

# The Secret of Gladness

by J.R. Miller

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*The sermon explores the profound sources of joy and gladness in the Christian life, emphasizing God's creation, providence, and the importance of maintaining joy amidst adversity.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 5:11, Psalm 9:2, Psalm 31:7, Psalm 32:11, Psalm 68:3, Psalm 90:14, Psalm 100:2, Psalm 118:24, John 16:20, Philippians 4:4

**Topics:** "Joy in Suffering", "The Source of Christian Gladness"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the secret of gladness in the Christian life, asserting that true joy is not dependent on circumstances but is rooted in God's love and grace. He explains that while Christians will face trials and sorrows, their joy can remain unshaken, as it is derived from a deep relationship with God. Miller encourages believers to cultivate a spirit of gladness through gratitude, a happy home, and a good conscience, while also recognizing the beauty of the world around them. He concludes that the essence of Christian gladness is a learned response to life's challenges, reflecting the light of Christ even in darkness.

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## Transcript

"But let all who take refuge in You be glad; let them ever sing for joy!" Psalm 5:11

"I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High." Psalm 9:2

"I will be glad and rejoice in Your love" Psalm 31:7

"Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous. Sing, all you who are upright in heart!" Psalm 32:11

"But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful." Psalm 68:3

"Satisfy us in the morning with Your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days." Psalm 90:14

"Worship the LORD with gladness; come before Him with joyful songs!" Psalm 100:2

"This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!" Psalm 118:24

It is worth while to be a singing bird, in this world in which are so many harsh and discordant sounds and so many cries of pain. Even a bird's songs put a little more music into the air. It is yet more worth while to be a singing Christian, giving out notes of gladness amid earth's sorrows.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Philippians 4:4. For most of us it is not easy to be always joyful; yet we should learn our lesson so well that whether amid circumstances of sorrow or of gladness -- our song shall never be interrupted.

Joy is God's ideal for His children. He means for them to be sunny-faced and happy-hearted. He does not wish them to be heavy-hearted and sad. He has made the world full of beauty and full of music. The mission of the gospel is to start songs wherever it goes. Its keynote is joy -- good tidings of great joy to all people. We are commanded to rejoice always.

This does not mean that the Christian's life is exempt from trouble, pain, and sorrow. The gospel does not give us a new set of conditions with the hard things left out. The Christian's home is not sheltered from life's storms -- any more than the worldly man's home is. Sickness enters the circle where the voice of prayer is heard, with its hot breath -- as well as the home where no heart adores and no knee bends before God. In the holiest home sanctuary, the loving group gathers about the bed of death, and there is sorrow of bereavement.

Nor is grief less poignant in the believer's case, than in that of the man who knows not Christ. Grace does not make . . .

love less tender,

the pang of affliction less sharp,

the sense of loss less keen, or

the feeling of loneliness less deep.

God does not give joy to His children by making them incapable of suffering. Divine grace makes the heart all the more tender, and the capacity for loving all the deeper; hence it increases rather than lessens the measure of sorrow when afflictions come.

But the joy of the Christian is something which lies too deep to be disturbed by the waves and tides of earthly trouble. It has its source in the very heart of God. Sorrow is not prevented by grace, but is swallowed up in the floods of heavenly joy. That was what Jesus meant when He talked to His disciples of joy just as He was about to go out to Gethsemane. He said their sorrow would be turned into joy, and that they would have a joy which the world could not take from them; that is, a joy which earth's deepest darkness could not put out. God's joy is not the absence of sorrow, but divine comfort overcoming sorrow -- sunshine striking through the black clouds, transfiguring them! "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy!" John 16:20

This Is a Beautiful World

What is the secret of gladness? There are many things which help to make people glad. This is a beautiful world in which we live. When the work of creation was finished, God surveyed it and saw that it was very good. We do not think enough of what God has done for our pleasure in the way he has adorned this world, preparing it to be our home. He has spread loveliness everywhere. He has covered the fields with a luxuriance of vegetation. He has sown the earth with flowers. The wonderful variety in nature -- mountain and valley, lake, river, and stream -- gives an added charm to the marvelous beauty. Then over all this splendor God has thrown a vast vaulted roof of blue, in which, when night comes, instead of black

darkness, thousands of star-lamps are hung to pour their soft, quiet radiance over us while we sleep.

