

Russell Kelfer

Praise for His Ways

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Series: The Fruit of the Spirit

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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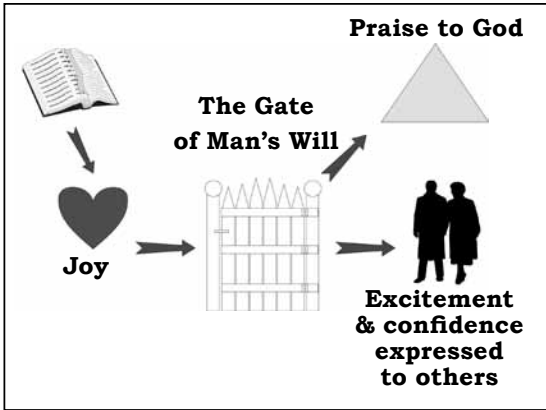
He was one of the richest men alive. In his lifetime, he had accumulated enough wealth to feed most of the poor people on planet earth. In his lifetime, he had made enough money to send the Word of God to the ends of the earth. In his lifetime, he had earned enough to pay off the national debt. But when he died, they found him in a dirty hotel room, in a dark closet, clutching bags full of money, as though by holding on to them, he could take it with him.

He had all he needed to live life and to give life, but he never chose to give it away. Because he clutched at what was meant to be spent, the very thing it was intended to do was never done, and over his life will be written, “Wasted”. It wasn’t that he didn’t have what he needed; it was that he never turned it loose.

Christians are that way in the spirit realm. At your salvation and mine, we received all we would ever need from God to live the Christian life. We received the Holy Spirit, and as we did, we received all of those aspects of the nature of God that He bestows upon the Christian. We received enough love, enough joy, enough peace, enough patience to last a lifetime. They were and are the result of nothing we have done; they are the result of what God has done. He is their source and He is their power.

But our God gave us the responsibility of spending what He gave us. He charged us with the choice of whether or not to let that love flow, to let that joy be expressed, to let that peace reign in our hearts. So joy, as with the other fruit of the Spirit, is God’s nature set free. We can’t produce it, but we can stop it from being expressed. In diagram form, it looks like this:

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The Word of God energizes the joy of God which is resident within our hearts, and the more difficult the circumstances, the more evident the opportunity to let that joy be expressed. But we have a choice. We can hide in the closet and wrap our arms about God's nature, clutching it for ourselves, or we can return it to Him in praise and worship, and we can bring glory to Him by expressing that joy to others in the form of quiet confidence and spiritual excitement. When we do that, our joy is multiplied, and we have *that much more to give away*.

The joy of the Lord! It is our strength. It is our expression of God's nature amidst a world whose happiness rises and falls with the "happenings" that surround it. It is that joy we have been exploring these past few sessions. We have been looking primarily at the things we can do to energize the joy that is resident within us, and we have looked at meditating on the Worth of God (Who He is); on the Word of God (What He's said); and on the Works of God (What He's done). Today we consider the joy that flows when we meditate on the "Ways of God": *those miraculous supernatural higher roads he takes to accomplish His purposes*. They, too, are a source of great joy. Then we will take a very brief look at the *expressions of joy* that let both God and the world know we are joyful.

Our title and our outline take this form:

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I- The Simple Gospel

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II- The “Why Me?” Solution

III- The Persectuion Privilege

IV- The Joy of Giving Up

V- The “No Reason” Reason for Rejoicing

VI- The Choice to Rejoice

I- THE SIMPLE GOSPEL

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! (Romans 11:33 NKJV)

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, (Isaiah 55:8,9 NKJV)

The ways of God are past finding out. They are so much higher than our ways that we can only fathom the difference by viewing it in the light of how much higher heaven is than earth. What is meant by *the ways of God* is “the incredibly different means He uses to accomplish His purposes, so only He can receive the Glory.” The “ways of God” are cause for great joy. Meditating on *how decidedly different are His ways* will comfort you and encourage you and fill your heart with gladness and rejoicing. They astound the world. The world cannot understand the ways of God, but you can. As you contemplate their majesty, joy fills your heart. Let’s look at just a few of them. First of all, let’s look at the *simplicity of the ways of God*. He uses simple people, simple principles, verifiable absolutes, and obviously simple methods to accomplish His purposes.

