“Genuine Joy and Happiness”
by Dr. D. W. Ekstrand

Introduction — The pursuit of happiness has probably reached its peak in our twentieth century world. Americans don’t stand alone in this pursuit, because it is an innate drive found in every man’s nature. Everyone wants to be happy and seeks it in varying ways and with varying degrees of intensity. Some seek it through pleasure, others through entertainment, possessions, work, position, education, and success; still others seek it in athletic endeavors, hobbies, travel, fashion, physical beauty, wealth, status, bigger homes, boats, planes, and vacation homes, as well as alcohol, food and drugs. King Solomon conducted a series of experiments in a quest to get the most and best out of life — his experiments not only included most of those things listed above, but also laughter, the finest wines, wisdom, and building projects that were the envy of the world… he built houses for himself, planted vineyard and gardens, built waterpools, acquired male and female servants, male and female singers and musicians, herds and flocks that were unparalleled, silver and gold and valuable treasures… said Solomon, “I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem… whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them… I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure…. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done… and found it to be nothing but vanity and a striving after wind” (Ecc 2:1-12). Therefore, said Solomon, “I completely despised of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun… it was all vanity” (Ecc 2:20-25). Solomon admitted that his quest rewarded him with a degree of joy, yet he still found that it did not satisfy him. Most people think they would have had an endless amount of joy were they as blessed as Solomon was… but Solomon concluded that it is God who determines whether or not we experience joy (Ecc 2:26). The experiences of men the world over tell us that no matter how secure and wonderful their sources of joy may be, human joy does not last long.

A Christian’s joy can be just as short-lived as anyone else’s, if he seeks it for itself as the world does. Biblical joy is a fruit, a byproduct, an additional blessing, not an end in itself. It flows into and grows within the person whose life and energies are not focused merely on being “joyful.” The lives of those in this world who so zealously chase after it prove this point. If they are still chasing it, then they must not have it! God’s Word also substantiates this. God knows that even among His people, relaxation and merriment tend to become their most important interest… and in the end their joy becomes gaiety, hilarity, revelry, and even debauchery… and God-produced joy is lost. On the other hand, when we follow God’s prescription, He feeds us in such a way that we experience real joy and satisfaction. God makes it very clear in Scripture that real joy lies in the quality of our relationship with Him; therefore, can we actually be so foolish so as to think that we can somehow produce it ourselves? One thing is certain: dwelling on ourselves and our wants will never produce true joy — rather than being obsessed with ourselves we must become obsessed with Christ; if we do, we will immerse ourselves in His Word, and seek to know Him more intimately “and our joy will be made full” (Jn 15:1-11). It is only through God’s Spirit that we can experience true joy (Ps 15:11-12; Gal 5:22; 1 Th 1:6); it cannot be accomplished apart from God (2 Cor 12:10; 13:4). The harder we try to be joyful through our own efforts, the more miserable we will become. Rest in the Lord’s arms (Mt 11:28-30) and seek His face through prayer and Scripture. Writes the apostle Paul: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:13).

The psalmist David wrote these encouraging words: “Thou will make known to me the path of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy: in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever” (Ps 16:11). The Bible is clear that the only place we can find true joy is in God’s presence. Faith is a necessary requisite for
experiencing joy and pleasing God (Heb 11:6; Jam 1:2-4), and without joy we don’t have the faith to conquer the problems we face in life. The night before Jesus went to the cross He taught His disciples how important it was for them to “abide in Him;” that only when they were experiencing “intimacy with Him” would they be able to bear fruit — “apart from Me you can do nothing.” He went on to tell them that He had spoken these things to them “that His joy might be in them, and that their joy might be made full” (Jn 15:11). Writes David, “Taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. For to those who fear Him, there is no want” (Ps 34:8-9). When we lack joy, the heart is discontented, anxious, and unhappy… so a lack of joy leads to a lack of peace; and obviously where there is no peace, there is no joy. Other traits that characterize people who lack joy are: bitterness, stubbornness, pride, gossiping, jealousy, insecurity, maliciousness, anger and hatefulness. The lack of joy is a symptom of a deeper disease that destroys one’s hopes, dreams and ambitions. Sin in David’s life caused his joy to dissipate, so with a repentant heart he cried out, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me… and restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation” (Ps 51:10-12). God wants us to be victorious over sin, fear, depression and everything else that holds us back from experiencing intimacy with Him… and as a reward for victory over these things He gives us joy.

