

This was sent out as a video on April 8, 2020. Just want everyone to be encouraged and still get the messages. Thank you for your patience and pray that you are well.

**FLEA Video #1:
"Where's The Joy?"**

As we listen to the news in this seemingly brand-new world in which we live, we as Christians still have an obligation - and the incredible privilege - of shining the light of Jesus Christ into the world. And a huge part of being that shining light is to live our lives with joy. With all the fear and anxiety in the world as people worry about their health and their jobs and the economy and so on, a life being lived in joy just might stick out a wee bit. But how do we do that?

Well, we might want to start with a movie moment from the 1960 Disney film, *Pollyanna*. Pollyanna was a young girl, the orphan of missionary parents, who was brought to a small town to live with her wealthy aunt Polly. Her aunt's wealth controlled most of what happened in the town, so people were fearful of opposing her - no matter what they thought of her.

By contrast, Pollyanna was a cheerful girl who tried to see the bright side in every situation in which she found herself. One of the ways she had learned to do this was to focus on the "happy texts" in the Bible. There were, according to her late father, over 800 happy texts in the Scriptures. As she said he had taught her: "If God told us 800 times to be happy, he must have meant it."

Now, while I personally haven't counted how many "happy texts" there are in our Bible, I do agree with that movie moment: If God has told us a whole bunch of times to be happy, he must have meant it.

So how do we do that? Well, there are two Bible verses I am most often drawn to when I think about "happy texts" - one from the OT and one from the NT. The Old Testament verse comes from the book of Nehemiah, where he said to the Israelite people: "*[T]he joy of the Lord is your strength*" - *Nehemiah 8:10b*. In the New Testament book of Galatians, we find the apostle Paul listing the "fruits of the Spirit": *[T]he fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* - Paul, *Galatians 5:22-23a*. Did you hear the second fruit he mentions? Joy. Now both words for "joy," Hebrew and Greek, declare a similar meaning: rejoicing, delight and gladness. But this is not some quick, fleeting joy, driven by a moment of human satisfaction, but a lasting, enduring, eternal joy - driven by our response as Christians to our possessing the amazing grace of God. This joy cannot be dimmed because it comes from an eternal storehouse - as Paul described it to the Philippian church, *the riches of [God's] glory in*

Christ Jesus - Paul, Philippians 4:19b. It is that truth, that foundation of blessedness based on the eternal riches of the glory of God, that allows Paul to exclaim a few verses earlier: ***Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! - Paul, Philippians 4:4.*** That doesn't work unless Paul's joy is based on something outside of the momentary ups and downs of this world. And praise God, it is!

And one last thing: There is no way that I can personally think of joy in the Lord without thinking of our future, eternal home in heaven. Actually, I learned that from Jesus himself. Remember when he was with the disciples in the Upper Room, just before they left to go to Gethsemane? As they were in turmoil over so many things, he reassured them: ***"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me" - Jesus Christ, John 14:1.*** In other words, "hey, guys; don't be worried about what is going on in this moment because, as sure as you can trust God, you can trust me, too." And then he tells them something more: ***"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" - Jesus Christ, John 14:2-3 (NKJV).*** Translation: This world is not all there is. In fact, nothing in this world is even going to last; it's all going to go away. But I'm planning something that will take all your worries away, something that will be so much better than anything this silly world could ever offer - my Father's house. That's where the greatest life of all is waiting for everyone who believes in me - one that will never end.

No matter what people think has value in this world, it is absolutely nothing to what Christians have to look forward to in heaven. As Paul reminds us: ***[O]ur citizenship is in heaven - Paul, Philippians 3:20a.*** Now is it OK to be concerned with things in this world, like the pandemic swirling all around us? Absolutely - concern drives us to prayer. But fear and anxiety? No. Those do not come from God. Those come from living unsure of who's in charge. If we're trying to be in charge, living in our own strength, it's fear and anxiety that are going to rule. But if we are living in the assurance of God in charge, then it's simply the peace and joy of watching God at work. Because we walk in God's grace while we wait for eternity in God's presence, we can live with a joy that should overwhelm anything this world throws at us. We have the opportunity of living in the joy of the Lord and, like all else in our faith, that joy should look like something. If our focus is on who walks with us on earthly streets while we wait to walk with him on heavenly streets, our joy will be evident to all around us. Joy in the Lord should stand out in this world, because, in this world, there's nothing else like it. So go ahead; flex your strength - in the joy of the Lord! God bless, y'all!