The world, you see, has a plan. It is this: Make the simple complicated, and you will need man to explain it. God has a plan, as well. It is this: Make the complicated simple, and even a child can understand it. Jesus explained it to us, as He spoke to His Father:

At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,

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because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.” (Luke 10:21 NIV)

Nothing fills my heart with joy more than realizing that God made the Gospel simple enough for me to understand it. It doesn't require a college degree, or a theological background, or even an IQ of above average. Praise God. Man's ways are to elevate knowledge and create inequality. God's ways are to elevate Godliness and make it equally available to the wise and to the simple. That retarded youngster who may never hold a job can give his life to Jesus. That uneducated native in the backwoods of the jungle who will never learn to read can rest in Jesus. That five year old lad who lives next door, who isn't even old enough to start school, can start his walk with God. Why? Because God's ways are higher. He chose to make it *so simple* that not only can the simple-minded grasp it, but often the wise of this world miss it in its sheer simplicity. In I Corinthians 1, Paul quoted Isaiah 29:14, then asked some pertinent questions. It reads like this:

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? (I Corinthians 1:19,20 NKJV)

Then he explains how God's wisdom compares to the wisdom of man, and how God chose to use other than what the world calls “the cream of the crop” to build His Kingdom.

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

That no flesh should glory in His presence.

That, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.” (I Corinthians 1:26,27,29,31 NKJV)

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That is why God called you. That is why God called me. He was looking for “regular” folks to shine through. He was looking for ordinary people, so an extraordinary God could be seen in their lives. He was looking for folks who weren’t naturally super, so he could supernaturally reveal Himself. If that doesn’t take a load off your shoulders, it should. It means you and I have been called to minister by a God who isn’t choosing the way we do when we choose up sides for a baseball game. He isn’t looking for the most talented, the most brilliant, the most educated. He’s looking for the most committed, and we all have an equal chance to qualify. Oh, the wonderful ways of God.

II- THE “WHY ME?” SOLUTION

The second of God’s wonderful ways that ought to fill us with joy is the wonderful way He chooses to *bless us through suffering*. Scripture indicates that perhaps the greatest source of joy in the Christian life is sorrow. The greatest source of growth is chastisement. The greatest source of encouragement is defeat. Now, to the natural mind, that’s not only difficult to understand, it’s impossible. But because God’s ways are so much higher, and because God’s goals are spiritual, and because man’s heart is so hard to penetrate, God has graciously come up with this incredible backwards philosophy. It almost says, “The worse things are, the better you are..” But not quite. It does say, “The worse things are, the better God is able to reveal Himself...let Him.” Thus, the joy of the Lord is best expressed when the storms of life are raging. The peace of the Lord is best expressed when there is no cause for peace. The patience of the Lord is best expressed when there is just cause, humanly speaking, to be impatient. But it goes one step beyond that. Not only is testing God’s proving ground, it is actually *God’s method of demonstrating His love*. The more He trusts you, the more He can test you, because He knows what you are made of. Therefore, the “Why Me?” syndrome has an answer. When the storms bellow, and the winds blow against you, and you cry, “Why Me, Lord?” God actually answers, “Because I love you, and I trust you, and you’re special, that’s why.”

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Let's look at some passages that explain this phenomenon.

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

(II Corinthians 8:1,2 NKJV)

Paul was saying, "Look how God works. Look at the Macedonian church. They were passing through fiery trials. Those trials produced joy. Out of the abundance of that joy (the joy the trials produced), and because *they had so little*, they felt led to give more." Now you pass that one through the world's grid and see what you come up with. Because they hurt so much and had so little, they were filled with the joy of the Lord and gave more than they had ever given. Why? The joy of the Lord. It is multiplied when things are tough. Look in Hebrews:

For you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.