**Biblical joy is inseparable from our relationship with God,** and springs from our knowledge and understanding of the purpose of life and the hope of living with God for eternity when there will be joy evermore. *Joy is the sign that life has found its purpose and its reason for being.* One characteristic that plays a major role toward producing biblical joy is common to all of the “Beatitudes” — each contains a measure of *self-denial and selflessness* (which is the exact opposite of the world!). In the Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-12, Christ lists nine ways that we can be happy. These include being pure in heart, being humble, being gentle, being peacemakers, hungering for righteousness, being merciful, mourning over sin, and suffering persecution for righteousness sake and for Jesus’ sake. Christ’s message to us is that *joy is possible at all times if we live as He commands us to live.* Those who were listening to Jesus’ discourse at the time were hoping that He would conquer Rome and set up a Jewish empire. They all wanted their circumstances changed so that they could be happy… but Jesus did not fix their circumstances or set up an earthly kingdom… still He said that they could be happy *if and only if they let the kingdom of Christ rule in their hearts.* The happiness that Christ was referring to is not circumstantial in nature; rather, it is all about investing in heavenly priorities and placing one’s faith in Christ regardless of the circumstances.

**The believer’s joy is not a conjured-up type of smiling, and being nice no matter what;** such a joy is fake, worldly and worthless. What Christ is after is *a happiness that stems from hope in that Supernatural Reality* (GOD) that lifts one’s spirit even in the midst of suffering and debilitating circumstances. Believers ask, “Is such joy really possible? Is it reasonably attainable?” The answer is an unequivocal “yes,” but it does demand the *discipline of faith* (more on that later). There is nothing like knowing that our joy remains full even when we have been rendered empty of all that we had *thought we needed* to sustain our happiness. Sadly, it is true that most Christians fail to experience joy when times become difficult — generally they get so caught up in the issues of life that they forget to “rejoice in the Lord,” or they question how it is even possible when life gets so discouraging, depressing and frustrating. To experience the *secret of joy* one must carefully reflect on the *path of joy* as it is outlined in Scripture. Twice in Philippians 4:4 Paul gives this command: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say rejoice.” Just because God’s Spirit dwells within us does not mean that we will necessarily experience joy — *we must make a choice to let Christ be our joy.* When we falter in our faith, we try to manufacture our own joy, and that is simply not possible, because God is its author. Only when we find our happiness in the person of Christ can we experience true joy.
Jesus said to His disciples, “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full” (Jn 15:11). Here Jesus reminds us that we will not have fullness of joy unless we abide in Him, and that involves keeping His commands and putting our full trust and confidence in Him. Obedience to God is central to experiencing the joy of God. — if we do not follow His will and live according to His Word, we will not experience joy. The darkest times of life for most believers are times of disobedience because there is a lack of joy in their lives even in the midst of positive circumstances. The most joyful times in life can actually be when we triumph in faith during the most difficult and oppressive times. If we want to experience the “supernatural joy life,” then we must walk in obedience, resting in God all the while. When we put our confidence in God and choose to have His joy, we will experience that unspeakably wonderful “gift of the Spirit” — JOY. His joy can be experienced at this very moment in your life — regardless of circumstances — if you will walk in faith and obedience (again, more on that later).

