

PRACTICING JOY - Pastor Dan Bradley (8.23.2026)

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

Big Idea: Christian joy is not merely a feeling to wait for; it is a grace to practice as we submit to God’s work, rejoice in our heavenly identity, and choose habits that cultivate joy. **Key Text:** “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

1. SUBMISSIVE JOY

- Joy does not require the absence of trials. James 1:2–4 calls believers to “consider it pure joy” when trials test faith and produce perseverance, maturity, and completeness.
- Our ability to rejoice grows as part of progressive sanctification. God is steadily maturing His children rather than leaving them spiritually immature.
- Spiritual growth changes what delights us. As we see more of God, Christ, and the gospel, our affections are increasingly shaped by divine realities.

Application: Instead of asking only, “How do I get out of this trial?” ask, “How is God using this to mature me, and how can I submit joyfully to His work?”

2. HEAVENLY JOY

- Jesus redirected the seventy-two from rejoicing merely in ministry success to rejoicing that their names were written in heaven (Luke 10:17–20). Our deepest joy rests in salvation, not circumstances or accomplishments.
- Jesus Himself was “full of joy in the Holy Spirit” (Luke 10:21), was anointed with “the oil of joy” (Hebrews 1:8–9), and endured the cross “for the joy set before Him” (Hebrews 12:2).
- Believers share in Christ’s joy. Jesus said that His joy can be in us and that our joy can be complete as we remain in His love and obey His commands (John 15:10–11).

Application: Anchor joy in what cannot be taken away: belonging to Christ, being a child of God, and the hope of His presence.

PRACTICING JOY — APPLICATION GUIDE

3. PRACTICAL JOY

- Practice the outward expression of joy. Proverbs 17:22 says, “A joyful heart is good medicine.” Even smiling can reinforce a more joyful disposition and reduce stress.
- Choose rejoicing over complaining. Psalm 118:24 calls us to rejoice in the day the Lord has made, while Philippians 2:14 commands us to do everything without complaining or arguing.
- Direct your thoughts deliberately. Philippians 4:8 tells believers to think on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy.
- Joy changes how we treat difficult people. Jesus commands us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44–48).
- Joy flourishes in humble, others-focused relationships. Philippians 2:1–4 connects joy with unity, love, humility, and looking to the interests of others.

FOUR PRACTICES FOR THE WEEK

Pray continually. Turn interruptions, frustrations, needs, and blessings into short prayers throughout the day.

Be thankful. Name specific evidences of God’s goodness, especially in difficult circumstances.

Exhibit consistent joy. Choose a joyful countenance, refuse unnecessary complaining, and speak words that encourage others.

Think joyfully. Replace obsessive negative thinking with what is true, excellent, and praiseworthy.

Key Connection: Prayer, gratitude, and joy reinforce one another. To practice any one of them consistently, we need all three.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- Where am I waiting for circumstances to improve before I allow myself to rejoice?
- What current trial could God be using to mature my faith?
- Is my greatest source of joy earthly success, or the fact that I belong to Christ?
- What patterns of complaining or negative thinking are stealing my joy?
- Who is difficult for me to love, and how can I pray for that person this week?
- What specific reasons can I give thanks to God for today?

Pray continually. Be thankful. Exhibit consistent joy.