Many Bible scholars say that when Jesus speaks of the many mansions in the Father's house, he does not refer to Heaven only, but means that this world is one of the mansions, and Heaven is another. Thus earth is one apartment of the Father's house. Surely it is beautiful enough, glorious enough, for this. No doubt Heaven will be more lovely, more resplendent, than earth; for sin has left its marrings here on everything. "The whole creation groans and travails together in pain." Earth's storms and earthquakes and floods and other calamitous events and occurrences, are in some mysterious way, a part of the fruit of sin. In the story of the fall we have hints of a sad change that came upon the earth in consequence of sin.

At least we know that the heavenly home will not have any of these sad things in it. Earth is not so beautiful nor so good as Heaven. Yet this is really one of the mansions of our Father's house in which we are now living, and its wondrous beauty and splendor ought to make us glad.

He who studies nature, and has an eye for its beauty -- has found one of the secrets of gladness! There are scenes which have in them splendor enough to fill our hearts with rapture. He who has learned to see what is lovely in field and forest and landscape, has found an exhaustless resource of gladness!

#### This Is Our Father's World

Another thing that ministers to human gladness, is the goodness of God in providence. Not only is this a beautiful world, but the heavenly Father's care for his children appears in all its life. Jesus taught this when he pointed to the birds and the flowers, and said that even for these, his lowlier creatures, God cares. "Behold the birds of the Heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns -- and your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you of much more value than they?" "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin -- yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." The wondrous teaching which our Lord drew from this, was not merely that God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers, but that his care for his own children is far more tender and constant than his care for his ravens and his lilies. "Are you not of much more value than they?" How much more shall he care for you?

It ought to be a great source of gladness to us to know that as vast as this world is, our Father's care extends to its smallest events -- to the weaving of a tiny flower's beautiful garments and the feeding of a troublesome sparrow -- as well as to the movements of planets. "If I could not believe," said one, "that there is a thinking mind at the center of things -- life would be intolerable to me." But the teaching of our Master is that a Father's heart beats in all nature and providence, and that a Father's love works in all events and experiences. On every leaf is written a covenant of divine love; on every flower and tuft of moss is found a pledge of divine faithfulness and care.

A little story-poem tells of a shepherd boy leading his sheep through a valley when a stranger, meeting him, and looking closely at his flock, said, "I see you have more white sheep than black."

"Yes," answered the boy; "it is always so."

It is always so with sheep; there are more white ones than black in every flock. But we may take a wider view, and we shall find that everywhere in life, there is more white than black.

It is so in nature. There are some desert spots on the earth; but these are few, and their extent is small in comparison with the broad, fertile fields which spread everywhere.

There are some sad people in every community; but the number is far exceeded by the multitude of those who are happy.

There always are sick and crippled and blind and suffering ones; but they make only a small proportion of the whole population of any place, the great majority being well, active, and strong.

There are cloudy days in every year; but there are more days of sunshine and blue skies.

In any life, too, there is more white than black. Some people are not willing to confess that this is true with them. They imagine that . . .

the evil days are more in number than the good,

there is more cloud than blue sky in their life,

they have more sorrow than joy.

But this is never true. There may be days when the darkness swallows up the light, but at evening time it shall be light. Really, the list of mercies in any life, if added up through the years, would make a measureless record -- while the sad and painful things, if summed up, would show an almost inappreciable list.

The trouble with too many people is that one little spot of darkness appears so large in their vision, that it hides a whole heaven full of stars. One sorrow blots out the memory of a thousand joys. One disappointment makes them forget years of fulfilled hopes. Many people have a strangely perverted faculty of exaggerating their molehills of trouble into mountains, and looking at their blessings through diminishing lenses.

It would minister greatly to our gladness, if we had a firm faith in the goodness of God's providence which rules in all the affairs of our life. There is infinitely . . .

more mercy than misery in the world,

more pleasure than pain,

more white than black.

