

5-DAY
DEVOTIONAL

CULTIVATING

JOY

Cultivating Joy

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CONTENT

1. <i>Introduction</i>	2
2. <i>Your Source</i>	3
3. <i>Comparison</i>	5
4. <i>Self-Care vs Self-Love</i>	7
5. <i>What do you listen to?</i>	9
6. <i>Isolation</i>	11
7. <i>Prayer</i>	12

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INTRODUCTION

Those who are familiar with the biology of plants and gardening will know that there are four main factors that affect the growth of plants. Namely, light, water, temperature and nutrients. The lack of any one of these four elements will produce the wrong results.

Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit. We read this in Galatians 5:22. Just as plants need to be planted in the right soil, watered and taken care of in a certain way in order to produce strong, beautiful and healthy fruit, the fruits of the Spirit need to be watered and taken care of so that they may grow. We cannot expect a plant to grow if we do not water it. Or better yet, if it does not have the right amount of light on it, or it lives in the wrong atmosphere and environment, it will not grow!

We seldom perceive joy as something that can be cultivated. Joy is a fruit, and like every fruit, it needs to be cultivated. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, cultivate means to assist the growth of crops by care or to improve or develop the growth of crops by giving careful attention, training, study or to devote time.

Joy is something we often struggle with. Especially in a world that is so busy and driven by social media, strife and world tragedies. As they say, “life happens”, and we sometimes don’t know how to be joyful.

This is why I’ve written this devotional. To walk a journey of cultivating joy by enlightening you to the things that God wants you to see and partner with. To cultivate and fight for your joy in every season. Joy is a promise from God. Living in joy is possible even in the worst seasons of life. It’s God-given. All we need to do is position ourselves.

My prayer is that this devotional will shed light on the areas of your life that lack joy. That you will learn to cultivate joy regardless of what life brings, and that this particular fruit will bloom in your life. May you be joyful as we pursue our King over the next five days.

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“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” Psalm 73:26

Day 1

YOUR SOURCE

I want to start by saying that joy and happiness are two different things. Joy comes as a result of hope. Hope in what is unseen, and in what we know without a shadow of a doubt. That God is faithful. Like how we know that oxygen exists, even though we cannot see it with our eyes.

Hope comes from Jesus. Hope is not determined by what we face on the outside.

Joy may produce happiness, but happiness is not the source of joy. Joy comes from the hope that we have in Jesus. Happiness may sometimes be momentary and found in material things. Joy, on the other hand, comes from what we believe to be true. Which is the Word of God. Joy is eternal.

Your source of joy is found in the Word and promises of God. So, when the Bible constantly tells us to rejoice and be glad – it is a reminder to take heart and find hope.

“Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith.” Philippians 3:1

Happiness is a feeling and an emotion. But the Bible tells us that we do not need to see before we hope.

Happiness is defined by what's on the outside. Joy, on the other hand, is defined by what's on the inside. Our hearts. Our minds. Our source. Our relationship with God. When we look to the world to fill areas of our lives that only God can fill, we begin to lose our joy. We sometimes think that a career, a romantic relationship or money would be enough to find joy. Although all these things aren't bad, they were not designed to be our source. Only Jesus is the source of joy (Nehemiah 8:10).

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Find areas in your life where you have made things, other than Jesus, the source of your joy. Your life was created for so much more. The “more” is found in your relationship with the ultimate source of joy. The Good Shepherd. The Promise Keeper and Creator of heaven and earth. When you hope, you find joy. When you believe God’s Word (which is truth), you find peace and joy. Regardless of what life looks like on the outside.

