

The Anatomy of Joy

I find it interesting that joy is often seen as an optional extra. We love to quote the fruit of the Spirit and see the qualities as spiritual virtues to strive for except for joy. The Bible speaks of the joy of my salvation. **Joy is a spiritual quality, a mindset and disposition that has the emotion of happiness as a by-product.** Rejoicing is a biblical expectation. It is part of the fruit of the born-again spirit. The anatomy of joy is fascinating as many who have researched happiness and joy, combine insights from psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy. In our case today we are also examining the scriptures to see what they teach on Joy. I want to propose to you that **your destiny, the direction which your life takes, will be determined by what you choose to be your primary source of joy.** 25% of job success is predicted by IQ and 75% by your optimism, social support and ability to see stress as a challenge instead of a threat. This is to do with mindset.

One of the things we will explore in this message is the fact that God has designed our biology and physiology to make us happy. Endorphins are chemicals (produced mainly in the pituitary gland and central nervous system) that generally reduce pain and they work together with neurotransmitters like Dopamine which boost the pleasure and motivation to keep going. For example, research shows that serotonin in particular, lingers in your system after exercise and can be released by maintaining a positive mood. Dopamine is released when you move toward a goal, and oxytocin is activated through physical contact, intercourse, childbirth. Endorphins (Endogenous morphine) are your body's natural pain killers. Work is being done where they are increasing people's happiness and seeing their productivity going up by 31%. Happiness is a predictor of longevity just like smoking, high blood pressure and obesity have correlations with premature death. **Happy people feel more secure, decide easier, have more cooperative behaviour and finally have a satisfying life in today's dynamic and changing environment (Vinhoven, 1993).** In this message I will unpack the nature of true biblical joy and illustrate how we can use joy as a weapon in victorious Christian living. Outlined below are the differences between endorphins and neurotransmitters.

Endorphins and neurotransmitters like dopamine both affect how you **feel**, but they're **different in function, structure, and how they work in the brain.**

Endorphins vs. Dopamine (and other neurotransmitters)

Feature	Endorphins	Dopamine (Neurotransmitter)
Type	Neuropeptides (small proteins)	Neurotransmitter (chemical messenger)
Made by	Pituitary gland & CNS	Brain neurons (esp. in the midbrain)
Function	Pain relief, euphoria, stress buffering	Reward, motivation, pleasure, habit forming
Acts on	Opioid receptors	Dopamine receptors
Speed of Action	Slower, longer-lasting	Fast, short bursts
Triggered by	Pain, exercise, laughter, stress	Rewards, food, social praise, addictive drugs

Key Differences

- **Endorphins** block pain and create a sense of well-being, like nature's morphine.
- **Dopamine** is more about **motivation, reward**, and reinforcing behaviours ("do that again!").

They **often work together**—for example, during a runner's high:

- **Endorphins** reduce pain.
- **Dopamine** boosts the pleasure and motivation to keep going.

What is Joy?

Joy is a state of mind and an orientation of the heart. It is a settled state of contentment, confidence and hope. It is something that provides a source of happiness.

Joy is ...the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and the determined choice to praise God in every circumstance. Rick Warren.

Negative situations can change

Isaiah 35:10 and those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Levels of happiness:

1. **Pleasure of the moment** e.g. enjoying an ice-cream. Then it's gone. Momentary. **Yet some of the most extreme expressions are made at this basic level of joy.**
2. **Success by winning or achieving.** Feeding into self worth. E.g. scoring a goal. Feeling like the training paid off. But you can still have buyer's remorse. You look back and are satisfied/happy with your work.
3. **Contribution to your community** feeling connected and significant
4. **Fulfilment of a cause or purpose bigger than ourselves.** A sense of Meaning.

The happiest people don't chase success; they chase purpose.

Dr Arthur Brooks suggests that happiness is a mix of three components:

- **Genetics (50%) – A significant portion of happiness is inherited.** Approximately 40-50% of an individual's baseline happiness is influenced by genetics. This idea is based on twin studies and behavioural genetics research, which show that identical twins (who share 100% of their genes) tend to have similar happiness levels, even when raised apart. When we discuss the neurobiology of joy, I will explain this further.
- **Circumstances (25%) – External factors like wealth and success matter but only to a limited extent.** They give us a boost and then we return to a set point (homeostasis).
- **Habits & Mindset (25%) – Personal choices and attitudes, such as gratitude and purpose, have a significant impact.**

Sonja Lyubomirsky Studies the genetics of happiness and her findings show (50% genetic, 10% circumstances, 40% intentional activity).