It was the prophet Nehemiah who said, “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh 8:10). To appreciate what this means we must understand the context in which these words were stated. The Israelites had just returned from Babylon after having spent seventy years in exile… under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah the Jewish people rebuilt Jerusalem’s ruined walls, and now they set their sights on re-establishing the temple and restoring the nation. Though they were no longer being held captive in Babylon, “they were still slaves to those who were governing the land God had given to them” (Neh 9:36). The Jewish remnant who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, in large part were ignorant of their spiritual heritage due to their captivity; furthermore they had forgotten their native language; and above all, they had lived in sin and had forgotten God. Nehemiah called a “special meeting” in the middle of the city — altogether about 50,000 people attended. Ezra the priest was asked to read the book of the Law of Moses to the assembly — he read it aloud from daybreak until noon, and the Word of God spoke in a profound way to the hearts of the people, and for the first time they were made aware of their sinfulness before God. The people learned that Jeremiah had prophesied the very destruction that they had suffered, yet in the same breath Jeremiah gave them a promise that their mourning would turn to a morning of joy — God would bring them back to their land seventy years later. Ezra read, “Behold,” says the Lord, “I will gather My people from the remote parts of the earth… a great company shall return here… they shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them… for I am a father to Israel” (Jer 31:8-9). The people experienced the relevancy of the message — they were made aware of the connection between the sins of their own hearts and their distressful situation, and they saw that their slavery was the result of their own sin. As they stood there mourning over their sins, they understood the message of salvation… it was not a message of “I told you so” or “you should have known better” or “look what a mess you have made of your lives”… instead they are told to “Go and enjoy choice food and drinks, for this day is sacred to the Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!” “Then all the people went away to eat and drink and celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them” (Neh 8:9-12). This day was sacred to the Lord — it was the joy of the Lord that made this such a sacred day… God had deliberately led them to this moment in time… it wasn’t a day of good fortune or good luck… it was the joyful day of the Lord! The people were told “not to grieve” — “God’s anger is but for a moment; whereas His favor lasts a life-time” (Ps 30:4-5). When the Word of God was opened and read to them, the people began to understand themselves and the need to change their minds about the way they were living. And like them, if we listen, it will also bring us to a mourning of joy. When we set our hearts to obey God’s Word, the Lord Himself causes us to rejoice — “God had made them rejoice with great joy” (Neh 12:43).
The resounding message of “repentance” runs throughout the Bible. Jesus said, “Except you repent… you will perish” (Lk 13:5). A change of direction only comes through changing our minds about where we are headed; it requires knowing and acknowledging what is wrong with our lives. Turning to God in repentance always creates a joyous hunger for more. It is in turning to God that we realize our emptiness. During the days of Israel’s captivity in Babylon, the children of Israel were “spiritually famished” (Amos 8:11-13); upon returning to the land of their forefathers they began to feast upon God’s Word. When they understood its relevancy and the joy it brings to life, they began to hunger and thirst for more — the joy of their salvation was so great that they wanted to hear more. They found written in the Law that their forefathers had “lived in makeshift booths” in the wilderness for forty years, and that the Law had instructed them to celebrate “The Feast of Booths” later that month… so the whole company that had returned from exile went into the hill country to fetch tree branches for themselves to build booths to live in for the seven days of the feast. Scripture tells us the children of Israel had not celebrated the feast like that since the days of Joshua, and that “their joy” was very great! Day after day Ezra read the Book of the Law of God to them, and as the people returned to God they found even more reason to “rejoice in their salvation.” The deeper their appreciation grew for what God had done for them, the greater their joy became (Neh 8:14-18).

