

# Psalm 126

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[ 0 : 00 ] I wonder if you've ever received news that seemed too good to be true. Perhaps one day you went into work and your boss told you that he's giving you a cash bonus and you've got to take a month off to spend it.

Or perhaps your five-year-old child suddenly announces, I really like green vegetables. Or the girl you've been admiring for months says yes when you finally ask her out. Or perhaps an exam result that you've been dreading in a subject that you've been not so good at and you get a really good exam result and you think, wow.

Wow. Thursday night I got a phone call from a lady who now lives in Glasgow but she's from Kenya originally. Anybody here from Kenya? Put your hand up. Habari. Suri Sala.

And she came to the UK as an asylum seeker having been left, literally left for dead in some of the ethnic classes from some years ago in Kenya. She was beaten up by the police, taken to a mortuary. Members of her family were killed in a house fire that burned her property.

And it was only as the staff and the mortuary were going home and stuffing up at the end of the day they recognised that the body on the slab was still alive. And they took this lady, I'll call her Penny, to the hospital and as soon as she was able to crawl or walk she managed to get on a plane to the UK and she was given leave to remain pretty quickly actually.

[ 1 : 35 ] But as far as she knew her two sons and her daughter died in the house fire. This happened 10, maybe 12, maybe 15 years ago.

And just last week or about 10 days ago she got a phone call from a friend in Kenya to tell her some unbelievable news that she had met this lady's daughter who was still alive.

And after all these years of thinking that her daughter had died in the house fire, the joy of that unexpected news, well you can imagine.

It's just like the end of the parable of the prodigal son, for those of you who know it, this is my son or in Penny's case this is my daughter who was dead and is alive, was lost in his fire. The Lord restoring the fortunes of that Christian lady from Kenya, a remarkable turnaround, unexpected in many ways.

And the psalmist in Psalm 126 recalls a turnaround in the fortunes of the people of Zion, the people of God. A turnaround so sudden and so good it was like a dream when the Lord brought back the captives or restored the fortunes of Zion we were like men who dreamed.

[ 2 : 49 ] Could it be true, if this psalm relates to the end of the exile in Babylon, as it may well do, could it be true that we're going home after years of captivity here in Babylon, hundreds of miles from home?

It can't be real, pinch me, I must be dreaming, but it was real, God had remembered his promise. God had heard his people's cries and how the Lord's people rejoiced.

Now as you will see, and as I mentioned earlier on, the psalm is one of two halves, one looking back and the other looking forward. But the two halves, it seems to me, are united by a common theme, the theme of joy or gladness.

Joy for what the Lord has done and has done for them and looking ahead to future joy, which the Lord will promise and has promised for his people, the theme of joy.

Now, I don't know about you what your view is of Scottish people or Scottish Christians or even more particularly Scottish Presbyterians. Perhaps when you look at people like Andy Murray and Gordon Brown, you think, well, joy is not the first word that comes to mind.

[ 3 : 57 ] And of course you could say it's a caricature, but there's always some truth to some caricatures, isn't there? Eugene Peterson tells of a story, true story, Ellen Glasgow is a good name, but she's actually from America, a US Pulitzer Prize winning novelist.

Ellen Glasgow wrote a biography of her father, who was a Presbyterian elder. And she says this about her father, quote, He was entirely unselfish and in his long life never committed a pleasure. Well, not much joy there. But as Christians, and if you are a Christian, you know that we are called to be people of joy. It's part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

And that suggests, doesn't it, if it's part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, it's something to be nurtured and something to be cultivated, something to be grown, developed as we live as Christians. How does that happen? Well, John 15 gives us an insight into how that fruit is grown as we remain in Christ, as we abide in Christ, who is the true vine. How are we fruitful as Christians?

[ 5 : 05 ] Only in so much as we rest in Christ are connected to Jesus, the true vine. Only then can we produce the fruit, including the fruit of joy. And Jesus very clearly in John 15 connects that process of abiding in him, resting in him, obeying his commands, remaining in his love.

