

Lesson 8 A Prayer of Joy Psalm 66

Purpose: To teach us how to express joy.

Joy: (n.) a feeling of great pleasure and happiness; a thing that causes joy.

Life was not intended by God to be a joyless ordeal. As much as it might surprise some of us, it is actually God's desire for us to experience joy. Joy is an act of relating to God with vulnerable, unselfconscious gratitude for the good gifts he gives. Joy comes when we allow ourselves to express our gratitude for his love with emotional and physical energy. Joy is the celebration of God's love.

Personal Reflection. Think of a time when you experienced joy. What evoked this feeling in you? How would you describe the experience of joy?

Note from the ESV Study Bible: Psalm 66. This psalm was written in thanksgiving for God's answer to the prayer of a particular member of His people. Perhaps it was especially suited to the occasion on which a worshiper brought various sacrifices to express his thanks and consecration (cf. **vv. 13-15**). The marvel of this psalm is the way in which the first half (**vv. 1-12**)—with its references to "us" and to "all the earth," and its recounting of God's "awesome deeds" for Israel—sets God's deeds for the particular person into the context of all mankind.

Outline of Psalm 66

- **66:1-4** Let All the Earth Worship of God!
- **66:5-7** Come and See How God Brought Israel out of Egypt.
- **66:8-12** Let All People Bless the God who Preserved Us!.
- **66:13-15** I Will Come to His House with Offerings.
- **66:16-20** Let Me Tell You How God Has Heard My Prayer.

This psalm invites us to experience joy. Read **Psalm 66**

Discussion:

1. The writer calls us to action (**vv.1-3, 5, 8 and 16**). What does he call us to do?
 - a. He calls us to "Make a joyful noise unto God; Sing forth the honor of His name and make His praise glorious; to say unto God, how terrible are thou in thy works.
 - b. He invites the readers to "Come and see the works of God; to bless God and make the voice of his praise to be heard." He also invites us to "Come and hear the psalmist declare what God hath done for the psalmist soul."
2. How are each of these behaviors related to the experience or the expression of joy?
 - a. These behaviors of praise and adoration can generate overwhelming gladness and uncontrolled cheerfulness as we think about and focus on the goodness of the Lord.

3. What does the section in the middle of this psalm (**vv. 8-12**) tells us about the cause for this particular expression of joy?
 - a. The middle section of this psalm tells us that the cause for this expression of joy is the things God has done for us. In particular, it for God's deliverance and protection. Even in God allowing affliction and testing or proving us there is delight. Why? Because it is for our good.
4. How might this kind of experience lead to joy?
 - a. The joy in this section is related to the experience of being delivered from danger.
 - b. Deliverance through things by God can create confidence and delight in the Lord.
5. **Verses 13-15** talk about offering animal sacrifices as an expression of joy and worship. A person's livestock was the equivalent of our personal bank accounts. How can giving materially be an expression of gratitude and joy?
 - a. Giving materially puts many things into perspective. It is a tangible way of expressing the truth that all we have comes from God and belongs to God. It is a tangible way of saying thank you. And expressing gratitude is very closely related to expressing joy.
6. **Verses 16-20** are a personal account of what the Lord has done. What does the writer say the Lord has done for him?
 - a. The writer says that He cried unto the Lord and not only prayed for things, but also highly praised God. He said God heard him and gave heed to his voice. He said that God has not turned away from his prayer nor has he turned away His lovingkindness from him.
7. How might this kind of experience lead to joy?
 - a. Here joy is related to the experience of being personally loved. Experiencing God's love in personal ways can generate joy on the inside. This is because we can experience God's love on the inside despite what is going on outside of us!
8. What other ways of expressing joy to God would you add to the list in question 1?
9. In what ways are joy, praise and worship related?
 - a. Joy, praise and worship are related in that one focuses on the character of God and the works of God. We bring God's worthiness to heart and celebrate His deliverance, provisions, and his goodness. They are related in that one can lead to the other two.
10. It is important to realize that this psalm is not about pretending to be joyful when it is more honest or appropriate to be grieving or angry. What dangers are there in pretending to be joyful when we are not?
 - a. One danger in pretending to be joyful when we are not, is that we deny how we are really feeling. We may be denying reality also.

- b. Another danger is that pretending to be joyful requires self-effort. What happens when we are tired of pretending?

11. Why is it important to allow ourselves to experience and express joy?

- a. The expression of joy is an act of intimate relating to God. Others may not know it or understand it—the smile, the joy, the cheerfulness. But God knows.
- b. Nehemiah 8:10 reads, "...for the joy of Lord is your strength." God can give us the will and the strength to keep going. It may be a song or a scripture that rekindles the joy!

12. What joy would you like to express to God?

Prayer: Take sometime to express your joy to God in a time of prayer.

Now or Later

Make a list of all the gifts God has given you that contribute to your joy.

Below are some Scripture references to kinds of joy, descriptions of joy, and some ways joy is expressed.

Kinds of:	Reference
Foolish	Proverbs 15:21
Temporary	Matt. 13:20
Motherly	Ps. 113:9
Figurative	Is. 52:9
Future	Matt. 25:21,23

Described as:	Reference
Everlasting	Is. 51:11
Great	Acts 8:8
Full	1 John 1:4
Abundant	2 Cor. 8:2
Unspeakable	1 Pet. 1:8

Expressed by:	Reference
Song	Gen. 31:27
Music Instruments	1 Sam. 18:6
Sounds	1 Chr. 15:16
Praises	2 Chr. 29:30
Shouting	Ezra 3:12,13