Then, even the things that seem adverse, have hidden in them a secret of blessing. "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose!" Romans 8:28. In every tear -- a rainbow sleeps!

It is said that one of the great diamond fields of South Africa was discovered in this interesting way: One day a traveler entered the valley, and paused before a settler's door where a boy was amusing himself by throwing stones. One of the stones fell at the feet of the visitor; and he picked it up, and was about to return it to the boy when he saw a flash of light from it which arrested his attention, and made his heart beat with eager surprise. The stone was a diamond! The boy had no thought of its value; to him it was only a plaything. To the passer-by it was only a common pebble which he spurned with his foot. But to the eye of the man of science -- a gem of surpassing value was enfolded in the rough covering.

So it is that many of the events of God's providence appear to ordinary eyes as uninteresting, without meaning, oftentimes as even unkindly, adverse. Yet in each event there is wrapped up a divine treasure of good and blessing for the child of God. We need only eyes of Christian faith to find in every painful experience -- a helper of our gladness. Precious gems of rarest blessing are enclosed in the rough crusts of hardship, affliction, loss, and trial, which we are constantly coming upon in life's pathway. We shall find when we get home to Heaven, that many of the things from which we have shrunk as evils, have been the bearers to us of our richest treasures of good.

#### A Happy Home Makes Gladness

Another helper of gladness is a happy home. It need not be a home of wealth and luxury; it may be plain, without wealth, with but little adornment -- yet filled with love. There hearts trust each other. Men who are out in the world all day must be continually on their guard, not knowing whom they may trust; when they come home at nightfall they may lay aside their reserve, for they are with those now who love them. Home is a resting-place for tired hearts. Many of us would never be able day after day to face life, with its struggles, its battles, its duties -- were it not for the renewal of strength which we get in our home.

Many are the joys of a true home. True wedded life gives sweet happiness. Husband and wife live for each other, and learn to practice all of love's sweet lessons -- thoughtfulness, patience, helpfulness, kindness. Children bring new happiness; the meaning of the home-life deepens as they come. They add to the care -- but in the care, rich blessing is folded up. Love's burdens are light -- they are gifts of God. They are to the soul -- what wings are to the bird. A true home is a little fragment of Heaven, not with Heaven's perfect purity and perfect happiness -- but having in it something of Heaven's love, a prophecy at least of the full life of love in the Father's house beyond the shadows of earth.

What scenes on earth are more beautiful than those which are witnessed in a consistent Christian home -- the family gathered at the table, or sitting about the evening lamp with reading and music and conversation, or bowing in prayer at the family altar! It is easy to be good and true, with a holy home-life to inspire in us the things that are beautiful and worthy.

#### A Holy Life and Good Conscience Inspire Songs

A good conscience is also a helper of gladness. One who lives in neglect of God's commandments, is making unhappiness for himself. Sin has its pleasures, but in the end they yield a harvest of briars and thorns! The later years are fields in which the sowings of earlier years come to ripeness. If we live disobediently and selfishly -- then we are destroying our own gladness, and preparing bitterness for ourselves. But if we live a holy life -- then we are writing the music of sweet songs which shall sing in our heart in the days to come, and even in the night of our sorrow. Nothing does more for our happiness than a well-lived past. Good deeds, gentle ministries, unselfish kindnesses, and helpful words spoken -- will make a memory of gladness.

What a wonderful thing memory is! There is a Persian story of a king who dedicated one room in his palace to be a chamber of memory. In it he kept the memorials of his earlier days, before royal favor had lifted him from his lowly place to a position of honor. It was a little room, with bare floors; and here he kept his crook, his wallet, his coarse dress, and his water-cruise -- things which had belonged to his shepherd-life. Every day he went for an hour away from the splendors of his palace, into this humble room, to live again for a time amid the memorials of his happy youth. Very sweet were his recollections; and by his daily visit his heart was kept warm and tender amid all the pomp and show, and all the trial and

sorrow, of his public life.