And then he says this remarkable thing in John 15 verse 11. I have told you this so that my joy, my joy may be in you, and that your joy might be complete.

So this joy is indeed a joy in the Lord, a joy of the Lord.

And that's exactly what this psalmist is talking about, isn't it? He's talking about a joy that is found in the Lord. Because of who the Lord is, because of what the Lord has done, because of what the Lord will yet do one day.

And it's a theme we find all through the Bible. When Paul writes to the Philippians, some of you will know the verse, in chapter 4 verse 4, I think it is where he says, Well, what does he say? Does he say rejoice always?

[ 6 : 23 ] I will say it again, rejoice. Does he say that? This is a real question. Answer it. Does he say that? No, he says, someone tell me. Rejoice in the Lord always.

That's what he says. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, rejoice. Does that mean we're going to sing I am H-A-P-P-Y all the time? No, of course not. It's the same apostle who says we weak with those who weak.

We rejoice with those who rejoice. But it does mean, it does mean that our joy, as someone has said, our joy should not be so deep as Christians that it never occasionally bubbles to the surface. And there's a remarkable verse that we had read on in 2 Corinthians to chapter 6 and verse 10. Paul says there, sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

Isn't that incredible? Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Well, the psalmist speaks of, this lectern is really quite incredible.

[ 7 : 28 ] How do you cope with this, Paul? I get very couples on us. I hope that helps. Okay, the psalmist speaks of joy because of what the Lord has done and what the Lord will yet do.

And look at the two halves. Verses 1 to 3, I'm going to say recalling, recalling the joy of the Lord or remembering the joy of the Lord. And then verses 4 to 6, what I call reclaiming.

It's not a great word, but I hope you get the sense of it. Reclaiming the joy of the Lord. So, recalling the joy of the Lord and then reclaiming the joy of the Lord. And verses 1 to 3, where the Lord brought back the captives to Zion.

We were like men. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, the pagan nations. Yahweh the Lord. Jehovah the covenant Lord has done great things for them.

Yahweh has done great things for us. And we are filled with gladness or with joy. And looking back in Psalm 126 verses 1 to 3. He's looking back to a life changing moment.

[ 8 : 28 ] One that restored the fortunes of Zion. It's a bit like, I don't know whether anybody here is old enough to remember the end of World War 2. But at the end of World War 2 in VE day. Not just hundreds, not just thousands.

But millions of people poured out onto the streets of Britain. To celebrate a turnaround in the fortunes of the nation. When all seemed so dark and lost and desperate. And with victory came the joy.

But this is not just a memory here in the Psalm of Happy Days. Here the psalmist is recalling that joy which is rooted in Yahweh's faithful love for his people. We know that if the translation you have uses the word Lord in capital letters.

When you see that, certainly in the NIV. That indicates this is the covenant name for God. What does that mean? This reminds us that the God they worshipped is the God who has said, I will be your God. You will be my people.

What does that mean in practice? Well that means that although God's people were stubborn sinners and repeat offenders. The Lord had mercy on them. The Lord had mercy on them.

[ 9 : 36 ] Remembered his promise. Brought them back and set them free from their captivity. The psalmist recalls the joy of the Lord. Now we can apply this to ourselves in at least two ways.

Firstly in a personal sense. And secondly with respect to the church, the people of God. If we make a personal application, the source of Christian joy is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the great things he has done for us on the cross at Calvary and by his rising from the dead.

And if you were converted in a sudden way, some of us come to faith more gradually.

But if your conversion was a sudden conversion, I suspect you can look back to that time. It's a time of great joy. When you realise the Lord had done great things for you in Christ.

And perhaps it was a bit of a blur. I've heard people say that. A bit like a dream at the start. You knew God had done something great in your life. Setting you free from captivity to sin. Setting you on the roads to Zion as it were.

[ 10 : 38 ] And your heart was bursting with joy. A colleague in the ministry showed me a letter some time ago that a woman wrote to him. In the small hours of the night.