(Hebrews 10:34,35 NKJV)

"You joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods knowing you have a better and enduring possession in heaven." Think about it. They were joyful when they lost it all, because it brought them closer to the reality that they had an inheritance in heaven that was "incorruptible, and undefiled, and fadeth not away, kept safe in heaven for them..." (I Peter 1:4). The more they lost, the more joy they had, because the less they had, the more they realized *what they really had... Jesus*. And of course,

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces character let it happen, that you may become mature.

(James 1:2,3 paraphrase)

Count it all joy? That's what it says. When the oven

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gets hot, rejoice! When the oven gets hotter, rejoice the more. Why? Because the goal of this life is to prepare you for the next. The way God does it is by changing your character. The way God changes your character is by the tests and trials of life on planet earth. So every time the cannons boom, it's God saying, "I love you, trust me...I'm just helping you grow. Be joyful." In fact, Hebrews 12:5-12 tells us that the very fact that God allows you to be chastened or tested is proof of His love. If He didn't love you, He wouldn't be treating you like His special child. It concludes:

Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful [grievous], nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:11 NKJV)

The fruit that the Spirit produces in you is best grown in the storms. When the wind is blowing, you don't like it, and God understands that. But He guarantees you in writing, that afterwards...when the storm has passed, the "Son" will shine much brighter through your life; His fruit will be more evident, if you'll just relax and be patient. *The wonderful ways of our God. He actually demonstrates His love by choosing us to endure trials, so that through those trials He can produce His character.* The ways of God—not at all like the ways of man. But they are our source of joy.

III- THE PERSECUTION PRIVILEGE

This next of God's ways is painfully, yet beautifully tied to the last one. It is the privilege of persecution. In Matthew Jesus gives us this amazing challenge:

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

You are the salt of the earth; (Matthew 5:10-13a NKJV)

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Jesus is saying, “If you would like to make a list of the privileges in the Christian life, put this one near the top—the privilege of suffering for the sake of the Gospel; the privilege of being reviled, made fun of, having all kinds of lies made up about you and spread about.” This is to be a source of joy! For two reasons: 1) It puts you in good company: it identifies you with God’s greats who’ve gone before and gone before firing squads for Jesus’ sake and 2) It allows you to trade the temporary plaudits of men on earth for the permanent rewards that are yours in eternity, rewards that moth and rust cannot corrupt, and thieves cannot break through and steal. If persecution comes into your life; *deserved persecution, that is*, and you are reviled because of what you believe (not because of the obnoxious way you present it), start shouting for joy! God just tucked away another crown of Glory for you. Oh, the marvelous, but different ways of our God. The very things we hate, physically, become the very things that bless us, spiritually.

IV- THE JOY OF GIVING UP

Do you get the picture? Do you see how *the ways of God* are cause for releasing *the joy of God*? What man makes complicated, God makes simple. He calls those we would overlook, so the world will overlook them and see Him. He takes the very things we try to avoid and uses them to prepare us for Heaven; and, in fact, sends us those things in *direct proportion to His love and confidence in us*, so while the world may think we are being tested because we don’t measure up, in God’s wonderful ways, it is the opposite. In fact, He tells us that one of the greatest pleasures He has reserved for a chosen few on planet earth is the privilege of being reviled, persecuted, misunderstood, and rejected. *Indeed, His ways are not as our ways.*

Here’s another of His wonderful ways. *You win by losing.* You gain by giving up. You live by dying. Thus, John the Baptist made this amazing statement in John 3:

He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices

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greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is fulfilled.

He must increase, but I must decrease.

(John 3:29,30 NKJV)

The Amplified Bible adds:

[He must grow more prominent; I must grow less so.]

In Matthew Jesus gave this formula for spiritual success:

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

For whosoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to His works."