What hope looks like:

I am the head and not the tail (Deuteronomy 28:13)

The same power that rose Christ from death to life lives in me (Romans 8:11, Ephesians 1:19-21)

God provides for me (2 Corinthians 9:8, Luke 12:24)

God sees me and knows my name (Isaiah 43:1, Psalm 139:1)

God will never leave me (Deuteronomy 31:8)

God will order my steps (Psalm 37:23)

I am healed, redeemed and restored (Zephaniah 3:20)

I am loved (John 3:16, Romans 5:8, 1 John 4:19)

God wants me to be happy (Zephaniah 3:17)

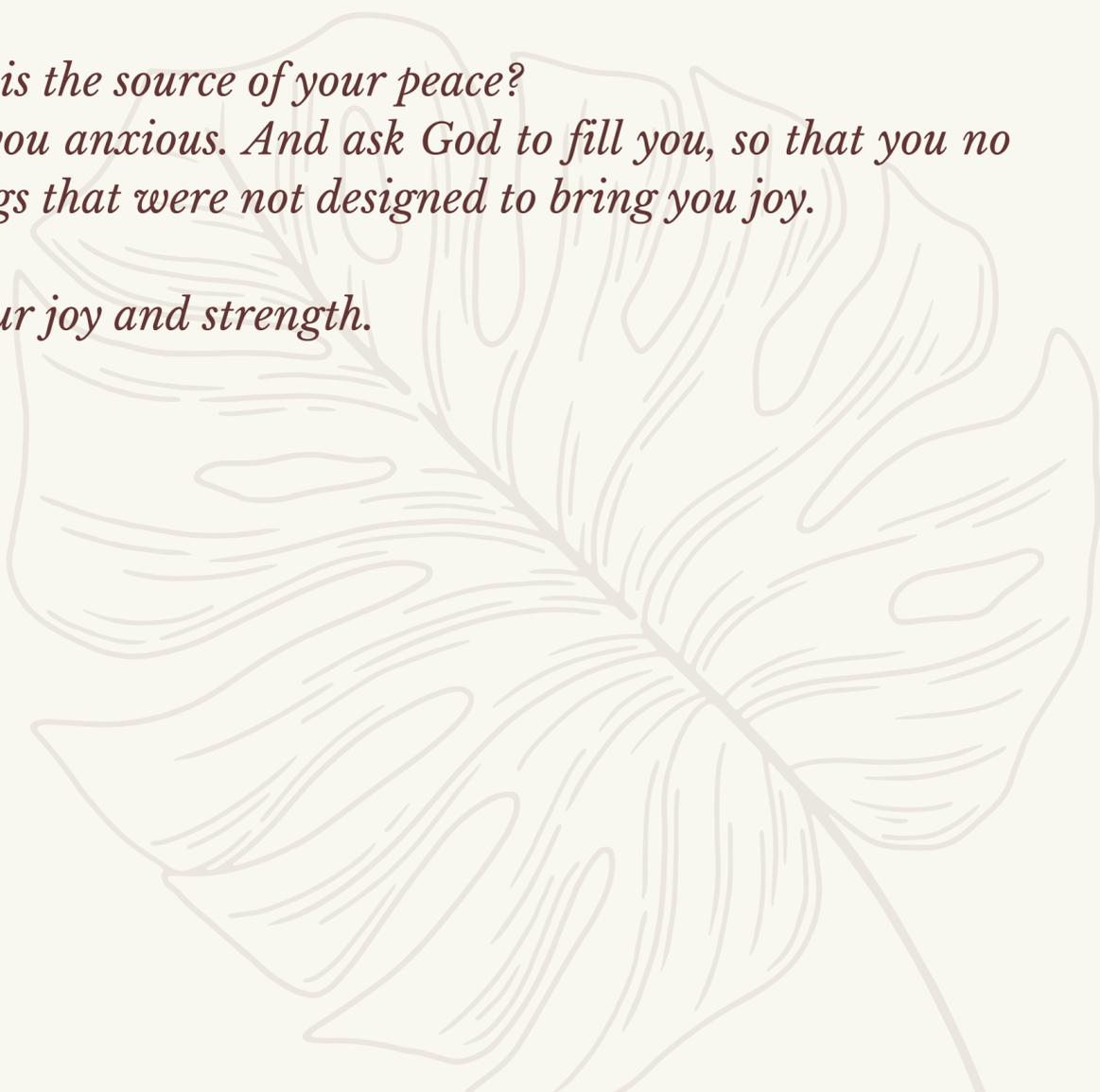
God cares about the things I care about (Jeremiah 29:11, Proverbs 3:5-6, Psalm 37:4, Matthew 6:25-33)

Sometimes we need to be still for a moment. God is a safe place. When we are still and wait on Him, He is able to reveal Himself in a way that we never knew existed. He is already God, but when we are still, He can BE God in our lives and situation.