Not that he was in the habit of receiving letters from women in the small hours of the night. But she had been converted some days previously. And she says this, the lady is called Margaret. She writes about suddenly understanding things she never understood before in the Bible.

Of enjoying Christian fellowship in a way that she had never enjoyed before. And then she says this. Isn't God's touch wonderful? Isn't God's touch wonderful?

Now the whole letter just echoes and resounds with a note of joy. Of unexpected joy. It reminds me of the title that C.S. Lewis gave to his autobiography.

Surprised by joy. Surprised by joy. What about the church? Well, the Old Testament people of God could look back to any number of times when God had done great things for them.

[ 11 : 39 ] The exodus from Egypt. The journey into the promised land. The victories under Joshua. The great days of King David and Solomon. The return from exile itself. And the rebuilding of the temple.

And the church of Jesus Christ can look back to heavy days as well. To the rapid spread of the Christian faith in the early years of Christianity. To the reformation of the 16th century.

To the 18th century evangelical awakening. To the 1859 revival. I better mention because Paul's here. The revival in Wales in 1904. And friends from Skye.

And John who was born in Lewis. The revival of Lewis and Skye in 1940s and 1950s. What happened? Times when God's spirit came down in great power to do great things.

Times when the Lord came and restored the fortunes of his people. And filled their mouths with laughter and with songs and shouts of joy. And if you've ever read the accounts of any of these revivals.

[ 12 : 36 ] And I would strongly encourage you to do so. You will know that they often tell you of people praising God into the small hours of the night. The small hours of the morning. Great joy.

As well as great seriousness. About eternal matters. And an earnest desire to live a holy life.

Feeding to God. Now another thing. That strikes you when you read the account of these revivals. Particularly the revivals in Lewis and in Skye.

Is that everyone in the community. Knew what was going on. And why. Whether they were Christians or not. Because the pubs were being emptied. The dance halls were empty.

And everyone knew that it was the Lord who was at work. They knew it wasn't because the council had passed a bylaw. Saying everybody must go to church. They knew it wasn't because the church presbytery or the synod or whatever had declared this to be the case.

[ 13 : 33 ] They knew it was God at work transforming people's lives. And transforming communities. And that's what you see here at the end of verse 2. Don't we? It's said among the nations.

The pagan Gentile heathen nations. They recognize that Yahweh had done great things for them. Now it's one thing to be happy which comes and goes.

It's another thing to be filled with the joy that comes from the Lord. But it's yet another thing to be filled with the joy that comes from the Lord. And for people around us to know who and what is the source of our joy.

And I would encourage us because I know how easy it is to keep quiet about these things. If the Lord has answered your prayers. If you've been in a difficult situation and the Lord has heard your cries and restored your fortunes.

When you go into work and somebody says well you look happy this morning. Don't just say well this situation my mum was ill and now she's better. Say the Lord has had mercy. He has heard my prayers and the prayers of my friends.

[ 14 : 37 ] My mum's better. This situation at work or whatever has been resolved. The Lord has done great things for me. Let them know. Let them know that your faith is real.

That God is real. And that he works in your life. He is the one who has filled my mouth with laughter. And put a new sorrow in my heart. Well that's recalling the joy of the Lord.

Verses 1 to 3. But of course life is not always easy. The times of laughter and celebration pass. The end of World War 2 did not end the hard times. As you know there were many years of wrestling in Britain long after the end of the war.

And the Jews who came back from exile soon ran into problems. The lady I told you about from Kenya. You might ask well why did it take 10, 12 or 15 years for her to discover that her daughter was still alive.

While the friend who found her daughter found her homeless. Mentally unwell. And scrapping for life among the streets of Nairobi. And looking for food in the bins and the like.

[ 15 : 40 ] And she's going out hoping to go out in April this year. If she can do something to help her daughter. Who's mentally sick with no one to care for her. The homeless in Nairobi.