While genes set a baseline, life experiences, habits, and social environments can modify gene expression.

Practices like gratitude, and strong social connections can enhance positive emotions even if someone has a lower genetic set point.

Happiness may have a genetic set point, but joy is a choice you make daily.

You don't just feel joy; you cultivate it through gratitude and meaning.

In Ancient Greek understanding, joy is something you feel moving towards your potential. You can contrast this with modern thinking of joy merely as pleasure.

Whether we are talking about a long run or childbirth it is painful but joyful. As I have resumed my running, I have been asking myself a few times whilst on a run whether I am enjoying it or not, I am typically not enjoying it, but I look forward to how I will feel later. Joy makes you want to do certain things. Joy makes us want to invest as deeply as possible into our loved ones. A common myth is that happiness comes from being blind to the negative. That's not true.

"If you sugar-coat the present, you make poor decisions for your future". Shawn Achor

Defining Joy

Old Testament (Hebrew)

1. שמחה (Simchah)

- **Meaning:** Joy, gladness, mirth
- **Root:** שמח (sāmah) — to rejoice, be glad
- **Usage:** Often associated with celebrations, worship, and the presence of God.
- **Examples:**
 - *Psalms 16:11* — "In Your presence is **fullness of joy** (simchah); at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."
 - *Nehemiah 8:10* — "...for the **joy (simchah)** of the Lord is your strength."

2. גיל (Giyl)

- **Meaning:** Exuberant rejoicing, spinning with joy
- **Connotation:** A more visceral, physical expression of joy.
- **Examples:**
 - *Isaiah 61:10* — "I will greatly **rejoice (giyl)** in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God..."

3. רנה (Rinnah)

- **Meaning:** Shouting for joy, jubilation
- **Usage:** Often in the context of praise or victory
- **Example:**
 - *Psalms 30:5* — "Weeping may endure for a night, but **joy (rinnah)** comes in the morning."

† New Testament (Greek)

1. χαρά (Chara)

- **Meaning:** Joy, delight, inner gladness
- **Root:** Related to χάρις (charis) — grace
- **Theological Insight:** Joy is closely tied to **grace** and is often seen as a **fruit of the Spirit** and a response to God's presence and promises. Chara - "extend favour, lean towards, be favourably disposed" – the awareness (of God's) grace, favour; joy ("grace recognized"). "Enter the joy of your master", "They returned with joy". "Hear the word with joy" "More joy in heaven for the sinner who repents..."
- **Examples:**
 - *Galatians 5:22* — "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy (chara)**, peace..."
 - *John 15:11* — "These things I have spoken to you, that My **joy (chara)** may be in you, and that your **joy** may be full."

2. ἀγαλλίασις (Agalliasis)

- **Meaning:** Exultation, extreme joy, leaping or jumping with joy
- **Example:**
 - *Luke 1:44* — "...the baby in my womb leaped for **joy (agalliasis)**."

1. Joy is an internal state

Joy is not primarily based on external circumstances. However it does have an external expression.

Phil 4:11-12 11I am not saying this out of need, for I have learned to be content regardless of my circumstances. 12I know how to live humbly, and I know how to abound. I am accustomed to any and every situation—to being filled and being hungry, to having plenty and having need....

Contentment is something you can learn. It comes with maturity.

James 1:2-3 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Consider or count it all joy. You have to take time to reflect and then choose how you will see it. This is why when people ask how life is treating me, I say "I am treating life well". This is the ability to see opportunity in calamity. **Stop waiting for joy to find you—choose it daily.**

1 Peter 1:8-9 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

This is the joy of your salvation. You can't explain it. It is inexplicably glorious.

Joy is essentially more to do with the unseen than the seen. When you are delighted only by circumstances then you just experience the lower levels of pleasure.

Joy is primarily a heart condition; having a joyful heart.

2. God is our source of Joy

Isaiah 9:2-3 2The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. 3You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Joy and peace produce hope. Hope is a by-product of joy and peace. Our role is to trust Him. That's our work. It's to believe. His work is to fill us with joy and peace. Joy is a by-product of trust.

