



## the nature of **JOY**

Joy is our natural state, one of our most basic human needs and the only emotion an infant will seek on their own. To our brains, joy means someone is relationally glad to be with us, an actual experience in relationship with God or someone else. We experience and build joy best as we look into the face of another and know they are glad to be with us, like an infant looking into the eyes of a doting mother. Joy excites & motivates us to interact with the world and stay connected in relationships. We need high levels of joy to thrive and the amount of joy our brains hold is the greatest determinant of our resiliency throughout our lives.

When our joy levels are low, we struggle to recover from negative emotions, to stay motivated, or feel empowered. This can lead to all kinds of relational and developmental difficulties, including unhealthy dependencies or addictions. When our relational joy levels are low, we seek pseudo joy in what counselor Ed Khouri calls BEEPS: Behaviors, Experiences, Events, People, & Substances. These BEEPS can artificially help to regulate our emotions. They leave us feeling dependent upon them, yet empty. Low joy levels also lead us to feel depleted, overwhelmed, or weak.

When joy is low-lying, relationships, families, communities, and pursuits are vulnerable to being thwarted or destroyed. The enemy knows this, and he is happy to assist in stealing, killing, and destroying our joy levels (JOHN 10:10). He actively seeks to do this by generating conflict that creates distance in relationships or other traumas that disrupt our joy and instill pain and fear. The good news is that Jesus came to restore all that has been lost or destroyed. We can receive healing, we can receive and extend forgiveness, and we can learn new relational skills to grow our joy.

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Nehemiah 8:10 • Romans 14:17 • John 15:11 • John 16:4 • Luke 1:44 • 2 John 1:12 • Acts 2:28

## Benefits of **JOY**

Here are more ways joy benefits us. Joy...

- Creates a chemical response in our brain that feels euphoric. Releases dopamine – “that was good. I want to connect with God and others again.”
- Enables our brain to create & utilize serotonin.
- Directly affects emotional regulation later in life.
- Sets my brain up like fertilizer sewn to begin growing maturity.
- Enables us to grow a stronger and deeper sense of identity.
- Helps us maintain godly character to handle suffering well.
- Builds resilience that enables us to handle life’s pressures and challenges; it motivates (HEBREWS 12:2).
- Pulls me from operating in the back, most primal part of my brain, to the front. This enables me to respond rather than to react to people and situations.
- Generates the basis for building strong bonds and secure attachments & creates a desire to learn during the first years of life.
- Cultivates a desire to connect. Apart from relational connection and joy, serving God and others becomes “just duty.”

**Joy ushers us into the fullest experiences and expressions of who God has created us to be, the destinies he has designed us to live.**

*Question to Consider:* What would be the impact of you and your relational circles possessing more joy?