

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY FIFTEEN

Happiness Is a Walk on the Wall

Nehemiah 12:27–47

The secret to our daily happiness cannot depend upon our external circumstances. True joy must depend upon daily contact with and love for the Lord Jesus Christ, who is preeminent over all.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHO doesn't want to be happy? For many, personal happiness is their sole pursuit in life. Yet, frustratingly, happiness is often a slippery goal—like a wet bar of soap that leaps right out of your hand. Though we seek happiness, all too often it feels like we live in an entirely *unhappy* world.

Every day, we deal with financial insecurity, relational friction, broken bodies, or emotional trauma. More than this, war tears apart nations and families. Natural disasters wreck homes and communities. Famine starves innocent children. Disease kills loved ones. Realities like these thwart the pursuit of happiness, making that trite platitude, “Don't worry! Be happy!” an unrealistic mockery.

But what if God doesn't call us to be happy? What if, instead, He wants to see our lives overflow with *joy*?

This *Searching the Scriptures* study looks at an ancient community who lived joyous lives despite enduring burdensome realities. Their example demonstrates how we, too, can experience joy in an unhappy world.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Do you face unhappy circumstances today? Do the burdens of life weigh heavily on your soul? Bring these concerns to God. Jesus Himself said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. . . . For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light” (*Matthew 11:28, 30*). Allow Him to give you joy as you say this prayer:

Father, I know You are the source of true joy. Though my happiness may come and go, I know You never change. Remind me of that truth as I open Your Word today. May I forever rejoice in Your goodness. In Jesus’ name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

God called Nehemiah to move from the palace in Persia to live in the ruined city of Jerusalem. Amid this challenging transition, Nehemiah set his mind on two tasks: to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and to recommit the people of Jerusalem to serving their God.

Despite strong pushback at every turn of the journey, Nehemiah accomplished exactly what he set out to do. The city had walls again. The people had agreed to follow God again. And the people had resettled into the city. Now, it was time for dedication and *celebration*.



Observation: Dedication of the Wall

The dedication of the new wall of Jerusalem is recorded in *Nehemiah 12:27–47*. As you read, put yourself in the city. Feel the excitement of the moment. Hear the instruments playing and the voices singing. Experience the joy of a people wholly committed to God. Placing yourself in the scene helps you observe what the text says.¹



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Nehemiah 12:27–47

According to *Nehemiah 12:27*, what role did the Levites play in the “joyous occasion” of this dedication ceremony? According to *12:30*, what did they do before they carried out this task? Why is this sequence of events important?

Nehemiah explained that he “led the leaders of Judah to the top of the wall and organized two large choirs” (*Nehemiah 12:31*). One group proceeded to the south (*12:31*) and the other to the north (*12:38*). Then, they all “played and sang loudly” together (*12:42*). *What a sight!* According to *12:31*, why did Nehemiah organize these two choirs?

According to *12:43*, in what other way did the people of Jerusalem express their joy? What kind of far-reaching effects did this ceremony have?



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Nehemiah 12:27–47

According to *Nehemiah 12:44, 47*, with what kind of support did the people of Jerusalem contribute to the ministry of the priests and Levites? Why did they respond in this manner?

How does *12:45–46* situate the events of this dedication ceremony within the broader story of Israel?

In these verses, we find much more than the dedication of a wall. We find people whose hearts were really rejoicing. Just imagine what the people living outside the city must have thought when they looked up. On this broad wall came dozens—maybe hundreds—of people making music to their God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Dedication of the People

This passage simply exudes joy! You can almost hear the music rising off the page. As the people of God reflect on His faithfulness, they simply can't resist praising Him.



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Nehemiah 12:27–47

What is joy? In what ways do joy and happiness resemble one another? In what ways do they differ? What is the source of true joy? What are some results of joy? Feel free to look at a *Bible dictionary* (like *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* available for free at biblestudytools.com) to help you engage with these questions.

Ultimately, the people of Jerusalem faced largely unhappy circumstances. In light of the broader context of the book of Nehemiah, what reasons would the people have had *not* to act joyfully? Why were they able to maintain an attitude of joy regardless of their circumstances?

Using the following template, write two or three timeless truths based on this passage: *A godly leader can lead a life characterized by joy by . . . because*



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Nehemiah 12:27–47

I don't want us to be proverbial ostriches, who stick our heads in the sand and smile our way through hard times. I want our hearts to be light as we see things from God's perspective. I don't think our heavenly Father, the Lord of this earth, has yet come to a place of frustration. The things of this earth are marching toward His divine, perfect plan regardless of the scars we now bear. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Dedication to Christ

As the cross loomed over Jesus, He gathered His disciples for a final meal and a final lesson. He made the purpose of this lesson clear: “I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!” (*John 15:11*). The disciples likely heard this and wondered, *How can I be joyful when You've told us You are about to die?*

Jesus answered this question in *John 16:16–22*. Summarize Jesus' message in your own words.

In this statement, Jesus explained the eternal nature of joy when He said, “So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy” (*16:22*). What is the relationship between Jesus' resurrection and true joy?



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The book of Philippians demonstrates joy in action. In *Philippians 2:2*, the apostle Paul used almost the same expression Jesus did in *John 15:11*: “Make my joy complete . . .” (NASB). According to *Philippians 2:2–4*, in what ways did Paul want the Philippian believers to complete his joy? In what ways does true, Christ-centered joy act as the fuel for these kinds of behaviors?

Jesus came to offer us joy—*complete* joy. The good news of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection provides us with eternal life, everlasting hope, and endless peace. Because we know that Jesus will return to conquer Satan, sin, and death and to redeem creation, we can truly *rejoice* for all He has accomplished.

Application: Dedication to Joy

Based on his reflection of the topic of joy, Pastor Chuck developed a set of timeless principles, which the people of Jerusalem in Nehemiah’s day clearly demonstrated:

1. An atmosphere of happiness should surround God’s people.
2. Music is one of the most expressive ways to communicate joy.
3. A joyful spirit will have far-reaching effects on others.
4. Joy is not dependent upon outward circumstances but upon inward focus.



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Nehemiah 12:27–47

As you reflect on your own life, what reasons has God given you to rejoice? Write down some sources of *true joy*, not mere happiness.

What are some practical ways you can communicate your joy in worship? The people of Jerusalem rejoiced in song. List two or three practical ways you can rejoice.

In what ways have you seen the joy of the body of Christ either draw in nonbelievers or encourage other believers? How do you sense the Holy Spirit leading you to serve others through your own joy?



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Nehemiah 12:27–47

Though happiness is often elusive and temporary, joy remains steady and abiding. This blessed gift of God is the product of that hope that God will redeem this broken, sinful, and messy world. This joy ultimately allows us to smile . . . even amid the unhappiest of circumstances.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I rejoice in You and in You alone. I rejoice because You loved me enough to send Your Son to die in my place. I rejoice because He rose from the dead and now offers me new life. I rejoice because He will return to defeat Satan, sin, and death. I rejoice because I will live with You forever. Thank You. Help me never to forget the reasons for my joy. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

