

# **Acting Joyful Glorifies God**

*By Bobby Schuller*

Today, we are talking about joy, and as we navigate through the idea of being Daniel in the Lion's Den or Lions in the Daniel Den, we think of one thing and that is that joy is your strength. And let's begin there.

I believe that no matter who you are, if you have Jesus, you have joy. If you have Christ within you, you have joy. No matter how depressed, no matter how blue, no matter how sick, I think it's in there. And I believe that so much of living a joyful life is not about having joy, but about releasing joy. You are a joyful person. And I want you to claim that! I want you to think to yourself, 'I am a joyful person.' That joy is a good thing, that joy is happy, and that joy is holy. And I want to affirm in you that you are a joyful person, and that the joy that you have in your life gives joy to others because it's contagious, like a yawn. Try not to yawn right now. Your joy gives strength and hope and life to people who are struggling. And although sometimes we're struggling ourselves, one of the best things you can do is release your joy into a hurting world. I'm proud of you.

Joy is your strength. That is what the scriptures say. There is something about joy, this un-choke-able happiness that lives in our

bodies, that because we chose Jesus, joy chose us. And because of that, when tough times come in life, we have this amazing thing in our body, joy, that makes us strong. It's like armor. It's like no matter what we're going through, we can always laugh, smile, enjoy the time with the people we love, and experience God's goodness and grace in every moment because we know he has the victory. If you know that, you're filled with joy. Release your joy! Release it. Joy begins with Jesus Christ, but it materializes with your choice to act happy and do things that are joyful. And I'm going to make a big argument for that today. That no matter how you feel, if you feel glum, if you feel lazy and slothful, that you have joy in your body and you need to release it. You need to get it out. And when you get it out of your body, you'll feel it! You'll feel positive, you'll feel hopeful, you'll be smarter, and you'll be less scared if you release your joy today. So, do it and I know you will. Release your joy.

I remember when I was a teenager being bored, and it's been a long time since I've been bored. And I sometimes think, like when I'm going through really stressful times in my life, or like work seems to never end, and especially when I was studying and graduate school and other things, I remember thinking like how much I didn't appreciate the fact that I got to be bored. Do you know what I mean? Like 14, 15, summer vacation, no job, no bills, very few responsibilities, waking up at 10:00 in

the morning, some of you are like 10, 1 in the afternoon. Waking up, getting a bowl of cereal, going back to sleep, getting up again, and watching TV for four hours.

These times as a young teenager, I think about it I'm like man. And I remember back then and I have so much contempt for me back then because I would sit around and just think I don't want to do anything. I'm so bored. And I remember back then learning very quickly in the summer because I had all this free time that sometimes I would feel not only bored, but honestly a little depressed. Like blue, I didn't want to get out of the house. And so much about having a great summer was about just making a decision, a choice to get up, put some shorts and flip-flops on, and get out of the house and go fishing or go surfing or do whatever. And when I did that, then I felt alive. But sitting and bumming around the house really wasn't good for me. And it didn't make me feel joy and it didn't make me feel alive.

And this is something I've learned ever since, because there are definitely days even today that very often, a lot of people don't know this, but for preachers, Monday you have to fight the blues, the Monday blues. There's something about the adrenaline and all the work that goes into Sunday, probably you musicians get it too, am I right? Marc says that there's this thing on Monday where you wake up and you're tired, and

you feel blue. And there is this need just to decide to get up and get out. Get out of the house, go on a walk, go get a cup of coffee with a friend, go get breakfast with Hannah, take the kids to the park.

And the reason I begin with that is I think so much, we are so passive when it comes to our joyful life. We always expect joy just to make its way into our lives. But joy requires work, joy requires a choice, and, in fact, you have a responsibility to be joyful because joy is holy and it's a mandate from God. I'm serious about this. You know how I feel. This is a community of joy and we know that being positive and joyful is harder than being negative and slothy. Am I right? Being positive is hard! It is! Being joyful is hard work. But it's worth it.

So today, choose joy. Make decisions today that 'I'm going to act happy and act joyful even when I don't feel it.' And I know many of you, the younger you are, the more you hate what I just said. I've actually been talking about this for a long time that acting happy is your responsibility if you have no reason to be sad. I stole this from Dennis Prager, of course, and he stole it from Rabbi Nachman, so we all stand on the shoulders of giants.

Anyway, young people don't like the idea of acting happy when you don't feel happy, but I find the older people are, the more they believe

that because the more they've lived life and recognize that much of the emotions we feel are based on our decisions and our actions. Can I get an amen? It is true! So act joyful. If you act joyful, joyful feelings will follow. It's actually been proved and I'm going to talk more about that in a bit.