Where do you go to find joy? What is the source of your peace?

Write down the things that make you anxious. And ask God to fill you, so that you no longer try to fill your life with things that were not designed to bring you joy.

Wait on the Lord. Be still. He is your joy and strength.



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Day 2

COMPARISON

“Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.” Galatians 1:10

Whenever I hear a conversation about comparison, I am always reminded of the story in John 21 where Peter compares himself to John. Peter was devoted to Jesus, however, he had an issue with the fact that Jesus spoke with John differently. Jesus seemed to be (in Peter's eyes) “questioning” Peter's love for Him (Jesus). This was obviously a big deal to Peter.

Peter looks at Jesus and says: “Well, what about him?”. He was obviously bothered by the fact that John was not getting the same “interrogation” (again, that's what it looked like in Peter's eyes). To Peter, life probably looked a lot simpler, easier and prettier for John. Jesus looks at Peter and basically tells him to mind his own business. As he should! Peter gets told not to compare himself to John, and to keep his eyes on Jesus. That's all Jesus asks of us- “Follow Me. Don't worry about the people around you. Focus on OUR relationship. What they do or do not do is none of your business. You are on your own journey, and so are they. Comparison will just rob you of what I am doing in your life.”

Comparison is a thief of joy. Sometimes we feel that what others have is better than what we have. Or wherever they are in life is better than where we are. When we compare ourselves to others, we rob ourselves from enjoying what we have. Life, family, health or a roof over our heads. We end up magnifying the idea that what others have is always better than what we have.

Sometimes we compare ourselves because we want to please others. Or because we feel we are not where we are “supposed to be”. Better yet, we want so bad to gain the approval of man that we sometimes forfeit our God-given purpose for “clout”. I used to hear the word ‘clout’ a lot. I had no idea what it meant until I looked it up.

Clout means doing things, especially on social media, in order to have influence and power or, to be popular and cool. A lot of times, “clout” has no substance behind it. Its entire existence is to please others or to show off. There is a lot of clout on social media. Because of this, we compare ourselves to some things that are not real. Instead of comparing our standards to the One who created us.