On the eighth day according to the Law there was an assembly of all the people… they gathered together for a great day of national confession… with fasting and mourning, they listened to the reading of the Law for three hours… and then for three more hours they confessed their sins and those of their fathers and worshipped the LORD their God (Neh 9:1-3). The people responded to the reading of the Law thus: “Because of our sins… we are in great distress” (Neh 9:37). Their confession was accompanied by great remorse… they understood their terrible condition as they journeyed back to God… but more importantly, they understood God’s joyous message of salvation, and at that they burst out in praise! Then said Nehemiah to the people, “This day is holy to the Lord your God… do not mourn or weep… rather, go eat and drink…. DO NOT GRIEVE, FOR THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH” (Neh 8:9-10). NOTE CAREFULLY it is “the Lord’s joy” that is our strength… it “the Lord’s joy” that gives us reason to rejoice… it is “the Lord’s joy” that fills us with hope. It is not anything that we have done that is our hope, joy or strength! Furthermore, it is not God’s anger, wrath or holiness that is our strength! IT IS “GOD’S JOY” THAT IS OUR STRENGTH!! NOT OUR JOY!! GOD’S JOY!! IT IS THE “LORD’S JOYOUS WISH TO SAVE US FROM OUR SINS — AND THAT IS OUR STRENGTH and ENERGY and VITALITY!” It is GOD’S JOY to stand us back up on our feet and strengthen our feeble legs & wobbly knees so that we might discover that HIS JOY IS OUR STRENGTH! It is the “joy of the Lord” that remains our strength today! REMEMBER, IT IS “GOD’S JOY” TO SAVE YOU!!! His faithfulness continues throughout all generations! The God of Abraham seeks to BLESS ALL MEN THROUGH JESUS CHRIST! THIS IS “GOD’S JOY!” READ HEBREWS 12:2 — “WHO FOR THE ‘JOY’ SET BEFORE HIM, JESUS ENDURED THE CROSS!” He seeks to fulfill the promise He made to Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed through his seed — THIS IS HIS JOY!!! Our response should be to commit our lives to Him for joyfully wanting to save us! It is incredible to realize that no matter how bad things get for us, GOD’S JOY will forever be our hope and strength! And it was the JOY OF THE LORD that caused us to turn to Him! So stop grieving and rejoice, and know that GOD WAS/IS THRILLED TO SAVE YOU!!! Re-read this paragraph if you’re struggling with this.

Why does James tell us to count it “pure joy” when we face trials? Because joy gives us strength to fight our trials, and if we fight them, we’ll overcome them. James continues, “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jam 1:2-4). James clearly
has victory over trials in mind, not mere acceptance of one’s trials. It is “joy” that gives us the strength to fight and overcome our trials. Joy gives us the strength to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim 6:12). Spiritual joy has a way of infusing strength into our being! If you are tired of fighting the battle it is because your problems seem too much for you — you have lost your joy, and have rightly concluded that the fight is too great for you. Paul said, “Rejoice in the Lord always!” (Phil 4:4). You are to always rejoice in the Lord — you can’t live off of the joy you had yesterday or last week — that joy will not give you strength today. Joy can only give you strength in the moment… it can only give you strength when you possess it. The time to rejoice is always “now” — if you don’t rejoice, you will lose the strength to fight. I love this verse in Habakkak — “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crops fail and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will be joyful in God my Savior” (Hab 3:17-18). He is going to rejoice because “the God of his salvation is his strength; He makes his feet like the feet of a deer, and enables him to walk on high places” (Hab 3:19). Habakkuk had no intention of staying defeated. The difference between the person who is defeated and the person who is victorious is his attitude toward God. An attitude of gratitude is what made the difference in the prophet’s life. Even though nothing good was happening in his life — no fruit, no crops, no sheep, no cattle — yet he rejoiced! Though our lives are filled with trials, we are also to rejoice! Regardless of our circumstances, we can rejoice! Reflect upon the words of the prophetic Isaiah: “Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. Therefore I will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation” (Is 12:2-3). Notice what this Scripture says: “with joy you will draw water from the springs of salvation.” It is joy that keeps you strong and enables you to draw from the springs of salvation.

