

WORD

Philippians 4:8-9 says, "8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. 9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

The Apostle Paul tells us in this Scripture that we are to focus or control our thoughts. He tells us that we are to think on, and even dwell on, whatever is right, lovely, good, excellent or praise worthy. He tells us that if we do the God of peace will be with us. It is much easier to laugh when we are thinking about the good things and have peace.

APPLICATION

- This week choose to think more on all the good things in your life. When you find yourself thinking of challenges, force yourself to start giving thanks for the blessings you have. Dwell on your blessings and you will feel blessed.
- Choose to laugh at your own unique personality traits and faults. Don't take yourself too seriously. Look back on some of the crazy mistakes you made and laugh about them.

Prayer: Lord, help us to know what to take seriously and what to laugh at. Help us to be more focused on the good in life and be filled with joy and peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Freedom Groups were created with the belief that we are all on a journey through life and that our heart's desire is to be free to be all that we can be. We all want to find effective ways of living and be successful. Trying to find these effective ways to overcome the challenges we face by ourselves just does not work well. We are all the same, no one is different. We need others to help us successfully walk our journey to effective living. Everyone is invited to freedom groups so we can journey together. Join in!



Joy

NOTES

WARM-UP

- When was the last time you laughed really hard?
- What was the cause of your laughter?
- What was so funny to you?

Laughter is one of the greatest gifts that humanity has been given. It is fun to laugh. It is fun to watch others laugh and it is even more fun to laugh ourselves. Laughter is so refreshing too.

Recently we had a pastor and spouse's gathering. The purpose of the gathering was to spend some quality time together, build relationships, honor retired ministers and of course to have fun. As part of the evening's activities, we played games and watched a few videos. The games and videos were very funny. The videos stuck with me in particular because many of them were poking good fun at the normal lives of pastors. We all laughed so hard. It was wonderful looking around the room and seeing other pastors and their wives laughing as hard as I was. We truly had a great time.

An old saying goes, "If a little does a little good then a lot will do a lot of good." I think this applies to Laughter. A little laughter is good but laughter is even better when it becomes almost uncontrollable. I am sure many of you have been to the point where you just could not hardly stop laughing. After a period of laughing we begin to laugh about our laughing. It is wonderfully contagious.

There has been more than one occasion where I have laughed uncontrollably. Several of these times of great laughter come quickly to mind. I remember when I was young having problems laughing in church. Something in the church service would strike me as funny and I would begin to laugh. My dad would usually flick my ear as a warning that I needed to settle down and get control of myself. Often I could get my laughter under control but sometimes I could not. When I couldn't stop laughing I would be taken outside and made to cry for a different reason. I would end up crying from disciplined.

The discipline I received as a child for inappropriate laughter did not seem to totally eliminate it. There has been several occasions as an adult where I have laughed uncontrollably in church. One time it was not even my regular church! What makes my uncontrollable laughter as an adult worse than during my youth are two things. First, as an adult I should be able to control it. Secondly, as an adult I have added to my uncontrollable laughter the "blessing" of uncontrollable snorting. When I get laughing too hard my laughter includes loud snorting. The "blessing" of the snorting is that if people were not laughing with me before I started snorting they surely join me in laughing after my snorting. Snorting always causes others to join in the laughing. Now that's a blessing!

Importance of Joy

Laughter is what we do when something brings us joy. Joy erupts into laughter and occasionally even snorting. Joy is the true source of laughter. Joy is defined as "a feeling of great pleasure and happiness." What are the things that bring you the most joy?

Laughing at Yourself

Part of what made the pastor's gathering so much fun is that we were all laughing together. The room was filled with laughter. Even better than laughing together is that we were laughing at ourselves. Often people do not want to laugh at themselves. Maybe they feel it will draw too much attention to them, that it will make them feel insecure, that people will see their faults or that people will think less of them. Whatever the reason, the ability to laugh at oneself is a gift. When we take ourselves too seriously it robs us of joy. None of us are perfect. We all have our faults and the reality is that other people already know most of our faults anyway. Laughing at them will not make our faults any more obvious but it will set us free from them. Why do you think it is so hard to laugh at our faults or other imperfections in our lives? Have any of you been able to overcome this obstacle to joy? If so, how? What change has this brought into your life?

Joy Is a Choice

The reality is that having joy is partly a choice. We all have challenges in our lives that could steal our joy. We also have a lot of blessings in our lives that could give us joy. The question is which do we focus our attention on? Do we think more about our challenges or our blessings? Do we choose to look for the good or the bad? Do we choose to shake our head at our mistakes and laugh or do we get stressed out over them? Do you think we tend to look more at the good or the bad? Why?