It would be a wonderful promoter of gladness if everyone, in the midst of life's responsibilities and cares, its temptations and struggles -- would keep such a chamber of memory, filled with the mementos of youth's happy days. Most of us grow old too soon. We forget our childhood joys as we take upon us so early the serious burdens of maturity. We should keep one room in our heart as a treasure-chamber for the sweet joys that we have left behind. Memory has marvelous power to make gladness for us.

These are some of the many ways in which gladness is promoted. God has done a great deal to make us happy. He wants us to be glad. The word glad comes from a root which means to be bright, to shine -- God wants us to be bright, shining Christians. A great deal is said in the Bible about the duty of Christians to be lights in the world. We are lamps which God lights, that we may give light to all who are in the house. We are specially warned against having our light dimmed or obscured in any way. We are to be light always, not only in the daytime, but especially in the darkness -- for there it is that most of all the world needs the light of our lamp. Nothing hides the light more quickly or more effectively, than unhappiness. A Christian should be a lamp that always shines, not only in time of prosperity -- but also in the day of adversity. We sin against God, and we rob the world of blessing -- when our gladness fails us.

#### Honoring God in Suffering

A good man who had lived an unusually long and noble Christian life, honoring God in many ways, once expressed fear that he might fail to honor God in suffering when it should come. Not all Christians truly honor God in trial and sorrow. While all things go well with them, while there is no loss, no adversity, no sore sickness or keen sorrow -- they are bright, shining believers -- glad-hearted, rejoicing. But when trials come, their brightness grows dim. We should watch our life most carefully, lest we fail to honor God when affliction or trouble comes. We forget that it is quite as wrong to fail God in our witnessing in this way, as it would be to fail him in truthfulness, in honesty, or in any of love's duties. Anybody can be cheerful -- when there are only pleasant things in the circumstances of life. But the test of Christian life is in being glad when it is not easy -- of shining when it is dark all around us.

Indeed, our mission in this world is to enlighten it; hence there is greater reason for shining, when the darkness surrounds us. It is not for the daytime that we have lamps in our houses and on our streets, but for the night. They would be strange lamps that would burn while it is day, and then go out the moment it grows dark. Yet that is the kind of lights some of us are. We are bright and joyous while all goes well -- and then when trouble comes, the light in us goes out. That is not the kind of gladness our Master expects in us. We are to shine through the darkest nights. We are to rejoice always. We are to sing our songs of noblest faith, in the times when the world's people are most cast down.

#### Christian Gladness Not a Mood

Gladness is not a mere privilege for a Christian, a quality which he may have in his life or may not have, according to his particular mood. It is not a matter merely of temperament. Some Christian people try to excuse themselves for being unhappy so much of the time, so easily cast down and discouraged, by pleading their natural disposition; they were not born with a sunny temper as was this or that friend they name. Others plead depressing ill health; they are sufferers, or they have a disease which keeps them low-spirited. But neither of these excuses will avail, for it is not nature, but grace with which we have to do.

If one is naturally cheerless or gloomy, the sad mood is to be converted into Christian joy. Christian gladness is oftentimes conquered sadness. The Spirit of God changes our nature. We are not to follow out our natural impulses -- to be glad or sad as we feel at the time. We are to be always glad. If we find ourselves lacking in this element, we are not to be content to remain thus lacking in such a vital quality of Christlikeness, but are to set about the filling up of what is missing in our character, until we shine like our Master.

One of the most remarkable incidents in the Bible is the story of Paul and one of his friends, who were heard once singing in a dungeon at midnight. We cannot say in explanation that these men were of a naturally mirthful mood -- that they could not help singing. Mirthfulness of mood would scarcely account for such an unusual experience. Nor can we say that on that particular night they were experiencing an ecstasy of some kind; there was nothing in their condition to inspire ecstasy or rapture. We read the story in full, and we learn that they were prisoners -- that they had been beaten with a scourge the day before until their backs were terribly gashed, that they had then been dragged down to the foulest dungeon of an ancient Roman prison and cast into it, and that to add to their torture, their feet had then been screwed in wooden stocks. This was their condition when the prisoners in the upper wards of the prison heard them singing. That was Christian gladness. It was not human nature. They had something in their heart which overcame human nature, and turned their cries of pain, into songs. It was the joy of Christ which was in them, and triumphed over all their pain and suffering. "God my Maker, who gives songs in the night!" Job 35:10

This is the kind of gladness which we should seek to have -- something which will shine all the more brightly in the darkness, and sing all the more sweetly in pain or trial. This type of gladness is particularly a Christian experience -- unbelievers know nothing of it.