But before I get there, I want to talk first, especially to religious people. If you're super religious, I just want to say a few things to you. Did you know joy is happy? I can't believe I have to say that. That joy is happy and joy is holy. For some reason, I think there are some religious people that love to be solemn, depressed, and sad so much that they've redefined joy as sort of this hidden inner happiness that nobody can see, and that's a bunch of bull. Joy smiles! Okay? Is your joy happy? If it's not, you're not joyful. Joy is happy. Joy smiles, it laughs, it eats, it sings. Joy tells jokes! Joy hugs. Joy celebrates and joy lifts up others.

Joy is happy. In fact, the only difference between happiness and joy, if you really want to get technical, is that happiness is based on what happens to you; joy is a happiness that's all the time, regardless of what happens to you. But do not believe the lie that joy is not happy. Never trust a religious person unless you've seen them laugh at a funny joke. I'm just going to leave it there. Religious people that don't have joy don't have Christ. Religious people that don't have laughter don't have Christ.

Religious people that don't smile don't have Christ. Because the fruit of the spirit is joy and joy is happy, because happiness is based on knowledge - knowledge that I'm safe, knowledge that Christ has won, knowledge that he will have the victory, and knowledge that this story is already written and he will have the victory. That makes me smile! It makes me happy; it makes me joyful.

The reason I'm saying this is because you are joyful. You are joyful. You're happy. And there are people in this world that want to mock your happiness, they want to mock your joy, but when people mock your joy, they are mocking God. You are a joyful person, and that joy fights against the darkness. It gives light to people. It gives happiness to people. It lifts people up. There is nothing wrong with your joy. The more joy you have, the better. You are a joyful person, and your joy gives you strength and people are jealous of it. That's why they mock you. I know. I'm like the happiest guy in the world. I get teased all the time.

So your joy is your strength and let it exude from your body. And practice joy. Practice happiness. And practice lifting people up with your smiles and your encouragement and your positive outlook. It's a good thing, and God appreciates it and loves it because it honors God. Amen?

So joy, we just want to establish this first that joy is happy, okay? Joy smiles, joy eats, joy celebrates, okay? Joy is also holy, and I need everybody to say this, even though it's in the Bible a million times. Say, "Joy is holy." (AUDIENCE RESPONDS – "Joy is holy.") It is. It's the second fruit of the spirit after love, by the way, in Galatians. It's the second thing Paul mentions. Joy is happy, but joy is also holy.

The scripture reading from today was Nehemiah chapter 8. Nehemiah and the book of Ezra used to be one book; they were sectioned into two books in the second century. And in the book of Nehemiah is the story of what happens after Daniel is in the lion's den. After the Babylonian exile, the Persians come in, they free the Jews, and the Jews are free to come back to Jerusalem. Then, there's this experience when they're relearning what it means to be themselves, to be Jewish, to be Jewish apart from Babylon. It begins with the rebuilding of the city and the temple. In Nehemiah, it is completed with the finishing of the building of the wall and the gates. It's this amazing story of a people who have come back from seventy years of exile and have to rediscover what it means to be Jewish. If it's been 70 years, the oldest men and women would have been babies when the Babylonian exile happened. So two or three generations have gone by and people can't really remember what it's like to be Jewish. This is Bobby Schuller's opinion, okay? It didn't say

that in the scriptures, but you see in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah this rediscovery of self.

And in this, there's this really important moment when Ezra, who's the priest, and Nehemiah, who's the governor, and the Levites, who are the ones who oversee religious life, they come out and they begin to preach the Bible and speak the Bible to the people. And they have the Bible again and they're in Jerusalem, so it's this really holy moment. And all of these people who are gathered around, as they hear the scriptures read, they begin to weep and weep. And there's something touching about that.

But then, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Levites instruct them; they say, 'No, do not weep for this is a holy day.' Notice they didn't say, 'Do not weep for this is a happy day,' or 'Do not weep for this is a day of victory.' They say, 'Do not weep for this is a holy day,' and they say, 'The joy of the Lord will be your strength.' What do we pull from this? Religious people think that solemnity, grief, sorrow is holy, and sometimes it is. But intrinsic in that thought is that, well, happiness is not.

And Nehemiah and Ezra and the Levites say, 'It's holy, so don't grieve.' And, basically, they say, 'Go throw a party. Go eat and drink and get all your friends together, and people who don't have anything, cook

some food for them, and go bring it to them, and laugh, and celebrate.’ And it says that the people left that place filled with joy because they understood the word of God. Isn’t that awesome? Joy is holy. Joy is strength. Joy is life. And you are joyful, and your joyfulness pleases God. And the more joy you have, the holier you are. Joy is righteous, joy is good, joy is altruistic, joy blesses people, joy helps people, joy gives you strength, joy is light. Depression is darkness.

