

Spiritual Warfare Series - Fighting With Joy

by Jim Cymbala

The joy of the Lord is our strength in spiritual warfare, and it is essential to maintain joy in the midst of battles.

Duration: 28:20

Scripture: Psalm 16:11, Proverbs 4:20-22, Proverbs 23:7, Jeremiah 15:16, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of focusing on positive truth and God's love, as it produces joy. He warns against dwelling on past hurts and encourages Christians to fill themselves with things that bring joy. The preacher shares the story of George Mueller, a man of great faith who fed and clothed thousands of orphans through prayer and trust in God. The sermon concludes with the reminder that in the presence of God, there is joy, and that even in difficult times, God is working behind the scenes to make a way.

Transcript

This one, the warfare that I want you to think about, is very applicable to a lot of us today. And it's unknown to a lot of people. When I speak this, you're gonna say, I never thought of that.

First of all, we want to establish the fact that the scripture tells us we're all involved in something called spiritual warfare. We are in a battle against principalities and powers. What are they trying to do? Break our faith, pull us away from Christ by discouragement, distraction, temptation, you name it.

Just something to just oppress us, pull us away. And it's a battle, a struggle, as we see. So let's read about it, and then talk about an aspect of it maybe you never thought of.

This'll be quick, to the point, but let's digest it. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

Finally, be what in the Lord? Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. So the devil has schemes, and to stand against it and overcome it, we have to be strong.

Notice, in the Lord, not in bicep, tricep, not in vitamins and all of that, that has its place, but we have to be strong in the Lord with spiritual power. Amen? Okay. Why? Because there's schemes, there's schemes.

And this has always profoundly affected me because I watch the National Geographic and the Animal Channel and all of that stuff, and they're always doing stories, usually about some cat that hunts, usually female lions. Tigers are harder to track and follow, and lions work as a team. The first time I saw it, I couldn't believe it, but it's true.

The female lions will wait in the long grass and they'll approach and creep up to a herd of buffalo. And they all have a strategy and they're gonna run it and cause panic. But they'll go and they'll just study, wolves do this, when they do check out a herd of whatever they're going after.

And they'll just lay in the grass and watch. And nobody knew what they were watching because they'll do it for so long. And they're eating and the buffalo are doing whatever.

And then, boom, they make their hit. And they don't go after the first animal they run into. You would think, whatever animal's nearest, you just attack that one and try to get it by the neck and squeeze its life out.

No, no, no, no. They all pick out an animal somehow and communicate it with each other. And that's the one they're going after.

And they have found out that when they make their run and go after an animal, they have picked up a limp, a weakness, sometimes youth, young, even disease. They've examined the buffalo kills and they have found out that the lions somehow picked up that it was diseased and thus not strong enough to withstand their attack. This is the way Satan goes about for he goes about like a roaring, what? A roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

The Bible says that a lot of things in life you'll get pity but in spiritual warfare, there is no pity. You might get pity from your family. You might get pity from the government.

If the hurricane knocked out your house, you could get FEMA funds. There's no such a thing as mercy with the enemy. God has mercy.

He'll protect us. But no mercy from the enemy. Obviously, be strong in the Lord because to be weak or to say I'm not what I should be, I'm not reading the word, I'm not strong in the Lord, that's like whistling.

Come and get me, attack. Because they're always looking for weakness. So the Bible says be strong.

Notice in the Lord, in the Lord. And many times when we're weak in ourselves, his power is made perfect in that weakness because we throw ourselves on him and he makes us strong. Now, I wanna take you back a couple thousand years.

Israel was sent into captivity because they disobeyed God. The Assyrians attacked the northern kingdom, then the Babylonians came in and defeated Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, left it in ruins, knocked down the walls of Jerusalem, which was a common practice then. It was conquer and divide.

They took the leading men, men like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and others, and they spread them throughout the Babylonian Empire. God had predicted this and even told how long it would last, 70 years. The Persian Empire conquered the Babylonian Empire during this period of time.

So now the Jews were scattered among the Persian Empire. God raised up a Persian ruler by the name of Cyrus who, through a long story, thought about the people of Israel being away from their homeland, and he commissioned them to go back, those who wanted to go back, but they had been living for 70 years in

captivity, generations, a couple generations had gone by. Some people didn't know what Israel even looked like.

But he said, those who wanna go back, but it's not easy, you gotta go back, and you're gonna have to rebuild the walls and rebuild the temple. So the books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell us the story about that process. Lot of discouragements, a lot of attacks from enemies, but they went back, led by God, a remnant, a small group to go back and try to rebuild Palestine, the land of Israel.

While they were there, Ezra was the scribe and the spiritual leader. Nehemiah was the governor and took care of more secular affairs, but both godly men. One day, Ezra gathered all the people after they had rebuilt the walls and felt more security, and he set up a huge meeting on the first mention we have in the Bible of what is now commonplace in synagogues and in churches, which is a platform.