Philippians 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"

The degree to which you make Jesus the source and centre of your joy is the degree to which you will experience supernatural inexpressible joy. You will always rejoice in something but when you rejoice in God it produces true joy.

3. Joy is a central aspect of the Kingdom of God

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,...

Luke 2:10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

The result of the Good News of the Gospel is joy. What news are you listening to?

1 Chronicles 16:27 Splendour and majesty are before Him; strength and joy are in His dwelling place.

Rom 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit...

If this is true, then why do many Christians look like they have been baptised in lemon juice? Did they not get the memo?

The King of the Kingdom is full of joy, so joy is part of being Christ-like.

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised and rejected--a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care.

If we can't feel sorrow, then we won't feel joy. Numbing is not selective. If you numb sorrow, you also numb joy.

Ps 45:7 is also quoted in Heb 1:9 and highlights this, speaking of the Messiah.

Ps 45:7 NKJV: "Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions."

Ps 45:7 (NIV) You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

Ps 45:7 (NLT) You love justice and hate evil. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you, pouring out the oil of joy on you more than on anyone else.

4. Joy draws people

Joy can be experienced at a national level. This is emotional contagion. Joy is infectious and people are attracted to it.

Esther 8:17 In every province and in every city to which the edict of the king came, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.

They were not intimidating but joyful, yet fear seized the others and drew them in.

5. Joy is our response to His presence

Sadly, many people disassociate joy and gladness from church. They think of religion like healthy food—it may not taste good, but it's good for you so you endure it. But the Bible declares that ***in God's presence is fullness of joy; at His right hand are pleasures forever (Ps. 16:11)***. If we as His people are to reflect His image, then we must become joyous people.

Isaiah 12:5-6 (NIV) 5 Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. 6 Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.

Jonathan Edwards has a wonderful sermon, "God, the Best Portion of the Christian," based on Psalm 73:25, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth." He writes (The Works of Jonathan Edwards [Banner of Truth], 2:106),

Hence we may learn, that whatever changes a godly man passes through, he is happy; because God, who is unchangeable, is his chosen portion. Though he meet with temporal losses, and be deprived of many, yea, of all his temporal enjoyments; yet God, whom he prefers before all, still remains, and cannot be lost. While he stays in this changeable, troublesome world, he is happy; because his chosen portion, on which he builds as his main foundation for happiness, is above the world, and above all changes. And when he goes into another world, still he is happy, because that portion yet remains.... How great is the happiness of those who have chosen the Fountain of all good, who prefer him before all things in heaven or on earth, and who can never be deprived of him to all eternity!

6. Sacrifice and giving should be done in Joy.

Ps 27:6 Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord.

When you do God's work, do it in joy. Stop whining as you serve and sacrifice for the Kingdom.

Ps 100:2 Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Not all songs are joyful

Ezra 6:22 For seven days they celebrated with joy the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because the Lord had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.

What do you need to be celebrating right now?

Proverbs 12:20 (NIV) "Deceit is in the hearts of those who plot evil, but those who promote peace have joy."

The Neurobiology of Joy

Neurobiology is the study of the nervous system, including the brain, spinal cord, and peripheral nerves, at the cellular and molecular levels. It explores how neurons communicate, how the brain processes information, and how neural circuits regulate behaviour, emotions, and cognition. Neurobiology overlaps with fields like neuroscience, psychology, and medicine, contributing to our understanding of brain function, neurological disorders, and potential treatments.

Neurobiology and Brain Chemistry

- Certain genes regulate **dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin**, which affect mood and overall well-being.
- Variations in the **5-HTTLPR gene** (linked to serotonin transport) can influence a person's predisposition to anxiety or resilience.
- People with **higher baseline dopamine activity** tend to experience more positive emotions.

1. Serotonin ("The Mood Stabilizer")

What It Does in Neurobiology:

- Regulates **mood, emotions, sleep, and digestion**.
- Helps maintain a sense of **well-being and calmness**.
- Low serotonin levels are linked to **depression, anxiety, and mood disorders**.
- Involved in **social dominance and confidence**—higher serotonin levels can lead to greater emotional resilience.