So do not grieve; today is holy. Be filled with joy for the joy of the Lord is your strength. You’ve never been stronger than when you’re filled with joy. Can I get an amen?

So, I believe that a big part of being joyful is an economic term, “priming the pump.” We learned this in business school. John Maynard Keynes said that in order to get the economy going you have to prime the pump. And what he meant by that is people need to spend money, either on the government, businesses, tax, things, whatever. That’s not here nor there. Priming the pump came from the idea from farming that when you have those little pumps, I don’t really know. How many of you grew up on a farm? Raise your hands so you can tell me if I’m getting this wrong. I’m a city boy. It’s something like this: There’s a pump and it goes into a well, but first you have to pour water into the well to get the water out. Is that right? You have to prime the pump.

So there's a ton of water down there and you have to put just a little water in to get a lot of water out, right? That's priming the pump. You are like a well. You have this whole bunch of joy stored up inside of you, but sometimes you got to prime the pump. Sometimes you got to fake it a little bit. Sometimes you got to act happy to get all that joy out of you. And you'll see it come out. And I really believe this because I practice it. I believe this in my own life and people say, 'You're a happy person,' but happy comes with hard work. I know. It's one of the few things I'm really good at is being happy.

So this is what I want to say is unless you are grieving about something in specific, like somebody died, or a divorce, or some major loss, grieving is healthy, grieving is good, but it needs to be intentional, and it needs to be for a time. But, your default should be joy and happiness. And if for no reason you feel depressed, blue, slothful, bored, I want to encourage you fake it. Fake it. Act happy even if you don't feel happy. One hundred percent, just act happy. Yes, fake it. Act happy even if you don't feel happy. And I just want to push back. You know, I like psychology, I believe in the hard work of the inner life; we've been talking about that for six weeks. But, today, I just need to take a moment and just say if you want to feel happy, act happy. And if you act happy, you'll feel happy.

So make happiness your default. So smile and make jokes, and hug people, and give people kisses on the cheek and do all those good things. Make happiness your default because the people who love you deserve happy company. Did you catch that? The people who love you deserve happy company. If you're acting unhappy for no good reason, you're being rude and you're not pleasing God.

Imagine there are ten people in a room and they all love each other very much, and one of those people is not happy. Can everybody else be happy? Not really. If you're in a room of ten people and you're not happy and you're blue and you're grumpy and you're critical, and the other nine people are happy, you've just given them a choice. They now get to choose: One, don't act so happy to match the posture of this person, or two, be rude and act happy in spite of them. So, you've given them a choice - to be gloomy or rude.

And now, if you're grieving, if you're going through loss, reach out to friends and grieve with them. But if you have no reason to grieve, fake it. It's a nice thing to do. And people say, 'Oh that is fake.' Yes, it's fake. So is showering and so is taking Advil and so is brushing your teeth. They're all fake. And people appreciate it when you put on deodorant, when you take a shower, though it's not real, it's not natural.

Many of you are saying, 'No, no.' I know that many of you just said it, because I've just felt it myself. There's a third option – I'm just not going to be around people anymore so I can be glum and gloomy. Don't do that, either. Be around people and be joyful around them because your joy is a ministry. Your joy is a ministry to people who are going through tough times. Life is hard for everybody. It really is. Nobody has an easy life. Everybody has a hard life. Some people have harder lives than others do. But still, everybody who's joyful and positive has to work at it. Contribute. And you do. You contribute. And when you walk into a room, you bring joy because you're gregarious and you're life-giving and you're joy-filled and you're happy and I'm proud of you. Way to go!

Now, I know when I say fake it, if you're a Gen-Xer or if you're a Millennial, you're like, 'Oh I'm checking out, I'm out of here.' And I just want to say, if you're still watching and you haven't changed the channel, and if you haven't left the church, God's going to reward you because I'm going to prove the science of this.

There is this phrase you've heard me say many times, and it began in recovery and alcoholics anonymous. It's "Fake it till you make it." This is something they train alcoholics, drug addicts, people with depression that if you have no reason to be grieving, act happy and then you'll feel

happy. What you're doing is training your body to be a happy body, your brain and your blood and everything else. You're training your body to be a happy body. You train your body, you train your muscles, why can't you train your brain? So fake it till you make it. If you act happy and you fake happy, if you act positive and fake positive-ness, you'll be positive. Your perspective will change. You'll see new things that you didn't see before. Don't give up. Act happy. You'll feel happy. Prime the pump.

