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# AUTHENTIC JOY



**What's the best forgery, fake, or fraud you've seen or heard about?**

**QUESTION #1**

## THE POINT

*Authentic joy flows from a relationship with Jesus.*



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Between 1590 and 1613, William Shakespeare wrote close to forty plays that are still performed around the world. So in 1795, when William-Henry Ireland produced documents supposedly written by Shakespeare, the world took notice. Several experts authenticated the documents. When Ireland “found” a previously unknown Shakespearean play called *Vortigern and Rowena*, it was immediately put into production. But the first performance revealed a play so bad that fighting broke out and Ireland was revealed as a fraud.<sup>1</sup>

Ireland didn’t find these documents at all. He had cleverly aged parchment paper and learned to forge the handwriting of the famous playwright; eventually however, these works were seen for the forgeries they were. At some point, inauthenticity will always be revealed—even when it is in a Christian’s attitude.

Most of us can be polite and friendly when we have to, but genuine joy calls for something deeper. People can detect the difference between a superficial “I’m glad to see you” and authentic joy. We cannot manufacture such genuine joy, but we will possess it when we’re consumed with the gospel and the love of Christ.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## ***1 Thessalonians 1:1-3***

**<sup>1</sup> Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. <sup>2</sup> We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, <sup>3</sup> remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The Christian church did not have a peaceful beginning in Thessalonica, the capital and largest city of Macedonia. Paul, Silas, and Timothy visited the city on Paul's second missionary journey. Many people in Thessalonica accepted the missionaries' message of Christ, but the Jewish community incited a mob to attack the house where the missionaries were staying. (See Acts 17:1-5.)

Nonetheless, the church had gotten off to a good start overall, but then Paul had to leave hoping the good work of the gospel would continue. Paul was not disappointed. He later received word that the new Christians in Thessalonica were continuing to grow in the faith and were persevering despite the continued persecution they were experiencing.

So great was Paul's joy that he wrote the letter we know as 1 Thessalonians. In these first few verses, you can hear not only his relief but also the great joy Paul felt after hearing what was going on there.

The Thessalonian Christians were working, laboring, and enduring. Paul was certainly thankful, and his thankfulness carried a sense of confidence that all these things would continue. But how could Paul be confident that these believers, young in their faith—believers he had spent so little time with—would continue working, laboring, and enduring?

***What do work, labor, and endurance have to do with faith, love, and hope?***

**QUESTION #2**

His confidence was not in the Thessalonians' ability. They were just ordinary people, weak and fallible. No, his confidence was in the foundation of their work, labor, and endurance. Faith produced their work. Love motivated their labor. Hope inspired their endurance.

Because the foundation was sure, the outward actions would continue. It is important for us to remember that any outward signs of our faith—like joy, for example—are ultimately dependent on the firmness of our foundation.

The battle and the work of the Christian are to be done at the heart level. And though it might not be as immediately gratifying as focusing on the beauty at the surface, this deep soul work where the Holy Spirit molds and shapes us is where we find our true strength. Long before our joy is expressed outwardly to others it is formed inwardly through our faith, hope, and love.

## ***1 Thessalonians 1:4-6***

**<sup>4</sup> For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup> because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup> And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,**

The foundation of our entire being is built on our salvation in Christ. These Christians believed the gospel, received the Holy Spirit, and were confident they had been accepted and welcomed into the family of God. As a result of that sure foundation, they had a joy that was unshakeable.

***What are some ways  
your life reflects the  
joy of the gospel?***

### **QUESTION #3**



If we are truly confident in our salvation in Christ, then we should have a true and authentic joy that is apparent to all who come in contact with us—and such joy is infectious to those around us. This authentic joy is one of the greatest ways we can have a welcoming heart and spirit. With such joy we truly desire for others to experience the same certainty and joy that we have experienced.

What does this kind of joy look like? Authentic joy that arises out of salvation in Christ has at least these three characteristics:

- 1. Authentic joy does not wax and wane with circumstances.** We tend to associate joy with what's going on during our day. But joy is deeper than a mere sentiment or emotion; joy does not ebb and flow with our circumstances. Joy finds its source in God and in God alone.
- 2. Authentic joy is more solid and stable than the rising sun.** Because joy comes from God, our unshakable Rock (see Ps. 18:2), we can know our true source of joy will never be shaken. That means we are never without hope.
- 3. Authentic joy is not found in immediate gratification but by pushing past it.** Everywhere we turn, the promise of happiness is held out for us, but joy is much deeper. Author C. S. Lewis wrote: "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."<sup>2</sup>

*How does demonstrating joy in difficult circumstances make a difference in the kingdom?*

#### **QUESTION #4**

## 1 Thessalonians 1:7-10

**<sup>7</sup> so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. <sup>8</sup> For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. <sup>9</sup> For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**

The Thessalonian believers presented just such a joyful witness. Paul reported that the believers in this city had become an example for others throughout the region and beyond. These believers had a reputation—a joyous designation that pointed to Christ and served as an invitation for others to embrace what they had. What a wonderful thing!

Perhaps you desire that too, but the circumstances of life seem to constantly threaten living in such joy. Maybe we can begin by reminding ourselves daily of a few things:

- ▶ **Remember what you deserve.** One of the great enemies of joy is entitlement. Entitlement creeps in when we look around at our circumstances and begin to foster the idea that we deserve something better than the situation or circumstance in which we find ourselves.
- ▶ **Remember what you have.** Another enemy of joy is comparison. We can get so caught up in our own covetousness that we simply don't have any room for joy. In those moments we should reflect on what we truly have.
- ▶ **Remember what was paid.** A great price has been paid for our salvation. We were not rescued from our empty way of life by silver or gold; no, it was by something much more valuable. Jesus was given for our sake. And in response, we begin to cultivate hearts that are no longer entitled. Instead, our hearts burn white hot with joy for the glory of the Lamb that was slain.

*How can the truths of these verses help our group be more welcoming?*

### QUESTION #5

# AUTHENTIC JOY

*Using the words below, put a box around the actions Paul took toward the Thessalonians and a circle around the actions for which the Thessalonians were known:*

**Prayed**

**Turning from idols**

**Faithful work**

**Thanked God**

**Serve the one, true God**

**Remembered**

**Enduring hope**

**Wait for Jesus' return**

**Loving labor**

Now underline the actions that produce authentic joy in your life as you interact with other people for Christ.

How will these affect the way you live out your week?

*"Joy is the serious business of Heaven."*

— C. S. LEWIS

# LIVE IT OUT

A faithful walk nurtures authentic joy with Christ. Choose one of the following applications.

- ▶ **Thank someone.** Who is one person in your life who lives with authentic joy? Write a note and thank that person for his or her example.
- ▶ **Grow in joy.** Take a hard look at the three suggestions for growing your joy (see page 49). Write them on index cards and place them in spots where you will see them on a daily basis.
- ▶ **Journal your thanks.** Because joy is linked with gratitude, begin a “thankful” journal. Each day for the next month write down something you are thankful for and watch your joy begin to grow.



Happiness and a plastic smile can be manufactured easily enough, but time and circumstances will reveal the phoniness behind it. Authentic joy, on the other hand, will shine through, for it is rooted in what God has done for us in Christ.

My thoughts

1. Doug Stewart, “To Be . . . Or Not: The Greatest Shakespeare Forgery,” *Smithsonian*, June 2010, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/to-be-or-not-the-greatest-shakespeare-forgery-136201/>.

2. Lewis, C.S., *The Weight of Glory*, (Harper One, 1949), 26.