It's the first mention, really, although Solomon kind of prayed on a lifted up area too, but it tells us that Ezra stood up and he read, along with the other Levites, the priestly tribe, he read from the book of the law, and he told the people, this is what God's word says. We've so backslidden, we don't even know what's in the word of God anymore, like what's up with this? So now we're gonna read this, we're gonna read it to you. So he's reading it to them on a raised platform, possibly a lectern or a pulpit to put it down, and he had other priests reading it with him.

The reading of the word of God had a great effect on the people, and they began to cry. They began to get convicted. They began to say, oh no, Moses said that? God told him, don't do that? What is this all about? What have we done? And they began to weep and cry.

But this was a day of blessing and a day where God wanted to celebrate his faithfulness among the people. So now a very famous verse is gonna come. So Ezra and the leadership tells the people this.

Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, this day is sacred to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep, for all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the law. Nehemiah said, go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared.

This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. The joy of the Lord is your strength.

No matter how God breaks you, no matter how he deals with you, you can't stay sad because the joy of the Lord is your strength. You can't be depressed and strong spiritually. You can't be sad and mournful and be strong spiritually.

Why? The joy of the Lord is your strength. The Levites calmed all the people saying, be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve, stop crying.

There's a time to cry, but then there's a time to rejoice. Tears are for the night, but joy comes what? In the morning. Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and celebrate with great joy because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

The joy of the Lord is our strength. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. A lot of years ago in the 1800s, there was a great man of God, German by birth, but he lived in England.

His name was George Muller and his name now is synonymous, if you know about him or read about him, one of the greatest men of faith that ever lived. He literally fed and clothed thousands of orphans without ever taking an offering, just by prayer and by trusting God. God supplied in year after year after year everything they needed.

It was a modern day miracle. Muller has a two volume autobiography that's very, very interesting. Books have been written about George Muller because he was such a godly person.

He wasn't so strong in the pulpit, although his Bible teaching is profound, but he was more known as an expositor or an encourager, an exhorter, and this man of faith and prayer. So his secrets of spiritual living, I have always looked into and his analysis of the Bible is very profound. Muller said this, I have faced all kinds of problems in my life.

This is a man who at times had no food for the children, but God would tell him, sit down and say grace, I'll provide. And while they were praying, someone would knock on the door with the food that the kids needed. It's incredible reading.

So Muller said, here's what I found out, the only way I can survive in this warfare, this attack on my faith. He said every day I start with the word of God and I start with prayer and I look at the promises and I meditate on them because the word strengthens prayer. Prayer makes the word come even more alive.

He said, but I never leave my room until I'm happy in Jesus. Because there's so many battles in life, there's so much sadness, there's so many sorrows. He said, I can't do it unless I find myself happy and rejoicing in Jesus.

What he was really saying is, the joy of the Lord is our strength. You can't fight against Satan sad. The only way you can go to war is smiling and happy.

That's crazy because to us, you go to war, what happens when you go to war? You're serious, you're hostile, agile and mobile and you're ready to get it on against the enemy but in spiritual terms, it's the opposite. Unless you're happy, unless you're rejoicing, if you just put on a front in front of people, listen carefully, you just put a front in front of people in church, praise God and then you're secretly living in the basement and everything is gray and purple and depressing and sad. That is the devil's playground because the joy of the Lord is our strength.

In fact, the Bible says repeatedly in Philippians, rejoice in the Lord always and again I say, rejoice, rejoice in the Lord. You gotta be happy for the fruit of the spirit is love joy. Second thing mentioned, after love.

You have to be happy or you can't face the enemy and we live in a victimized society where everybody's a victim of something. Ride the subway, just stop in any restaurant or diner and just hear what people are talking, everybody's complaining. I'm a victim, they're depressed, they're angry and they're justifying why they're depressed and why they're angry but the Bible says it doesn't matter what happened to you in the past, doesn't matter how people treat you, the joy of the Lord is your strength.

You have to be happy if you're gonna fight this battle. Listen, a lot of ministers have opened up to me and I know my own battles. Unless you are happy in the Lord, you are susceptible to all kinds of temptations but when you are happy, you're gonna stand valiant on the battlefield and you're gonna be more than an overcomer.

In fact, the Bible describing what Christianity is even like says this in Romans. Romans 14 verse 17, for the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking. It's not about food, it's not about what kind of clothes you put on.

You wanna know what the kingdom of God is really about? It's about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. That's what the kingdom of God is about. You wanna see a strong Christian? You'll see a happy Christian.

You wanna see a weak Christian? You'll see a depressed Christian. That's just the way it is. Because the joy of the Lord is our strength.