**OUR ENGLISH WORD “HAPPINESS”**

Our English word “happiness” comes from the old Norse word “happ” — this is the same word from which we get our word “happen;” thus happiness is based on what happens to us. So the argument goes like this: if something good is happening, we are happy… if something bad is happening, we are sad. Though that is a fairly accurate understanding of the word “happiness,” that alone is not the only meaning of the word. The word “happy” can also be used to subjectively describe the believer’s joy (Prv 3:18; 29:18; Mt 5:3-12), which is not necessarily dependent upon what “happens” to him. Though some believers have insisted on applying “happy feelings” only to circumstances, and have objected to the use of the word “happy” when translating the beatitudes of Matt 5, that is not what Scripture teaches. Just because the derivation of the word “happy” in English has its orientation in “happ,” does not necessarily limit its usage as such, as any modern dictionary will attest. Scripture tells us that we can indeed be “happy” even in the midst of pain and suffering. Thus to insist that “spiritual joy” and “spiritual happiness” are not equivalents is to engage in meaningless contrarieties that only serve to confuse the reader. The Lord has blessed us with ability to feel & emot; and we honor Him when we appropriately exercise those emotions; it is good for believers to rejoice and be exceeding glad and happy at all times in the Lord (Lk 2:10-11; 6:23; Jn 8:56; Rom 10:15; Rev 19:7). Paul sets “rejoicing” and “being anxious” in juxtaposition to each other in order to contrast their differences (Phil 4:4, 6-7; Mt 6:25-34) — to be anxious is to be joyless. The believer can experience a deep abiding peace and joy in his life regardless of circumstances… he can experience elation that transcends his circumstances… and experience that which is highly pleasing and pleasant in the midst of difficulties and trials — all these emotions are “felt” experiences. When the believer experiences a joyful happiness, there is an absence of anxiety, tension and want in his soul; conversely, when the believer is in a “state of want,” that longing produces a disquieting unrest in his soul, so instead of being at peace and satisfied, he is anxious and restless.
A. W. Tozer says the deep disease of the human heart is a “will” broken loose from its center; it is the disease of disobedience and revolt. The cure must be wrought within the heart, and the Holy Spirit achieves this inward cure by merging the believer’s will with His own — this is not accomplished in a single stroke, and is a longer process than we in our creature impatience wish. The most advanced soul may be shocked and chagrined to discover some private area in his life where he had been acting as the proprietor of that which he thought he had given to God. It is the work of the in-living Spirit to point out these moral discrepancies and inward desires and correct them. As the work of God advances in the heart the Christian finds himself free to choose whatever he will, and he increasingly and gladly chooses the will of God as his highest conceivable good. The work of the Holy Spirit is, among other things, to rescue the redeemed man’s emotions, to restring his harp and open again the wells of sacred joy which have been stopped up by sin. The heart that learns to “die with Christ” soon knows the blessed experience of “rising with Him,” and all the world’s persecutions cannot still the high note of holy joy that springs up in the soul that has become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual love of Christ will make constant music within our hearts and enable us to rejoice even in our sorrows. Until this condition is reached, the Christian’s peace and joy will continue to elude him. As long as the believer’s fleshly wants and desires occupy “prime property” in his soul, he will remain spiritually disquieted, restless, frustrated and discontented, because it is just such things which poison his joy and greatly reduce his power.

What are the basic “practical steps” the believer can take to experience the joy of the Lord? We take exactly the same steps we took to obtain His joy at the beginning. First, we love, honor and hunger excitedly for God’s Word — without an intentional effort at initially getting into the word, you will limit the in-living presence of the Holy Spirit to increase your hunger for the Word. Feeding upon the Word is absolutely essential for experiencing growth and joy (Jn 14:26; 15:7, 11; Rom 10:17; 1 Cor 2:14; Eph 6:17; 1 Pet 2:2). Second, we continually walk in repentance — without a whole-hearted intentional effort at putting God’s Word into practice in our life, we are essentially denying its very purpose (Lk 6:46-49; Jam 1:22-25; 2:14-20). Third, we separate ourselves from all worldly and ungodly influences (2 Cor 6:14; 1 Jn 2:15-17) — true joy is found in holiness, that is, in literally being “set apart” for the things of the Lord. When we set ourselves apart from the things of this world and consecrate ourselves to the Lord we find joy. There is no such thing as real joy apart from the Lord, therefore when we compromise in the area of obedience, we cheat ourselves of real joy; so when we embrace the things of this world, it costs us the joy of the Lord.

