



Approaching God

Begin your time with an opening prayer

Take a moment to quiet your heart and ask God to help you experience his presence today. Ask Him to free you from any distractions as you begin to read and meditate on today's passage.

Psalm 126 - Joy

Passage Introduction:

Where do we find Joy?: “We try to get it through entertainment. We pay someone to make jokes, tell stories, perform dramatic actions, sing songs. We buy the vitality of another’s imagination to divert and enliven our own poor lives. The enormous entertainment industry in America is a sign of the depletion of joy in our culture. Society is a bored, gluttonous king employing a court jester to divert it after an overindulgent meal. But that kind of joy never penetrates our lives, never changes our basic constitution. The effects are extremely temporary— a few minutes, a few hours, a few days at most. When we run out of money, the joy trickles away. We cannot make ourselves joyful. Joy cannot be commanded, purchased or arranged. But there is something we can do. We can decide to live in response to the abundance of God and not under the dictatorship of our own poor needs. We can decide to live in the environment of a living God and not our own dying selves. We can decide to center ourselves in the God who generously gives and not in our own egos which greedily grab. One of the certain consequences of such a life is joy, the kind expressed in Psalm 126.”

Eugene Peterson - *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*

Bible Reading, Study & Meditation - Read the passage slowly 2 or 3x's.

Start with Engaging the Text: Take a few minutes to highlight, circle, or underline key words.

Psalm 126 - A Song of Ascents (NIV) - **1** When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. **2** Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” **3** The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. **4** Restore our fortunes, LORD, like streams in the Negev. **5** Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. **6** Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.

Questions for Reflection & Meditation

- Eugene Peterson says that “*Joy is not a requirement of Christian discipleship, it is a consequence. It is not what we have to acquire in order to experience life in Christ; it is what comes to us when we are walking in the way of faith and obedience.*” How would you measure your sense of joy in life right now?

- What specific things does the psalmist point to in the passage that bring about joy for God's people?
- A common but futile strategy for achieving joy is trying to eliminate things that hurt: get rid of pain by numbing nerve ends, get rid of insecurity by eliminating risks, get rid of disappointment by depersonalizing your relationships. Try to lighten the boredom of such a life by buying joy in the form of vacations and entertainment. Where are you tempted to achieve joy outside of God?

Psalm 126

Passage Summary - (From The ESV Transformation Bible)

The covenant faithfulness and sovereign grace of God that preserved Jerusalem in the past (vv. 1–3) are the basis for confident expectation that the same powerful and gracious covenant God will restore Jerusalem in the future, come what may (vv. 4–6).

Perhaps the psalmist was reflecting on some specific time of divine deliverance of Jerusalem—perhaps when David first brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:12–19), or when Jerusalem was spared from destruction by Sennacherib during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18–19). In a sense, the City of God had been under assault perpetually, and God had spared her over and over again. The only reason for this was God's own commitment to this city, its temple, and most importantly, its chosen people. Even though Jerusalem would later be destroyed, first under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC and again by a Roman army in AD 70, yet God will do precisely what the psalmist declares in Psalm 126:4. God will restore the fortunes of Jerusalem and of his people. The Bible ends with the account of the new Jerusalem coming down from the sky, new and better than Jerusalem ever had been before (Revelation 21–22). No temple will be found there, "for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev. 21:22). God will indeed restore the Holy City. In the light of Christ's coming and the great promises for the future, God's people have strong reason to trust him with resilient hope.

Key Takeaway:

As you read today's passage, what are 1 or 2 main takeaways that you wrote down that you want to take with you? How would you briefly summarize your observations and meditations for today?

Close in Prayer:

Close by turning today's Psalm into your own prayer. Over the past couple of days we've given you some prayer prompts to get started. Now try to write some of your own prayers here using sections of Psalm 126 as a guide using the theme of joy. Consider confessing places where you've sought joy in the wrong places, or where you feel low on joy right now. Then ask for God to bring about joy as you seek to walk in the way of faith and dependency on Him.