(Matthew 16:24-27 NKJV)

The Christian life, then, is the opposite of the natural life. You want to have something? Give it away. You want to gain something? Be willing to lose it all. You want to become valuable? Become nothing. You want to someday be a leader? Then learn to be a slave. You want to someday stand before kings? Learn to kneel before God. You want to someday reign and rule? Learn to wash feet, serve saints, and dry tears. That means every time you lose, you win. Every time you get to go to the back of the line, you get reservations at the King's table in Glory; every time you take a seat in the back of the room, God dusts off a front row seat in The Tabernacle of Eternity. That means, that every defeat, every humbling task, every menial assignment is cause for joy! You are being prepared for greatness. The less of you there is, the more room there is for Him. The less acclaim you get for yourself, the more reward you get in the presence of the Great Rewarder. Oh, what bliss. Oh, what joy. The joy of the wonderful ways of God.

V- THE “NO REASON” REASON

Perhaps the best example of all of the wonderful ways of God is the “No reason” reason for being joyful. It makes no sense at all to the natural mind, because it is *designed for the supernatural mind to comprehend*. It is found all through Scripture, but we will specifically look at two passages: Philippians 4:4, and I Thessalonians 5 (TLB). They are both familiar to you. They read like this:

Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice!
(Philippians 4:4)

Always be joyful.

Always keep on praying.

No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

Do not smother the Holy Spirit.
(I Thessalonians 5:16-19 TLB)

The “no reason” reason to be joyful is God’s way of saying that, in the end, joy is not the product of anything we do, or anything we say; it is the product of choice. Meditating on the worth, the words, the works, and the ways of God helps give us motivation to express our joy, but the two passages we just read tell us that ultimately *the mature Christian needs no motivation other than Christ Himself. Joy is to be the natural expression of Christ living in you.* Therefore, you are to always be joyful; always be prayerful; always be thankful...no matter *what* happens. That is the will of God for you. That is the will of God for me. You say, “But that makes no sense to me.” To the natural man, it makes no sense. But the natural man is not the one being spoken to here. To the “New You” nothing else makes any sense.

Your God has reached down through the corridors of eternity, taken a man or a woman who deserved nothing but death, and at the price of His own Son, purchased for you eternal life. Then, at your invitation, He placed His Spirit in you to guide you, to lead you, to convict you, and to comfort you. Then that Son went back to Heaven to live and make

intercession for you. Realizing that, can you turn to God and say, "I can't be joyful today; my car broke down." Your car won't break down in Heaven; be joyful about that. How can you whine, "But I have a cold; I can't be joyful." Jesus hung on that Cross and suffered the cruel injustice of man for you... and you can't release His joy because you have the sniffles? Joy is a choice. You have the raw materials in you to always be joyful, otherwise God wouldn't tell you to do it. Christ in you is perfect joy, and Christ is in you. *So you never at any time have any reason not to be joyful.*

VI- THE CHOICE TO REJOICE

The question, then, naturally follows: "How do I express this joy? How can I release the joy that is resident within me, even when, and especially when the sky seems to be falling around me; my family is sick; I'm behind in my house payments; my ministry is crumbling; my job is in jeopardy. What have I to be joyful about, and how do I express joy now?"

The question is two-fold, and so is the answer. The first question is: "What do I have to be joyful about?" and the answer is Jesus! The second question is: "How do I express joy even when I don't feel joyful, and the answer is two-fold as well.

1- You begin to praise God to God, and

2- You begin to demonstrate God to man. You quietly begin to sing in your spirit, praying a prayer of thanksgiving for your salvation, for your deliverance, for your eternal security, for your eternal life. You make "melody in your heart to the Lord." It's not a "Praise the Lord Anyway" theology, that says "I have nothing to be thankful for, but "I'll praise the Lord anyway." No. It's a "Praise the Lord Continually" theology. It says "I have plenty to be thankful for; I've just forgotten. Dear God, please forgive me." And then it begins to sing...of the Worth, the Word, the Works, and the Ways of God.

