but even those who are not Jewish. **"Rejoice you Gentiles"**. (Romans 15:9&10) Though God began His revelation to Israel, He has now decreed, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek (Gentile – one outside of covenant with God), slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus". (Galatians 3:26-28) No matter what colour, race, language or situation in this world we are equal before our God, and must treat each other accordingly. If once we were an underdog, a despised one, this is no more in Christ!

Because this is God's plan we can trust Him for all things. The disciples worried that Jesus was going to leave them because they did not understand God's plan of salvation. Jesus had to tell them to rejoice instead of being fearful. "If you loved Me you would rejoice." (John 14:28) This total trust is a blessing to God and as we grow in this God can share His revelations with us.

We began by writing **rejoicing is a strategy from God for all people – and from His heart from the beginning of His revelation.** To rejoice is to enter into God's pleasure. As a father sits down with his family to just enjoy each other's company, so rejoicing in God is the same. No matter what is going on around us in the world, no matter what the world and the people of the world are doing to us we are in God's presence when we rejoice. This was why Jesus could say when He was being persecuted and misunderstood and why He tells us, "Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for great is your reward in Heaven." (Luke 6:23) It seems unbelievable that it could be a blessing to God that we desire His presence so much, but that is the truth of the matter. Rejoicing in all circumstances brings the presence of God to us, individually and corporately. That is why Paul wrote "be joyful in hope...rejoice with them that rejoice." (Romans 12:12&15)

Finally we will rejoice together when Babylon – the world's system – has been brought to ruin. (Revelation 18:20) The rejoicing in Heaven is recorded for us in John's vision...massive worship and praise...glory and majesty and the fulfilment of the promises of God for those who endure to the end. This is the reward for our trust.

The principles of rejoicing were laid down, then, under the Old Covenant, written in the Old Testament, but the practice of them brings our reward. Jude has a last word. (verses 24&25) "To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with **GREAT JOY** – to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen.

HALLELUJAH! THE LORD REIGNS!