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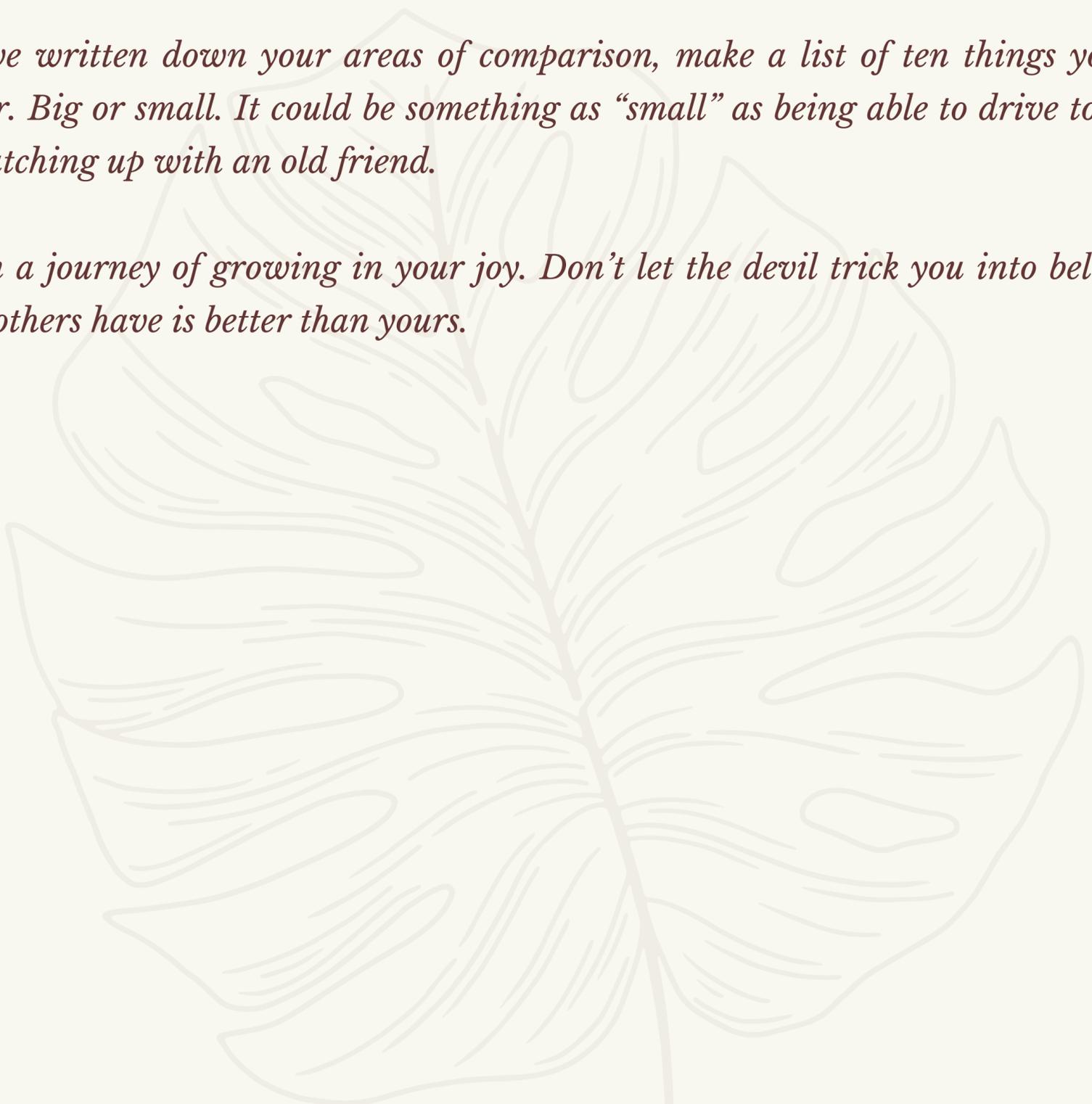
When we understand that God loves us and has the best for us, when we understand that His ways and plans are always better than our own, we begin to live more and more for Him. When we place all that we are in His hands, we will begin to cultivate joy.

When we compare ourselves to others, our minds focus on everything outside of us, and we become outward focused instead of inward. This stops us from cultivating the joy that was promised to us.

Stop and ponder on the things in your life that you compare to others. Pray and ask God to help you to let go of the lies of comparison. Pray that you will see the path that God has set out for you so that you can walk in it intentionally, without looking at what others are doing. Your journey is between you and God. Stay out of other people's journey and look up. There is so much around you that will remind you of God's faithfulness. You will begin to develop a healthy mindset and a lifestyle that will launch you into cultivating joy.

Once you've written down your areas of comparison, make a list of ten things you are grateful for. Big or small. It could be something as "small" as being able to drive to work today or catching up with an old friend.

You are on a journey of growing in your joy. Don't let the devil trick you into believing that what others have is better than yours.



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“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’. There is no commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:30-31

Day 3

SELF-CARE VS SELF-LOVE

Many times, when I have conversations with people about self-love and self-care, I can feel the atmosphere shift and tense up. I have learnt that it's because the idea of self-love has been associated with narcissism and selfishness. Yes, it can be selfish in the worldly sense, but self-love originated as a biblical concept.

When Jesus tells us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves, He is showing us that the standard of our love for others comes from the way we love ourselves, first. You cannot love and pour into others if you do not first love yourself.

How do you know if you love yourself? Well, first look at how you see yourself. Do you see yourself the way God sees you? Precious. Royal. The apple of His eye.

Listen to the way you speak about yourself or to yourself when you look into the mirror. You do not belittle what you love. You do not insult or speak negatively towards what you value. Start there. Now ask yourself: “Do I love myself?” This might be a very difficult and triggering question. But remember, cultivating is not easy.