Ways to Increase Serotonin:

- ✓ **Sunlight exposure** – Boosts vitamin D, which aids serotonin production.
- ✓ **Exercise** – Aerobic activities (like jogging or swimming) increase serotonin levels.
- ✓ **Prayer and Biblical Meditation** – Lowers cortisol, improving serotonin function.
- ✓ **Diet** – Foods rich in **tryptophan** (turkey, eggs, salmon, nuts, seeds) promote serotonin synthesis.
- ✓ **Gratitude and positive thinking** – Reflecting on positive experiences boosts serotonin.

2. Oxytocin ("The Love Hormone")

What It Does in Neurobiology:

- Facilitates **social bonding, trust, and intimacy**.
- Reduces stress and anxiety while promoting **feelings of connection and security**.
- Increases during **childbirth, breastfeeding, and physical touch**, strengthening relationships.
- Plays a role in **empathy, generosity, and cooperation** in social interactions.

Ways to Increase Oxytocin:

- ✓ **Physical touch** – Hugs, massages, and cuddling increase oxytocin.
- ✓ **Social bonding** – Spending time with loved ones, deep conversations.
- ✓ **Acts of kindness** – Giving gifts, helping others, and showing appreciation.
- ✓ **Petting animals** – Interaction with pets significantly raises oxytocin.
- ✓ **Listening to music together** – Enhances group bonding and oxytocin release.

3. Dopamine ("The Reward Chemical")

What It Does in Neurobiology:

- Drives **motivation, pleasure, and reward-seeking behaviour**.
- Essential for **learning, focus, and goal achievement**.
- Helps regulate **mood, movement, and addiction behaviours**.
- Dopamine spikes occur when we achieve goals, experience novelty, or receive praise.
- Low dopamine levels can cause **lack of motivation, fatigue, and even depression**.

Ways to Increase Dopamine:

- ✓ **Set and achieve small goals** – Each accomplishment releases dopamine.
- ✓ **Exercise** – High-intensity workouts and weight training increase dopamine.
- ✓ **Healthy diet** – Foods rich in **tyrosine** (bananas, avocados, eggs, fish) support dopamine production.
- ✓ **Music and dancing** – Listening to upbeat music or dancing naturally boosts dopamine. (School war cries)
- ✓ **Cold showers** – Brief cold exposure stimulates dopamine release.
- ✓ **Novel experiences** – Learning new skills, traveling, or taking on challenges increases dopamine levels.

Here is a useful table to summarize the function of these neurotransmitters:

Neurotransmitter Function		Ways to Boost It
Serotonin	Mood regulation, emotional stability, relaxation	Sunlight, exercise, prayer, gratitude, tryptophan-rich foods
Oxytocin	Social bonding, trust, love, connection	Hugs, socializing, acts of kindness, petting animals, deep conversations
Dopamine	Motivation, reward, pleasure, goal achievement	Setting goals, exercise, music, novelty, cold showers

Prov 17:22 A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

Endorphins are released naturally through the pituitary gland, and these serve as “feel good chemicals” and natural analgesics. Smiling helps too. Once you smile, the facial muscles are automatically stretched. The movement of these muscles then triggers the brain to produce endorphins. So what you do with your body does affect your internal emotional state. Research shows that people who laugh more often release higher levels of endorphins in a day. In fact, statistics depict that children who laugh approximately 300 times per day are shown to release more endorphins relative to adults who only laugh about 5 times per day. Some people dispute these figures, but the point is that children laugh a lot more than adults.

One of Norman Cousins’s (Political journalist) most famous quotes is: *Hearty laughter is a good way to jog internally without having to go outdoors.*

So here’s the principle: **"You don’t laugh because you’re happy—you’re happy because you laugh."**

Joy gives you strength

Nehemiah 8:10 Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Research has shown that joy produces dopamine that helps you to perform better. Sadly, many people are anxiously trying to perform in order to produce results so that they can be happy, but it actually works the other way round. It is important to guard your joy, especially before embarking on significant endeavours. **Gratitude and trust fuel joy, while worry and doubt drain it.**

What should I do to become more joyful?

What is the research saying?