It has stored up verses of praise in its memory bank for just such an occasion as this. So the heart begins to pray back to God His own words of praise. Suddenly, like a fountain waiting

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to be released, joy breaks forth upon your soul, and you praise Him the more. Because you're happy? No, you may have just lost everything you have, humanly speaking. Because you're filled with the joy of the Lord...that supernatural expression of the nature of God that is always excited over Who He is, What He's said, What He's done, and How He's done it; and you will have *chosen* to release His joy when you need it most.

So the less you *feel* like praising Him, the *more responsible* you are to do so. You say, "But isn't that hypocrisy?" No, that's obedience. Rejoice in the Lord *always*. Always means now. The less joyful you feel, the more you need to *choose to obey*, because the flesh is not going to cooperate. There is a lot more we can do as Christians to learn to praise corporately. And there is a lot more we can do to learn how to worship as part of the Body of Christ. But for the moment, we're talking about you and God alone. We're talking about you in the confines of your car driving to that appointment you don't want to keep with the doctor. We're talking about you waiting by the telephone for that call you dread receiving. We're talking about you kneeling by your bed, sobbing before God, seeking direction, not knowing what the future holds. At those times, you don't need other Christians to help you praise. All you need is to choose to let the joy that is captive within your spirit free. The minute you start to sing and to praise, God will do the rest. Read II Chronicles 20 again. It will help refresh your memory.

The enemy had hoodwinked the children of God. He had tricked them into a semi-important battle, so that *while they were occupied*, he could steal in and steal away the thing they valued most (their families). He does that with us today. It's his "Walt Disney" ploy. He gets us caught up in "Mickey Mouse" conflicts in the church or in the home, and *while we are putting out brush fires*, he sneaks in and sets the house ablaze. And we don't understand. We thought that since we were "fighting God's battles", we were safe.

At any rate, Jehoshaphat and his mighty warriors came back to "Reality Gulch" and found out that their world had crumbled. In verses 15-17, a passage we've reviewed many

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times, Jehoshaphat or “Phatty” as we like to call him, told the people, “Relax...I just got a call from God and He said we have no need to fight this battle. The outcome is not up to us; it’s up to Him.”

So “Phatty”, instead of ringing the armory for more troops, calls the musicians’ union and asks if the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra is booked for the weekend. Then with his classical “Drum and Bugle Corps” leading the way, *they head straight for where the skirmish was destined to be*, knowing all the while that *it was God’s job to fight the enemy*. It was their job to praise Him in advance for doing so.

And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments about the...[enemy] (II Chronicles 20:22 KJV)

And the enemy crashed and burned.

When they began to sing and to praise...

When they began to express their joy...God moved in.

Were they happy? God forbid. They had just lost everything! But they *chose* to praise...*out of obedience* to God. *That’s what God was waiting for.*

That may be all He is waiting for in your life right now. The enemy may have you surrounded, and there may appear to be no way out. That’s not your problem. When Christ came into your heart, God assumed the responsibility to fight for you; you assumed the responsibility to sing and to praise and to express joy *even if and especially if* the sky is falling. Not a phony grin that hides an angry heart...a conscious release by the exercise of your will of God’s very joy that lives in you.

You do that, as we said, in two ways:

1- You praise God to God. (You make melody in your heart; you sing and you pray prayers of rejoicing back to Him) and

2- You demonstrate God to man...

by reflecting joy amidst the thunder’s roll,

by rejoicing even as the storm clouds form,

by singing and praising...even as the enemy’s guns sound their call to battle and the bullets fly, and your

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earthly cause for rejoicing fades into nothing.

You say, "Then you rejoice?"

Paul answers, "Then you rejoice!"

You say, "But how?"

Paul answers, "You rejoice in the Lord..."

(not in the circumstances).

You say, "Now?"

Paul answers, "Always".

You ask, "Paul, are you sure?"

He answers, "Again I say, rejoice!"

And from the corridors of Heaven, as the angelic host gather 'round the throne of our Lord, worshipping, singing anthems of praise, "Holy, Holy, Holy", it is as if the entire chorus of eternity shouts in unison...

"Again I say, rejoice!"

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