We must not suppose that it was only apostles who could rejoice in such pain. Thousands of believers in Christ in every age, in our own age, have a joy which nothing can break or disturb. They experience earthly losses, but they know that their real possessions are laid up in Heaven, where no moth can corrupt, and no robber steal; and they rejoice in this security of their inheritance. They have sorrows which well-near break their hearts; but they sing in their chamber of grief, because they have the comforts of divine love and grace, which, make them strong to endure. They suffer affliction in manifold forms, but no pain smothers their Christian gladness.

#### The Influence of Climate

What is the secret of this gladness? Where is it found? The secret is -- abiding in the love of Christ.

Climate is important. If we live in a malarial region, we need not be surprised if we have malaria. It steals into our heart, and poisons our blood. If we move to a place where there is pure, sweet, wholesome air -- we may expect to be well and strong.

There are spiritual climates, too, some wholesome, some unwholesome; and we should choose our abiding-place where the influences will promote gladness. Christ tells us we can live in his love, as an atmosphere, as one would stay in the sunshine.

We are exhorted also to keep ourselves in the love of God, not to keep ourselves loving God, but to keep ourselves in the blessedness of God's love for us. That was the way John lived, staying in Christ's love; and we know how the sunshine got into John's soul, and made his face shine, and made his whole life a

benediction of gladness, for which all the world is happier, sweeter, and richer today.

If we would find the Christian's secret of gladness, we must refuse to live in the shadows, amid doubts, discouragements, and depressions; and must persist in living ever in the brightness and beauty of God's love.

"Is it always foggy here?" asked a passenger, of the captain of the steamer, off the banks of Newfoundland.

"How should I know, madam? I don't live here."

Yet there are too many Christians who seem to live always in the fogs of fear and unbelief. They are all the while questioning and doubting, seeing troubles afar off, complaining and murmuring. They are discontented Christians. Then they wonder why they do not have the joy of the Lord. But the joy of the Lord is never found in such climates. We must dwell in the uplands of God, if we would know the secret of gladness.

There are spiritual highlands to which we may climb, away from the low valleys in which too many of us live. There the silence is holy with the presence of God, and among the hills breaks sweetest music of joy. There streams burst from the rocks, and gurgle down through grass-fringed channels. There one may get away from the dusty streets and the noisy strife, and in the quiet hush meet God, and hear his voice of gentle stillness. It is because we live too much in the foggy, marshy lowlands that we know so little of the gladness of God. If we would learn the blessed secret, we must climb into the uplands, where the streams are heavenly pure, and where the air is sweet with the breath of God.

#### Gladness a Lesson to Be Learned

Far more than we suppose, is gladness a lesson to be learned. It does not come naturally to many of us at least, although there is a great difference in temperament, and some learn the lesson much more easily than others do. To none is it natural to rejoice in sorrow -- this is something all of us must learn. Nor can we, merely by resolving to be glad, go through all the days thereafter with a song in our heart and sunshine in our face. The lesson can be mastered only through years of patient self-discipline, just as all life's lessons must be mastered.

It will help us in this experience, if we keep the ideal ever before us -- that we are always to be glad, that failure here is sin, and grieves God. It will help us, also, if we will keep our heart full of the holy thoughts and words of God which are meant to inspire gladness. Longfellow gave a young friend this advice: "See some good picture -- in nature, if possible, or on canvas -- hear a song of the best music, or read a great poem, every day. You will always find a free half-hour for one or the other, and at the end of the year your mind will shine with such an accumulation of jewels as will astonish even yourself." This is good counsel for any Christian who would learn the lesson of gladness. To this may be added: Take into your heart every day, some cheering word of God. Listen to some heavenly song of hope and joy. Let your eye dwell on some beautiful vision of divine love. Thus your very soul will become a fountain of light and joy, and gladness will become more and more the dominant mood of your life.