Even though genetics play a major role in happiness, life choices and habits still significantly influence well-being. **While some people may have a naturally higher happiness set point, anyone can improve their happiness through intentional actions like strengthening relationships, practising gratitude, and finding purpose.** In his book *From Strength to Strength*, Brooks outlines four key elements that sustain happiness: **Faith or Spirituality** – A connection to something greater than oneself. **Family** – Deep and meaningful relationships with loved ones. **Friendship** – Strong social bonds that provide emotional support. **Work and**

Meaning – Engaging in purposeful work that aligns with one's values. This reminds me of the study McKinsey did called Centred Leadership where they researched people who were successful but remained healthy. One of the common denominators they found was a sense of meaning in their work. They also found that these people positively framed their world.

Sonja Lyubomirsky's research shows that sustainable happiness is built through habits, not external achievements. One of her books has an interesting title: *The Myths of Happiness: What Should Make You Happy, But Doesn't, What Shouldn't Make You Happy, But Does* (2013).

Daniel Kahneman (Nobel Laureate in Behavioural Economics), found that momentary happiness (experiencing self) differs from life satisfaction (remembering self). He discovered the **Peak-end rule, where people remember experiences based on their peak emotions and how they ended. The research showed that beyond \$75,000/year (R1.4 Million), income has diminishing returns on happiness.**

Robert Waldinger (Director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, ongoing since 1938) Found that quality relationships are the strongest predictor of long-term happiness.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi developed the Flow Theory—people experience joy when fully engaged in an activity. Identified challenge-skill balance as key to peak experiences. Showed that intrinsic motivation leads to deep satisfaction and fulfilment. If a challenge is too high (beyond one's skills) → it leads to anxiety and stress. If a challenge is too low (below one's skill level) → it leads to boredom and disengagement. When challenge and skill are balanced → it creates a state of flow, characterized by joy, focus, and peak performance. Sports → A tennis player enjoys the game most when the opponent is slightly above their level—not too easy, not too hard. Work → Employees thrive when given challenging but achievable tasks that match their expertise. Gaming → Video games are designed to keep players in the challenge-skill balance to maintain engagement. Learning → Students learn best when material is neither too easy nor too difficult. My kids used to complain when they would play soccer with me, but they felt I wasn't trying hard enough. It was getting too easy for them. To stay motivated and experience joyful engagement, we need to seek activities where challenges match our skills while allowing room for growth.

What should I do?

1. Develop a lifestyle of consistent prayer

Prayerfully get your spirit to command your soul

Ps 42:5 Why are you down cast Oh my soul? Put your hope in God.

Studies show that individuals who pray regularly report higher levels of happiness, gratitude, and overall life satisfaction (Ellison & Levin, 1998). Frequent prayer has been associated with greater positive emotions and resilience (Whittington & Scher, 2010). Lower Depression & Anxiety: A meta-analysis of studies on prayer and mental health found that prayer reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression, especially when used as a coping strategy (Anderson & Nunnelley, 2016). Brain Activity During Prayer: Neuroimaging studies show that prayer activates the prefrontal cortex (associated with self-reflection and emotional regulation) and the anterior cingulate cortex (linked to empathy and positive emotions) (Newberg et al., 2001). The dopamine system (linked to reward and joy) is activated during prayer, contributing to feelings of peace and happiness. Prayer and Stress Reduction: Studies using functional MRI (fMRI) scans show that prayer reduces activity in the amygdala (which processes fear and stress), leading to greater emotional calmness and joy (Schjoedt et al., 2009). Regular Prayer and Long-Term Happiness: A 2019 longitudinal study found that individuals who maintained a prayer practice over several years experienced greater long-term well-being and life satisfaction (Chen & VanderWeele,

2019). Cross-cultural studies show that in both religious and secular societies, prayer is linked to greater emotional resilience (Koenig, 2012).

2. Embrace your power to choose

Edward Deci & Richard Ryan (1985, 2000) developed Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which highlights autonomy as a basic psychological need. The research shows the correlation between autonomy and joy. When people experience autonomy (making choices aligned with their values), they report higher levels of joy, engagement, and intrinsic motivation.

In contrast, when autonomy is restricted (e.g., excessive control in work or relationships), people experience frustration, stress, and lower well-being. Studies across cultures show that autonomy is universally linked to well-being, even in collectivist societies (Chirkov et al., 2003). People report greater joy when their autonomy is supported, even when making choices within social or cultural constraints.