And the reason I'm telling you this is because I love you. And I want you to have a joyful life, but I know that joy doesn't come to lazy people. Joy comes to people who make a decision to have joy. People who make a decision to get up in the morning, to get out of bed, to be positive, to see the good in the world, and to be joyful. So fake it till you make it. And let me just tell you something: it's not actually fake. And you may not get this sentence, but I think this is brilliant. So it's not fake, it's a life-hack! Do you people know what a life-hack is? It's not fake; it's a life-hack. It's a way of training your body and mind to be happy. It's what you have to do. If you want to be happy, you have to train yourself.

One of the main ways you can show happiness or fake happiness is so obvious, and that is smiling. I want to challenge you right now to try to fake a smile. Try it. Try it. I want to see everybody smile. Okay, can

I just point out this is not a cool church. You don't get points for being cool here; you get points for being happy. If you're too cool to smile, then frown. But I just want to see everybody fake, because I can see you. I can see you in the back; everybody thinks I can't see you. I want everybody to fake a smile. Try it. It's pretty good. It's really hard when somebody asks you to. It's really hard to fake a smile because it starts fake but if others see you, it's so awkward that it's funny and then it makes you laugh.

There is a science to smiling, and I read a great article published by Leo Widrich about how smiling helps others. When people see you smile their cortisol levels go down; it causes dopamine to go up. In other words, it makes them feel happy. It makes them feel happier and less stressed when they see people that they love smile. There was a study done about what smiling does to your brain and why it's a life-hack. When your smile muscles contract, there's a positive feedback loop that reinforces our feelings of joy. In other words, when you smile in life, even if you don't feel happy, it triggers the thing in your body that makes you feel happy. In other words, faking smiles actually makes you a happier person and makes you smile naturally more. Isn't that great? Because you smile and you're faking, and the other person smiles and it's real, and then you see they're smiling and you really smile. Then everybody's laughing and having a good time.

When you fake a smile, it causes real feelings of joy to happen in your body and that makes you actually smile, and that's a good thing. They wanted to see what makes people happy, and you know what almost topped the list? You're going to be really surprised by this. Chocolate. Absolutely. Chocolate almost topped the list about things that nail the reward center of your brain, that cause dopamine and happy feelings to go into your brain. But you know what beat even chocolate? Faking smiles! This is science, people. I know, I'm a pastor, right? I'm not a scientist, but this study says smiling reinforces our brain's reward mechanism in a way even chocolate cannot match. Yes! You can clap for that!

In other words, smiling changes the brain, changes your brain chemistry, it changes your body. When you smile around other people, when you fake it till you make it, when you release your joy into the world, you're training your body, your mind, and even your brain to be more joyful. And I'm telling you this because I love you, because I've practiced it.

There was a study done, a famous study, it's called the yearbook study. This is one sample. They did a yearbook study of people who had big smiles versus people who had fake or little or no smiles at all. And the study showed that the people with the biggest smiles lived happier

lives, had happier marriages, and had fewer setbacks. That smiling is actually probably healthy for your body. There was another famous study done called the baseball card study in which they went through old baseball cards and they studied the lives of the men who smiled versus the one who didn't for their baseball card pictures, and as an average, the men who smiled lived seven years longer than the men who didn't. Smiling is good for you. Smiling is good for other people. Being joyful is holy.

If I have chosen Jesus, joy has chosen me. And that's true. You may not feel it, you may feel blue, you may feel down, you may have been sitting on a couch for days, maybe you've just barely gotten to church today, and your knuckles are dragging, and you're like 'I don't even know why I'm here.' I want to tell you – you have such a well of joy inside of you and all you have to do is release it by doing the things that joyful people do. If you've done the hard work of bringing Christ inside your body, now you need to release your joy into the world because people need your smile. People need your hugs. People need your food. People need your joy. Joy is a good thing. Your joy lifts up people; it gives them strength.

Don't listen to people who mock you or tease you because you're positive and joyful. Being positive and joyful honors God. Your joy gives

people strength and I'm proud of you. And keep growing in joy because it's a discipline. It doesn't come to the lazy, it comes to those who work hard at being joyful, being vulnerable, being big hearted, being risk takers, and you're doing great. I just want to tell you that. Your joy is encouragement to the people who love you. Keep doing it. It's changing lives.

Let's pray: Father, we love you and we thank you that you've given us a choice. Many people here are listening and they say, 'Bobby, you don't know what I've gone through,' and to you, I just want to say, 'That's absolutely right.' Many of you have been wounded, you've been hurt, you've been let down, you've been betrayed, you've lost a lot, you've lost your health. I just want to say let it go and allow the joy that's in your body, and it is there, let it come out. Just try it for one day. So Lord, help us to have faith, to act in faith according to the joy that you've given us. To be happy people in the world in which we live. And I plead over you joy, happiness, smiles, hugs, a good life, a life that celebrates, a life that lifts others. In Jesus' name, amen.