THE “PROCESS” OF DISCOVERING JOY

When a believer finds himself in the midst of a “very frustrating circumstance,” and his flesh desperately wants to control his response… what does he do to experience joy? First, it is important that the believer have a storehouse of biblical knowledge upon which to draw from. With that said, let’s assume some situation is causing you to be “angry and mad” (the most common of all maladies)… what do you do? Either you can give in and “feed your anger,” or you can stand up and “fight your anger.” Obviously, the easiest thing to do is feed it and justify it… because that’s what we “feel” like doing! And we are all master practitioners in justifying the way we feel! To fight your anger, however, requires “faith” — you have to believe what God says about the issue you’re struggling with, and you have to engage yourself in the battle to overcome it. In short, the essence of faith is “affirming the truth” — you have to affirm the truth about what God says regarding the matter, and affirm the truth about how you are to respond to the matter. Whatever the issue is that makes you angry — being treated wrongly, facing a negative circumstance, or being exasperated with life — your options are always the same: you can
either stay angry, stew, holler, rant & rave, and cause some kind of damage, or you can go to God with your problem. By the way, once you go to God with it, your ultimate goal is that of willingly turning your situation over to God to do with as He chooses — and that’s not necessarily going to happen at the snap of a finger. The “process” that gets you to that point may take thirty minutes or so, and this may be one of those more difficult “Not my will, but Thy will be done” issues. Your initial response might be this: “Lord, this situation is beyond my ability to handle, and I don’t even know if I can even turn it over to You, because I am really angry!” Always start your discussion with God by being honest with Him; don’t try to play the self-righteous pious card. By the way, your frustrating situation demands that you are going to need to spend some time discussing the matter with God — for me personally, I like to go for a walk when having this discussion and actually talk “audibly” with God; it helps me work through the process. Whatever your preference, you will need to “affirm what Scripture has to say” about the problem you’re facing — remember, you are simply telling the Lord what “He has said in His Word.” Obviously, you may feel the need to tell Him why you are so angry (that’s a part of the process); even though there will be times when you can’t even articulate why your angry; you are just angry; generally those are the less serious issues. Next, you will have to “wrestle through the issue of handing it over to God to do with as He chooses.” It is during this step that you let the truths of God’s Word settle in your heart — by affirming them over and over again, God’s Word will slowly begin to settle peacefully in your heart; all the while you are asking God to give you the “grace” to surrender everything to Him. Since your “heart attitude” is one of at least wanting to surrender everything to God (even though your flesh does not want to), the Holy Spirit will carve out that path in your soul whereby you are able to do so. True, it takes time, but not days and weeks like some believers think. The problem many believers face at this point is that they are so angry they don’t think God can give them peace about their situation, so they just sit there and stew and don’t embark on the journey (other than throwing up some ten second prayer!). Let me remind you, very seldom does the process take more than thirty minutes before you begin experiencing God’s peace and joy in your heart. A key ingredient in your discussion with God is that of “thanking Him that He understands your pain... that He really loves you... that He really wants to deliver you from your pain... and that He really wants to bring healing to your heart, and give you His joy & His peace” (carefully read Phil 4:6-7). These truths are simply the truths of God’s Word that you need to affirm over and over again — as you affirm them you will discover that you will really start to identify with those truths (Rom 10:17; 1 Cor 2:14; Heb 11:1), and the next you will notice is that you are slowly transitioning from a state of anger to one of joy and peace in the Lord. By the way, such joy and peace do not ultimately depend on you “getting your way” (positive circumstances); the truth is, you may not end up getting your way. So during your dialogue with the Lord, you will need to come to that point where you are able to accept the issue, even though you know God may not choose to change it — you will come to a point where you are able to say, “I’m ok with that,” and that you are able trust God to keep you at peace regarding the matter. Notice, you have fully resolved in your heart that you are able to accept things as they are (negative circumstances)... and that you are no longer exasperated with the situation. Obviously, this transformation in your heart would not be possible if it was all just left up to you, but GOD is at work in you to will and do His good pleasure (read Phil 2:12-13) that you might know His love, joy and peace; these are the three most prominent fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). Only God can produce these things in your heart. One further note: should the same issue arise again tomorrow? God wants to walk you thru the process again. Some of the “more difficult issues” we may face in life (a cheating spouse, terminal illness, the death of a loved one, etc.) will require that we go through this process over & over again... because the “pain will resurface” in our life over & over again... and each time we go through the process, God will pour out upon us an even greater measure of peace and joy. This is all a part of the “transformational process” of becoming conformed to the image of Christ.
Should you believe for some reason that "God is a kill-joy" or that "God is against you," you need a godly friend to come alongside you and share the truths of what Scripture really says, so that you can **confidently** place your trust in a God who loves you and experience His grace and peace in a fresh new way (Heb 4:15-16). Your problem is that your knowledge of God is not scriptural; you have started to listen to Satan’s lies; we all seem to do this from time to time. Remember, if God loved you so much as a “rebellious sinner,” and went to the cross for you in your fallen state, how much more does He love you now as “His beloved child?” (carefully read Rom 5:8; 8:31-32, 37-39). Let the truths of God’s Word minister to your soul (by affirming them over and over) that you might really come to know His love, joy & peace.

