

# KINGDOM EMOTIONS

## Joy and Anger, *James 1:2-3, 19-20*

We live in a consumerist culture in which joy has become bound to the products and services promoted by marketers and influencers. At the same time, we live in a culture where outrage has become the expected response to a growing list of offenses. No matter how we feel about our culture's values, its influence shapes us. That shaping complicates the already challenging balance between joy and anger. This lesson, which considers the place of joy and anger in our lives, concludes a short series examining some of the conflicting emotions that attend following God's will in the world.

### Biblical joy and righteous anger

- God intended life to be enjoyable, entrusting to humanity a beautiful and abundant world designed to meet their needs.
- While the world can still be a source of joy, God never intended human joy to focus on the creation. Instead, God intended the blessings of the creation to remind humanity that He is the ultimate source of joy. Consider, for example, joy's connection to God:
  - God, who gives "every good gift and every perfect gift"<sup>1</sup> (*James 1:16-17*), authors the things that bring us joy.
  - Joy does not exist in the gifts God gives, but in the relationship with Him those gifts prompt us to seek (*1 Chronicles 16:23-27; Psalm 51:11-12; 16:5-11*)
  - God's joy, centered on our loving relationship with Him, offers a source of strength to us (*Nehemiah 8:9-10*).
  - Jesus – God in human form - promised to give his followers the full measure of his joy if they "abide in [his] love" if they pursue a love-motivated relationship with him (*John 15:9-11*).
  - God's joy, the joy Jesus promised to 'fill up' in his followers, connects to the Holy Spirit's presence in Christians' lives (*Acts 13:52; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; Galatians 5:22*). Joy connects to the Holy Spirit because he evidences our relationship with God and mediates that relationship on our behalf (*Romans 8:14-17, 26-27*).
- The origin of biblical joy in one's relationship with God rather than the circumstances of one's life explains the sometimes-unexpected things connected to it. For example:
  - While an emotion, joy's connection to one's relationship with God also makes it an action that can be commanded (*Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16*).
  - One can, consequently, cultivate joy in their life by committing to a faithful relationship with God.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- The apostles' rejoicing over their suffering reminds us that joy can exist even amid suffering and sorrow (*Acts 5:41; cf. Acts 16:25; Hebrews 12:2; 1 Peter 4:13; 2 Corinthians 12:10; 7:4; 8:2*).
  - Life's difficulties become a source of joy because they strengthen one's connection to God (*James 1:2-3; Romans 5:3*).
  - Suffering can be a source of joy because it allows us to follow Jesus' example (*1 Peter 4:13*).
- Because our joy centers on our relationship with God, violations of His will and disregard of His identity ought to solicit our anger (*cf. Exodus 32:19; Mark 3:5*).
- While anger can be 'righteous,' its place in many of the Bible's sin lists reveals the danger it poses. Consider:
  - Jesus linked murder and anger, teaching that both solicit God's judgment (*Matthew 5:21-22*).
  - James wrote that anger does not "achieve the righteousness of God" (*James 1:19-20*).
  - Paul instructed the Ephesians that unresolved anger gives "the devil an opportunity" to exercise his will in one's life (*Ephesians 4:26-27*).
- The Bible's presentation of anger as a sin, however, needs to be balanced against the following items:
  - God and Jesus experienced anger (*2 Samuel 6:7; Mark 3:5*).
  - Anger is not necessarily a sin (*Mark 3:5; Hebrews 4:14-15; cf. Colossians 3:5-8; Ephesians 4:26*).
  - While God's "very good" creation included making us emotional beings (*cf. Genesis 1:31*), our sins deform those emotions (*cf. Genesis 2:21-3:11; Matthew 5:27-28*).
  - Anger deforms when it transitions from righteous indignation to self-centered concerns (*Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:1-13*).

## Applications

- While we might experience joy and anger, **we will only achieve biblical joy and righteous anger by intentionally cultivating them within our lives.** Intentional cultivation requires a realistic plan and accountabilities; it requires time and involves lifestyle changes.
- **Biblical joy and righteous anger require proper focus.** Jesus' 'greatest commands' outline that focus (*Matthew 22:34-40*):
  - Our love for God motivates us to want what He wants; His will replaces our will.
  - God's will motivates us to prioritize the well-being and concerns of others over our circumstances.
  - The focus of biblical joy and righteous anger requires us to learn humility, in part, by seriously considering the concerns, complaints, and thoughts of others rather than defaulting to our concerns, complaints, or thoughts.
- Because they focus on God and others rather than us, **biblical joy and righteous anger require trust in God.**