This is the standard. Because God loves you, He never belittles you. That is the standard of “self-love”. Once you understand this, you then begin to love others. If you will not treat yourself badly (because you love yourself- and because God loves you), then you will not treat others badly.

Joy comes from prioritizing love. God, you, then others. So, take care of yourself. Love on yourself, as your heavenly Father loves on you.

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Mental health is so important. So is spiritual health. We need to take care of ourselves because we need to reflect God's love for us. Self-love comes from the acceptance of God's love for you. It happens when you begin to see yourself the way that God sees you. When you love yourself and see yourself the way God does, you begin to take care of yourself. This fuels your joy.

It is okay to take a break every now and then. Breathe. Do what fuels you, what motivates you and what makes you feel loved. Get your nails done, go for a walk, read a good book or watch a good movie. Love on yourself. Joy comes from the acceptance of love, and from living in love. Be kind to yourself. Love God and accept His love. Cultivating joy requires investing in yourself, the same way a gardener will lovingly look after his or her plants.

Day 4

WHAT DO YOU LISTEN TO?

In 2018, IKEA, a Swedish multinational conglomerate, did an experiment on plants to show the effects of bullying. Both plants were planted in separate rooms with the exact same temperature, light and soil. The difference, however, was that students would go into the room where plant A was located and say nasty things to the plant. In plant B's room, the students said lovely things to the plant. After thirty days, the experiment showed that the plant being bullied was wilting and did not look healthy. The second plant, however, was blooming beautifully and was healthy. IKEA did this experiment to show students the effect that negative words have.

If this is true for plants, imagine how true it is for our hearts and souls. When we hear things that are negative, harsh and unedifying, it is inevitable that we become discouraged, weary or even despondent. This is why what we listen to and absorb on a daily basis is crucial to our joy.

Even the music we listen to or the language we are exposed to at home or at work have a major effect on our joy. Choose what you listen to. By being intentional with this, you begin to cultivate joy.

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Fill your ears and heart with faith. With things that will give you hope, instead of stealing from it. Our minds and hearts were designed to absorb. This is why the bible tells us to guard our hearts (Proverbs 4:23) and listen to the good news that comes from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes God will also lead you to let go of certain areas that are toxic and that threaten your joy and peace of mind. Be obedient and let go of who and what God tells you to. Some things are not worth losing your joy, peace and hope for. Trust God to navigate the path He has set out for you. I have learned that the enemy will often use the things or people around us that we sometimes value the most to steal your joy. He does this in many ways. Sometimes through lies, deceit or distraction.

Cultivating joy requires intentionality. Be careful, and watch what you feed your mind.

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“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” John 10:10

Day 5

ISOLATION

When the devil wants to steal from us, he will either lie to you, distract you or isolate you from community. Sometimes, he will do all three.

Community with people was meant to reflect the image of God. The image of what the Kingdom of God is. Unity and strength. It is in community that we find love, shelter, belonging and so much more.

When we isolate ourselves because we think we do not need others, we rob ourselves of joy. The body of Christ was created to work hand-in-hand with the fruits of the Spirit. It is in community that you are able to see the manifestation of all these fruits. Especially joy.

There is power and beauty in numbers. Find people who will cheer you on and lift you up when you are in need. This is easier said than done, but remember, community was God's idea first. So, pray that He will send you the right people to walk the journey with. The ones who will genuinely celebrate you and with you (the way God does), and the ones who will be a shoulder to cry on. You were not meant to do this life on your own. Find your community, and plant yourself there.

PRAYER

Never underestimate the power of prayer. Nothing can be done without the grace of God. We need Him to walk this journey. To do this thing called life. After you have gone through the five days, go back and pray about the things you struggle with. God is always waiting with His arms open.

He loves you.

“God, help me to see things the way you do.

Teach me to cultivate joy your way.

Restore the areas of my life that lack joy.

Lead me on a new path of discovering the joy of the lord, everyday of my life.

In Jesus' Name.

Amen.”