And it's true as well isn't it. Following the excitement and joy of our conversion. That tends to fade as we get to grips with the reality of indwelling sin. And the reality of being a member of a church which is filled with people just like us who are still sinners and other Christians.

Bad things happen. Peter and I know of a man in Dundee who today. Remembers the 25th anniversary of the death of his young daughter from leukemia.

And he has managed okay in the past with his wife's help. To get through this painful memory of his young daughter's death. But today the 25th anniversary is the first time he has faced this anniversary without his wife.

Who died last year. He's asking for prayer. To pray on. And for God to hold him. So we know that. That's what life is like.

[ 16 : 49 ] It's not always a bed of roses. We face daily the frustrations of living in a difficult and fallen world. And what happens of course. When that happens is that we are tempted to look for our joy.

And our source of joy in things other than God. Other than the Lord. To be cast around. Looking for it. As the Bible puts it. The broken cisterns that hold no water.

And Peterson has a. I think a helpful passage on this. And he says we try to get joy through entertainment. We pay someone to make jokes and tell stories.

We buy the. The imagination of someone else. To try and enrich our own poor lives. And he says the enormous. Entertainment industry in our land.

Is a sign of the. The lack of joy. The depletion of joy. In our culture. Society is a bored king. A bored gluttonous king. Employing a court jester.

[ 17 : 50 ] A clown. To divert it. After an indulgent meal. But then he goes on to say. That that kind of joy. Never penetrates our lives. Never changes us.

The effects are temporary. It seems to be 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 then he says. There is something we can do. We can decide to live. In response to the abundance of God.

Rather than under the dictatorship. Of our own poor needs. We can decide to center ourselves. In God who generously gives. Rather than our own selfish egos.

Which greedily grab. Well it's true isn't it. If you're looking at the second half. Of the psalm. The psalmist resists the temptation. To try the broken sisters.

[ 18 : 48 ] To look for joy. Anywhere else. But in God. And he moves from recalling joy. In the past. To reclaiming it for the future. How does he do that? He does that through. A prayer. And a promise.

A prayer to God. And a promise from God. He does it through faith. Exercising his faith. And praying to God. Exercising his faith. And claiming the promise. From God. What about the prayer? Well it's there in verse 4. Isn't it? Restore our fortunes. Oh Lord. Like streams. In the desert. Streams in the Negev. It's a very simple prayer. Isn't it? Very simple. And very direct. As the best prayers are. Restore our fortunes. Oh Lord. Restore our fortunes. Like streams in the Negev. And the picture is one. Of the dried up riverbed. The wadis. In the desert. Filled for most of the year. With dust and sand. There's no vegetation. There's no life to the sea. And then the rain comes. And within 24 hours.

[ 19 : 42 ] 48 hours. The riverbed's full. And the surrounding countryside. Is transformed. As the prophet Isaiah. Puts it in Isaiah 35. Verse 1. The desert blossoms. Like a rose.

Now this kind of picture. Certainly in Scotland. Is hard for us to imagine. What a drought must be like. But I know you poor folks. From the south of England.

Are labouring under drought conditions. That means you can't use a hose. To wash your Jaguars and BMWs. But if you're in a company like Kenya. As I was for time.

And I went back to a year later. With my mum. The second time I was there. They hadn't had any rain. For two, three months. And everything was dry. And dusty. Dust was everywhere. And you'll notice. If you've been to Africa. The orange red dust.

That coats everything. And the very last night. That we were there. We came back to Nairobi. Before we flew back to the UK. We were staying with a Kenyan couple. And as we left the house. It began to rain.

[ 20 : 37 ] And the lady of the house. Began to do a little. Dance of joy. Now we were not there. To see the effect of that. But she knew that rain meant. Crops would grow.

She knew that rain meant a harvest. She knew that rain meant. Life transformation. Restore our fortunes like streams.

In the mega. We can pray like that. Can't we? We can pray that God would do that. For ourselves. For our society. For our nation. That he would restore. The fortunes of his people.

The church. And this land. I wonder. Do you pray for that? I hope you do.