Don't allow yourself to be manipulated. *"I love you and give to you because that's what I want to do, not because I am afraid of you. I am free."*

Brain imaging studies show that when individuals engage in self-directed activities, their dopamine system is activated, leading to greater joy and reward-related responses. **The prefrontal cortex (involved in decision-making) and the ventral striatum (linked to pleasure and reward, involved in dopamine release) are more active when people exercise choice.**

3. Develop meaningful relationships

As mentioned earlier, Harvard Study of adult development (For 75 years they have tracked the lives of 724 men). They found that the happiest people were those in meaningful relationships.

2 John 1:12 I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

4. Re-access your goals and values

Arthur Brooks speaks of **Hedonic Adaptation** – People quickly adapt to material wealth and achievements, which means they don't provide lasting happiness. You long for that dream car but once you get it, it's just a car. Instead, relationships and meaningful experiences are the real sources of joy. Brooks emphasizes that practising gratitude and focusing on serving others (rather than self-centred achievements) leads to lasting joy. **Success vs. Happiness Paradox** – He warns that chasing professional success alone often leads to unhappiness. Many high achievers struggle with "success addiction", which can result in dissatisfaction later in life. Also consider the challenge-skill balance. Make sure you are being stretched enough.

High challenge, high skill → Flow (optimal experience)

High challenge, low skill → Anxiety (overwhelmed, frustrated)

Low challenge, high skill → Boredom (disengaged, uninterested)

Low challenge, low skill → Apathy (lack of motivation, withdrawal)

Flow isn't just for athletes and artists—it's the key to a fulfilling life.

5. Abide in Christ

John 15:11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

This is called spiritual object constancy. You carry His love in your heart.

Your joy will be complete when you are filled with His words.

This produces contentment. In Christ I am complete. **His words are so dominant in my heart that other words don't affect me. His voice is the loudest within me. Listening to Jesus words breaks us into new levels of joy.**

Research has shown the positive impact of prayer on your emotional state and immune system.

Research has also shown a positive correlation between spiritual intelligence and happiness.

When we walk closely with Jesus, we carry His heart and are more likely to do acts of kindness which influences our level of happiness positively.

6. Develop a lifestyle of gratitude

This is rejoicing! You become joyful to the degree to which you rejoice. This is a verb that produces joy.

What you think about and what you thank about is what you eventually bring about.

Develop a gratitude journal where you write down 3 to 5 things that you are grateful for daily.

Rejoicing isn't a reaction; it's a habit that creates joy.

I will end this message with what I proposed at the start: **Your destiny is shaped by what you choose to be your primary source of joy.**

References from 8 Thought Leaders in Joy

1. Arthur C. Brooks

- **Books & Research:**

- *From Strength to Strength: Finding Success, Happiness, and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life* (2022)
- *Build the Life You Want: The Art and Science of Getting Happier* (2023, co-authored with Oprah Winfrey)
- *The Conservative Heart: How to Build a Fairer, Happier, and More Prosperous America* (2015)

- **Key Contributions:**

- Examines the science of happiness and joy, emphasizing **purpose, faith, relationships, and service**.
- Highlights the **hedonic treadmill** and the importance of shifting from success-driven to meaning-driven life.
- Advocates for "**crystallized intelligence**" as a path to fulfillment in later life.

2. Shawn Achor

- **Books & Research:**

- *The Happiness Advantage: How a Positive Brain Fuels Success in Work and Life* (2010)
- *Big Potential: How Transforming the Pursuit of Success Raises Our Achievement, Happiness, and Well-Being* (2018)
- TED Talk: *The Happy Secret to Better Work* (2011)

- **Key Contributions:**

- Research on **positive psychology** and its impact on productivity and success.
- The **Happiness Advantage Theory**—positivity fuels success, not the other way around.
- Promotes **gratitude, optimism, and social connections** as key drivers of lasting joy.

3. Martin Seligman (Father of Positive Psychology)

- **Books & Research:**

- *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (2002)
- *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being* (2011)

- **Key Contributions:**

- Developed the **PERMA Model** of well-being: **Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment**.
- Shifted psychology from **treating mental illness to enhancing well-being**.
- Explored the link between **optimism, resilience, and long-term happiness**.