It will help us also to let Christ be our teacher, as we learn this great lesson. "Learn of me," is his invitation. His life is our lesson written out for us -- and his Spirit is our teacher. The lesson is not impossible for any Christian -- the saddest of us can learn to rejoice always.

We allow ourselves to be too easily convinced that it is impossible in this world to do more than dream of the heavenly life, that we cannot enter into any great measure of its blessedness, joy, and beauty until we pass from earth. In truth, however, Heaven is not far away. It begins in us the moment we are born again. The everlasting life is not something we shall enter when we die: "He who believes has everlasting life." The fruits of the Spirit which come into our life here, are the beginnings of Heaven. The privileges of communion and fellowship with God, are earthly privileges.

The life to which we are called as believers, is the Heavenly life. We are taught to pray that God's will may be done on earth, as it is in Heaven; that is, that Heavenly graces may come down now into our heart. No doubt Heaven's life in its fullness of joy, must remain still and ever unreached on earth, even after all of earth's strivings. Heaven will still be far sweeter, holier, richer, diviner, than the saintliest life of this world. Yet Heaven is not far from true Christian faith; we are in its borders, at least, in all holy living. We may attain a large measure of its blessedness, even here on earth.

We know that gladness is God's will for His people -- not an occasional rapture of delight, not gladness on fair days and in happy conditions, then dropping again into sadness and tears on dreary days -- but gladness unbroken, perennial, filling all the life. Should we not try to learn the lesson while we are here on earth? We have the same God now, that we shall have then -- loving us, too, as he will then. We are God's children as truly now, as we shall be then. All things are ours, even in this land of changes. Why can we not learn to sing Heaven's songs in this world? The secret lies in simple, childlike faith. If our mind is stayed upon God -- he will keep us in perfect peace. If our will is lost in our Father's -- we shall have no crosses. A cross is composed of two pieces of wood. The shorter piece represents your will -- and the longer piece represents God's will. Lay the two pieces side by side -- and there is no cross; but lay the shorter piece across the longer one -- and you have a cross.

Just so, whenever our will falls across God's will -- there is a cross in our life. We make a cross for ourselves . . .

every time we do not accept Christ's way,

every time we murmur at anything He sends,

every time we will not do what He commands.

But when we quietly accept what He gives, when we yield in sweet acquiescence to His will, though it shatters our fairest hopes, when we let our will lie alongside His -- there are no crosses in our life, and we have found the peace of Christ.

If Christ lives in us, and if we abide in Christ -- the gladness of our heart shall be a song unbroken by any sorrow of earth.

The ministry of gladness is one of incalculable power. We cannot make the world better or happier, by going about in it with sad face and heavy heart and desponding speech. If our religion is not able to make us rejoicing Christians, victorious over all pain, loss, and sorrow -- it will not impress the men and women around us who are bowing under their burdens, and longing for help. But if Christ is to us a Friend and Helper who can enable us to overcome, not only every spiritual enemy, but also every sorrow, loss, and trial -- and to sing in the darkest midnight -- then the weary and heavy laden ones of earth who see our life will be eager to find the secret of our gladness.

We can serve the world in no other way so well, as by being glad Christians. Then light will shine from us wherever we go, and we will be true revealers of God. Then men will want our Savior for theirs, a Savior who can turn their grief to gladness, who can make them victorious over life's sorrows.

Yet, after all, our dream of perfect gladness will never be fully realized in this world. There will always be something lacking. At best, earth's best is still incomplete. We may learn to sing our songs of triumph in the thickest of life's struggles, in the deepest of sorrow's midnights, and to be inspirers of others through our victorious gladness; yet ever on before us will move the vision of perfect joy, leading us and cheering us forward by its sweet hope, yet still unreached, still calling us to something better. It will not be until we close our eyes in death -- that we shall attain the fullness of joy in Heavenly glory!

"In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand there are pleasures forevermore!" Psalm 16:11

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