But then. He moves on to the promise. And the promise given to us. In verses 5 and 6. Is a different picture. Isn't it? Yes it is true. That God sometimes. Pours out his Holy Spirit.

[ 21 : 34 ] Like a rain storm. After months and years. Of drought. A bit like a revival. But I think it is also true. That he more often. chooses to use. The patient method.

The slower method. Of sowing. That leads to an eventual harvest. And we see that. In the parables of Jesus. In the kingdom of God. There is a parable. Jesus told. In Mark chapter 4.

Verse 26. Where he talks about. The farmer going out. To sow the seed. Night and day. Whether he sleeps. Or gets up. The seed grows. All by itself. The soil. Produces the stock. And then the corn.

And then the harvest. Kingdom work. Is often. Patient. Patient. Sowing. Sowing. Sowing. Sowing. But the promise. Here to us. Is that those.

Who sow in tears. Will. Reek with songs. Songs of joy. That the one. Who goes out. Carrying. Seek to sow. Will return. With songs of joy. The King James Version. Translates it.

[ 22 : 28 ] Doubtless. Shall doubtless return. Shall doubtless. Come again. With rejoicing. Now I suspect. If you are. Like me.

You would prefer. The downpour. Wouldn't you? You would prefer. The sudden. Transformation. Of the riverbed. Being filled with water. And the desert. Blossoming like a rose. Overnight. We would want that. Partly that I think.

Is our. Our fallen nature. We desire that instant. Spiritual. Fix that instant. Spiritual. Graphification. Although. I would say. I did hear. A man. Who grew up in Kenya.

Through the East African revival. And he was talking about it. The man has now gone to glory. But. He was giving his. His account. Of living through East Africa. And the time of the East African revival.

And he just stopped. And he was obviously lost in thought. And lost in memory. And he said. You know. Revival. Is not. A comfortable thing. Revival. Is not.

[ 23 : 21 ] A comfortable thing. So be careful. What you pray for. If God poured out his Holy Spirit. Things would change. And we wouldn't necessarily be comfortable with it. But having said that.

I think it is true. That God more often uses. The patient method. Of sowing. The seed. And he promises us. Even though we would prefer. To find some other way. To reap the harvest of joy. He promises. If you sow. In tears. You shall reap. With shouts of joy. Maybe as you read these verses.

You think of the other parable. That Jesus told. Of the farmer. Sowing the seed. The seed being the word of God. And it is true of course. That gospel ministry. The sowing of the word. If it is done with tears.

And often is done with tears. Will indeed reap. A harvest. Of joy. But I think Peterson is right. When he says. That the truth in this psalm. Goes beyond. The sowing of God's word.

[ 24 : 17 ] All tears. All tears. Can be seen. If you sow them in God. And if you sow them in God. He will ultimately.

Finally. One day. Bring a crop of joy. From it. All tears. All disappointment. All suffering. All pain. All emptiness. All emptiness. Sow it in God. And he will finally.

Bring a crop of joy. And that means. My friends. If you are suffering this morning. Through personal circumstances. Whatever they may be. Driving you to tears.

Sow them in God. Don't hide them from God. Take them to God. As saints. Look to him. In his words. Say. Father. I don't know what to do.

We are helpless. We are hopeless. Without you. But you have promised. That if we sow in tears. We shall reap the songs of joy. If you have messed up. In your Christian life. As a Christian.

[ 25 : 14 ] If you are not to get stuck. In that sin. Come with tears of repentance. Tears of godly sorrow. That will bring you through.

To that harvest of joy. If you are not yet a Christian. Come like life. Jesus is not waiting for you. To be better. Or to be good. Before you come to him. He came not to. Not to.

Not to heal the well. But to heal the sick. To bring sinners to repentance. Come with your tears.

Come with your failure. With your messed up life. That's why Jesus came.

That's why he died on the cross. That's why he gave his life. Like a seed himself. Thrown to the ground. It might bear fruit for you. And for me. Sow your tears in God.