How are we gonna stand against the enemy when we're not rejoicing in the Lord? When we're happy in the Lord, he has to watch how he approaches us. But when we're feeling bad for ourselves, it's like whistling for him to attack. Now the Bible talks about joy from the beginning to end.

If you're here today with a broken heart, I don't care who did it to you. I've had my heart broken. I don't care how hard it is, you gotta get happy in the Lord.

You gotta. But pastor, I just lost a loved one or something. Did you know that Paul says it's possible to be sorrowful yet rejoicing? You're sorrowful in one part of you because you lost a loved one.

But the bottom has to be joy. Because if it's all sorrow, you're gonna have a bad day. Come on, do I get an amen here? Some of us are thinking about how this all works out in our lives.

But listen to what the Bible says is supposed to be our posture when we go to war. Psalm 30, verse 11 and 12. Here's what the whole thing about Christianity is.

You turn my wailing into dancing. You remove my sackcloth and you clothe me with joy that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. Oh Lord, my God, I will give you thanks forever.

Now there's a picture of somebody who knows where it's at. Here's a picture of someone who has grasped the way God wants us to live each day of our lives. You turn my wailing into dancing.

You remove my sackcloth. That speaks about mourning and depression and sorrow. And you clothe me with joy that my heart may sing to you and not be silent.

Oh Lord, my God, I will give you thanks forever. You show me, come on, let's put our hands together and say amen to that. You show me a thankful, happy, joyful, singing believer.

Martin Luther said he can't even ascribe how much music meant to his spiritual life. He went further and said anyone who doesn't like music and like to praise God, I have suspicions of them. Because when you're right with God and when you're open to the influences of God in your life, how could you not be singing? How could we not be happy? The world's depressed.

How can we be depressed if we have Jesus Christ? We have to be joyful. Someone once said that, and I believe it's especially for the day we live in, the testimony of joy is louder than any word you say. People are so empty and sad that when they see someone who's truly joyful, not with the fake smile and all on those energy drinks and just all hyped up, but I'm talking about the joy of the Lord.

How many are with me? The joy, when you have the true joy of the Lord, people take notice of you. One of the leading godly ladies in our church, Sylvia Glover, has given her testimony from this platform. And she was living with some Rastafarians and on all kinds of drugs and smoking weed as part of her religious ceremony.

And as she said, they said, the higher you get, the closer you get to God. And she said, I was getting very close to God. And a woman in her office invited her to church.

And she said, get out of here. I don't want to hear about your church. Junk you're talking about.

But she said, the thing I couldn't escape was, I was so empty and she was so full with joy. I could not escape that. Like, how are you so happy? But when you meet a depressed Christian, you meet a nasty, cranky, what testimony is that? That Jesus Christ is great and awesome.

So, a singing, happy, rejoicing Christian is what God wants us to be today. And I have learned in my life, because there's, you know, I've gone through some mental, emotional difficulties the last few months at the end of the year from traveling too much, was lacked wisdom. And beside pastoring, counseling, trying to write books and all of that, I ended up trying to help people who invited me, made 37 ministry trips to different places, just in the first 11 months of last year.

And seven were overseas involving time changes. 12 hour, seven hours, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and so on. So something happened to my nerves and my emotions that I had to come home suddenly from one trip, never got to preach, because I just, I couldn't do it.

And I noticed as I'm working my way through this and God is helping me, I noticed that one of the targets here is for Satan to take my joy. Because when you're tired and you've been through a lot, you've fought a lot of battles, you prayed for a girl, your daughter, to come back to God a lot of years ago when she was a teenager and whatever, and you counsel people and you believe God for millions of dollars and you go through all of that, you can get tired and if you're not careful, you can start feeling sorry for yourself. Come on, anybody here ever have a pity party? I mean with invitations and balloons and a cake and the whole thing, I mean a real pity party.

And the Bible tells us that the joy of the Lord is our strength. You have to be childlike and full of joy. Let's just close by saying how.

Look, when your words came, I ate them. They were my joy and my heart's delight for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty. Jeremiah, who was called the weeping prophet because of all the persecution he went through, he says when your words came, I ate them and they became the joy and rejoicing and my delight for I bear your name, O Lord my God.

That's one of the first verses I ever memorized when I was in college. This word, if you read it and meditate on it, it will bring you joy. If you read the Daily News, I don't know.

If you read the Post or the Times, some blog, I don't know. But this will bring you joy. Read Psalm 119, that longest of all chapters in the Bible.

All the joy that came by just hearing the good news of God's love for us. If you don't focus on this and his love and his promises, you will focus on something. Look, everyone here is focusing on something.

If you focus on positive truth and God's love for us, it will produce joy. If you think about what people have done to you in your life and what happened back in Port of Spain, Trinidad, 11 years ago, you could get very depressed because people act ugly, people act nasty. Wherever you're from.