The following statement by **Martyn Lloyd-Jones** seems so appropriate at this point: “As long as you see **your sins** as a detriment with regard to your acceptance before God, you will negate the work of the cross in your life.” Writes Paul, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice!” (Phil 4:4).

**Perhaps a closing word should be said about “feelings.”** Our “**feelings**” play a significant role in the development of our psychological and spiritual lives, because feelings are food for the mind — hence, Scripture emphatically tells us that we must keep a very keen vigil over our “**thought-life**” (Prv 23:7; Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 10:5; Eph 4:23; Phil 4:6-8). We cannot directly control our **feelings**, but we can control our **thoughts**, and they are the root cause of our feelings. Fundamentally, we can classify all feelings into two categories — good and bad — though all feelings differ in intensity and kind, they all have their origin in the mind. For the sake of this study, I would like us to primarily focus on those “**negative feelings**” that have an adverse affect upon our lives. If we live in accordance with the **world of our negative feelings**, we will ultimately discover that we are unable to restrain ourselves from being subservient to them… addicted persons become enslaved to their feelings and are controlled by them. On a deeper level, the negative feelings that arise every day in our lives on a regular basis will gradually become **individual habits** that will sooner or later establish a certain kind of **personal lifestyle**: as such, we become slaves of our own thirsts. Those thoughts we have that are nurtured in the mind will, over the course of time, become an **internal energy** that will directly affect not only our own existence, but also the existence of those around us (both for good and for bad). By the way, these **streams of energy**, particularly the negative ones, have the ability to affect those around us very quickly. Furthermore, **strong negative feelings are the root causes of the internal storms in our lives.** Thus it is critically important that the believer “**saturate his mind**” with the things of God (Phil 4:7; Col 3:2), and “**affirm the reality of spiritual truth**” in his own heart. If this is but a weekly experience (Sunday only), you will not have the spiritual energy to walk with God in the light of truth throughout the week, and experience the joy of the Lord; rather, you will suffer a joyless kind of **spiritual paralysis**. For those of you who are really struggling in the Christian life, you need to know that there is only “one way” to experience peace and joy in your life, and that is by **cultivating intimacy with Jesus Christ**” (and this happens principally by affirming truth over and over again). There is no other way. Close your time in this study by reflecting upon the words God gave to His people in Jeremiah 29:11-14 —

> “For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the Lord,  
> “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.”  
> “Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.”  
> “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”  
> “And I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and I will restore your fortunes.”

(Also read Ps 34:4, 10; 63:1; 105:4; 119:2; Prv 2:4-5; 8:17; Is 55:6-7; Mt 6:33; 7:7; Heb 11:6)

—PRAYERFULL “AFFIRM” THE REALITY OF THESE TRUTHS—
Enjoy!