And he will finally. Bring a crop of joy. From it. My father was a farmer. I grew up on a small farm. Back in Northern Ireland.

[ 26 : 11 ] And. There were seven of us as children. So. Money was sometimes. Scarce. But. Each year. He would take some of the money. That he had to buy. Seed to sow it.

On the ground. Not knowing. Because he could not guarantee. The harvest. Whether there would be a crop. Or not. And if there was a crop. Of course. And the harvest. Was gathered in. Then. It would be a time. Of joy.

But being a good Ulster Presbyterian. He didn't let it show very much. But. He was a. He would be happy. Of course. And give thanks to God. For the harvest. And James writes about this. And ties in with this notion.

Of perseverance. If you turn with me. To James chapter 5. Are you okay Paul. For time. If you will. Okay.

James chapter 5. We read from verse 7. To 11. And this is page 1216. If you are using a church bible. Page 1216.

[ 27 : 11 ] James chapter 5. And at verse 7. Be patient then brothers. Until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the lamb. To yield his valuable crop.

And how patient he is. For the autumn and spring rains. You too be patient. And stand firm. Because the Lord's coming is near.

Don't grumble against each other brothers. Or you will be judged. That would be a great verse to have at the front of a church. Don't see many churches with that motto. That would be good would it. Don't grumble against each other brothers.

Or you will be judged. The judge is standing at the door. Brothers as an example of patience in the face of suffering. Take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know. We consider blessed.

Those who have persevered. Those who have kept going. You have heard of Job's perseverance. And have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion.

[ 28 : 07 ] And mercy. The Lord is full of compassion. And mercy. My father could not guarantee the harvest. But the Lord who is full of compassion and mercy.

Has promised that those who sow in tears. Will reap. The songs of joy. Shall doubtless come again. Rejoicing. And it just remains for us.

For those of us who are Christians. We cry out to God. Believing in God's promise. And if we do that. We are sowing in faith. Faith which sees beyond the surface of things. Faith which sees and can look to the future.

And see the harvest being gathered in. Faith which perseveres. Because it knows that the Lord is faithful. And he will do. And it is this spirit of faith.

That enables Paul. In the passage you read. To be hard pressed. But not crushed. Perplexed. Yes perplexed. But not in despair.

[ 29 : 04 ] That is this faith that helped Paul to know. That his light. How does he call them? His light and momentary troubles. Paul who was whipped. Shipwrecked. Imprisoned. And he calls them his light and momentary troubles.

Were achieving for him. An eternal glory. That far outweighs them all. And so with Paul. Let's fix our eyes. Not on what is seen.

We see. The world around us. It's with us every day. But let's fix our eyes. Not on what is seen. But on what is unseen. Because what is seen. Is temporary. Is passing. Whereas what is unseen.

Is eternal. Let us fix our eyes. On Jesus. Who as Hebrews says. For the joy set before him.

Endured the cross. And scorned its shame. The joy set before him.

Didn't take away the pain of the cross. Didn't take away the hurt. But it did. As Scotty Smith has put it. Did reshape it. Did reshape the hope. The hope. For the joy set before him.

[ 30 : 05 ] Endured the cross. And scorned its shame. Now seated at the right hand of God.

Consider Jesus. Who sowed in tears. Who reaped in joy. Not just for himself.

But for you. And for me. That when we come to him. And sow our tears in him. We too might know that joy of the Lord. That his joy might be in us. And be complete. And together with God's people. And why wouldn't you be a member of God's people. When you hear the promise of the Lord. That the day is coming. At the end of time. When the Lord Jesus returns. And the dwelling of God is with men.

And we read of that in Revelation 21. Do we. Good way. They will be his people. And God himself will be with them. And be their God. What will he do. He will wipe away. Every tear.

God himself will wipe away. Every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death. Or mourning. Or crying. Or pain. For the old order of things. Has passed away. And all God's people.

[ 31 : 05 ] Shall say on that day. The Lord has done great things for us. And we are filled. With joy. Amen. Amen.