Am I right or wrong? And the saddest thing is to see Christians who instead of filling themselves with things that will give them joy, they play videos from 20, 30 years ago. I counsel people who tell me what someone did to them 30 years ago, they're still dwelling on it. Can they change it? No.

Will it help them? No. But are they thinking about it? Yes. And what does it produce? As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.

You can't think junk and get joy. You gotta think God's truth and get joy. Can we put our hands together and say amen to that? We gotta meditate on God's word.

Let me just give you one here that the Lord just gave me, literally just in the last, this time of like, getting through a little struggle here because my emotions and my nerves never faltered my whole life by God's grace. And this lack of wisdom just, it's like you go through like a night. So here's a verse I just read in a devotional and it spoke to me.

And all during the night, God pushed back the sea and made a way for the Israelites. It's from Exodus. Listen, listen again.

This is what God used his word to help me. All during the night, remember they were stuck. They got to the Red Sea.

Who was chasing them? Pharaoh and his chariots. And what was on both sides? Mountains. Nowhere to go, nowhere to go.

And he said to the people, why are you mourning? Why are you discouraged? Why are you doing all of that? Trust me, I didn't bring you out to get you killed. And then the Bible says Moses prayed, lifted up his staff and it says all during the night, God worked somehow miraculous to make a way which became a testimony to all the people. Read the rest of the Old Testament.

They're always referring back to Passover night and coming through the Red Sea. They're always referring to it. When did God do it? During the night.

The Lord spoke to me on that. He said when you go through night times in your life, seasons of difficulty, you don't see what God is doing. You don't feel anything.

You don't see anything. God is working in the middle of the night. And he's preparing something that we could never even imagine because, yeah, let's put our hands together and just say amen.

So those words bring joy. That brought joy. That brought joy to my heart in a moment that I needed joy.

I needed joy at that moment. Just one last one. Look at this.

Surely you have granted him, the man of God, eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence. In the presence of Jehovah, there's joy. That's why hearing the word, meditating on it, and spending time in church or alone in the presence of God, oh, does it change everything.

Troubles vanish. Hearts are mended. In the presence of the king.

The enemy wants us to be distracted, never give time, never enjoy God's presence. In churches today around America, unfortunately, enjoying the presence of God to a lot of Christians is a foreign element. Just sing a few songs, someone preach, and then we go home.

But this lingering and worshiping and enjoying his presence, what are you doing? That's emotionalism. It's not emotionalism. Seasons of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord.

There's joy in God's presence. How many have ever been down, and you just got in God's presence or a meeting, and God lifted you up, and you left the building just so happy in the Lord? So that's what we can do. I don't care what's happening around you or who let you down.

We have his word that will bring joy. His presence brings joy. And then I love that, I love that thought where David says, wait a minute, why are you, you ever talk to yourself? You need to.

I've been talking to myself lately. Not when anyone's around, but I talk to myself. And David says this.

Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy. God is my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, oh God, my God.

Why are you so downcast, oh my soul? Why are you so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God. For I will yet praise him, my savior and my God. David says, wait a minute, why am I going down? I'm not living in the basement, I'm living on the roof.

I'm gonna praise God. Soul, why are you so downcast? How many are believers here? Just say amen. Every sin you've ever committed has been washed away and there's no record anywhere, anywhere in the universe of any wrong thing you've ever done.

You can't rejoice in that? I don't know about the economy. I don't know about Obamacare. I don't know, I don't care about any of those things.

I know one thing, my name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. My sins have been forgiven me. Number two, I don't care who let you down.

Jesus said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So you're not alone. Satan, you're a liar.

People might have left me alone, but he did not leave me alone. And if you should die tonight, God forbid, but if our time should come tonight, we're not going just the body to the dust. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

We're gonna spend eternity with God. Someone says, no, I have a big 401k. I got something better than a 401k.

Come on, we have the promise of eternal life. Our sins are gone. The Lord is with us.

Close your eyes with me. Praise God. I'm rejoicing now better than when I started.

If you're heartbroken, I've had my heart broken. If you're having a problem with your nerves or emotions, I've been there. If you have a temperament that easily goes to sadness and being morose, you gotta understand this today.

Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, for the joy of the Lord is our strength. The joy of the Lord. You cannot be strong in the Lord if you're not happy in the Lord.

His joy working in you through the Spirit is gonna make you strong. You'll be able to overcome the enemy. You're gonna stand having done everything in the day of evil.

But we gotta face every single day happy in Jesus. Not complaining, not nasty, not mad, not angry, not begrudging other people, not feeling sorry for ourselves. We gotta start with God is with us.

God is with me. Praise God. His blood has washed away all my sins.

He's with me today. And I'm gonna live a life of joy, for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

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