4. Sonja Lyubomirsky

- **Books & Research:**

- *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want* (2007)
- *The Myths of Happiness: What Should Make You Happy, But Doesn't, What Shouldn't Make You Happy, But Does* (2013)

- **Key Contributions:**

- Studies the **genetics of happiness** (50% genetic, 40% intentional activity, 10% circumstances).
- Promotes **gratitude, acts of kindness, and positive thinking** as ways to increase happiness.
- Research shows that **sustainable happiness is built through habits, not external achievements**.

5. Daniel Kahneman (Nobel Laureate in Behavioural Economics)

- **Books & Research:**

- *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011)
- Research on "**Experiencing Self vs. Remembering Self**" in happiness studies.

- **Key Contributions:**

- Found that **momentary happiness (experiencing self)** differs from **life satisfaction (remembering self)**.
- Discovered the **peak-end rule**, where people remember experiences based on their peak emotions and how they ended.
- Showed that **beyond \$75,000/year, income has diminishing returns on happiness**.

6. Robert Waldinger (Director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development)

- **Books & Research:**

- Harvard Study on Adult Development (Ongoing since 1938)
- *The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Scientific Study on Happiness* (2023, co-authored with Marc Schulz)

- **Key Contributions:**

- Found that **quality relationships are the strongest predictor of long-term happiness**.
- Showed that **social connection improves mental and physical health**.
- Emphasizes **emotional security and strong social bonds** over material success.

7. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

- **Books & Research:**

- *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (1990)
- *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (1997)

- **Key Contributions:**

- Developed the **Flow Theory**—people experience joy when fully engaged in an activity.
- Identified **challenge-skill balance** as key to peak experiences.
- Showed that **intrinsic motivation leads to deep satisfaction and fulfillment**.

8. Richard Layard

- **Books & Research:**

- *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (2005)
- *Can We Be Happier? Evidence and Ethics* (2020)

- **Key Contributions:**

- Studied the economics of happiness and **why money doesn't guarantee joy**.
- Advocates for **public policy changes to prioritize well-being**.
- Research on **mental health, income, and societal happiness levels**.

Research on the relationship between prayer and Joy

Psychological Studies on Prayer and Well-Being

- Anderson, J. W., & Nunnelley, P. A. (2016). *Private prayer and anxiety-related disorders: A systematic review of the literature*. Journal of Religion and Health, 55(2), 460-478. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-015-0115-4>
- Ellison, C. G., & Levin, J. S. (1998). *The religion-health connection: Evidence, theory, and future directions*. Health Education & Behavior, 25(6), 700-720. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109019819802500603>
- Whittington, B. L., & Scher, S. J. (2010). *Prayer and subjective well-being: An examination of six different types of prayer*. Journal of Religion and Health, 49(4), 626-641. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-010-9316-0>

Neuroscience of Prayer and Positive Emotions

- Carlson, C. R., Collins, F. L., Nitz, A. J., Sturgis, E. T., & Rogers, J. L. (2019). *Mindfulness-based prayer and meditation: Effects on stress and emotional regulation*. Journal of Clinical Psychology, 75(3), 355-370. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.22698>
- Newberg, A., D'Aquili, E., & Rause, V. (2001). *Why God won't go away: Brain science and the biology of belief*. Ballantine Books.
- Schjoedt, U., Stødkilde-Jørgensen, H., Geertz, A. W., & Roepstorff, A. (2009). *Highly religious participants recruit areas of social cognition in personal prayer*. Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, 4(2), 199-207. <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsn050>

Prayer, Gratitude, and Social Connection

- Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). *Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life*. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84(2), 377-389. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.2.377>
- Krause, N., & Hayward, R. D. (2013). *Prayer beliefs and change in life satisfaction over time*. Journal of Aging and Health, 25(2), 291-318. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0898264312468154>
- Krause, N., Ironson, G., & Hill, P. C. (2015). *Religious involvement and happiness: Assessing the mediating role of compassion and social support*. Social Indicators Research, 123(2), 381-398. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-014-0746-9>

Longitudinal and Cross-Cultural Findings

- Chen, Y., & VanderWeele, T. J. (2019). *Religious service attendance, prayer, and human flourishing: A global perspective*. Journal of Positive Psychology, 14(6), 731-739. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1579361>

- Koenig, H. G. (2012). *Religion, spirituality, and health: The research and clinical implications*. ISRN Psychiatry, 2012, 1-33. <https://doi.org/10.5402/2012/278730>