

Unconditional!

By Mary Kane



Over the years, I've heard many preachers and pastors speak about unconditional love—a love that does not depend on the actions of another person or have any required conditions that must be meant in order to receive love. Lately, God has been speaking to me about unconditional joy...a joy that does not depend on anything other than the fact that my God "is" and that He has saved me. Unconditional joy is a whole new concept for me. Prior to this point my joy always depended on feeling certain emotions while experiencing favorable circumstances. Needless to say, my joy was a very fickle thing!

What does God's Word say about joy? Does it really depend on emotions and circumstances or is it something deeper than that? Let's see what God's word has to say about joy! Please turn to Philippians 4:4.

According to God's Word, when are we to rejoice?

We can see in Philippians 1:1 that Paul wrote this letter specifically to the Christians in Philippi. So as *Christians*, we are instructed by Paul to rejoice always! In the original Greek, the word used in this verse for *always* is *pantote*. According to Blue Letter Bible, *pantote* is made up of two smaller Greek words, one of which is *hote*. *Hote* translates as: when, whenever, while, as long as, as soon as, after, after that. We are to rejoice *when...* when good things happen, when bad things happen, when hard things happen. We are to rejoice *while...*while we are comfortable, while we are uncomfortable, while in plenty, while in need. We are to rejoice *as long as...*as long as we have breath, as long as we have voice, as long as we have ease, as long as we have hardship. We are to rejoice *after...*after we win, after we lose, after we get promoted, after we lose a job. Rejoice! Again, I say rejoice!

What reasons do Christians have to “rejoice always”?

The meaning behind the original Greek word for *rejoice* gives us a clue. Let's take a look and see what we can discover! In the Greek, the word *rejoice* means: to rejoice, to rejoice exceedingly, to be glad, to be well, to thrive. Thayer's Lexicon states that we can rejoice because we have “the hope of future blessedness.” The reason we can rejoice unconditionally then is because of our salvation! In Luke 10:20, Jesus told His disciples to rejoice not because the spirits were subject to them, but because their names were written in heaven.

Please take a moment to list all the things that you have to rejoice about during this season of life.

We now know that we are to have unconditional joy, but what about faith and peace? Shouldn't those things be unconditional as well? As you guessed, the Bible also has something to say about peace and faith!

Romans 1:17 states that the righteous shall live by faith. As we all know, life is never easy or predictable, but we are called to live each day by faith regardless of the circumstances. Moses kept the faith despite the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. Noah kept the faith and built the ark regardless of the fact that it had never rained before in the history of the world. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego kept the faith even though they faced the fiery furnace. Daniel kept the faith while facing the lion's den. All of these, Hero's of the Faith, kept the faith even when it seemed as if there was no hope of victory or even survival. You can keep the faith as well!

Please list your greatest challenge at the present time.

What seems impossible about this challenge?

Please turn to Luke 18:27 and write that verse in the space provided.

Now if you are willing please fill in the following blank.

I can keep the faith in spite of

How is your faith being built because of this great challenge?

Please remember that keeping the faith does not rest in the greatness of your faith, it rests in the greatness of your *God*. If you have the faith the size of a mustard seed (about the size of the period at the end of this sentence), it is enough for your greatest challenge. God wants you to know that you will be victorious in this situation if you will continue in the faith (someone needed to hear that!).

Now please look up the following verses and record what we need to do in order to have unconditional peace.

Philippians 4:6-7:

Isaiah 26:3:

In order to have unconditional peace we need to pray about everything, with thanksgiving and keep our minds riveted on God—not on our circumstances.

Please list some ways you can keep your mind focused on God:

Jamieson, Fausset and Browns states that "Jesus can create "perfect peace" within thy mind, though storms of trial rage without; as a city kept securely by a strong garrison within, though besieged without. "Keep," literally, "guard as with a garrison."ⁱ

When we focus our mind on God it is as if He places us inside a mighty fortress which He personally guards with His powerful right arm!

What is the opposite of peace?

To me, the opposite of peace is anxiety. Anxiety has been a very large, consuming, negative force in my life. Lately, I have been learning to react to anxiety in a Biblical manner. Instead of dwelling on stressful circumstances and dreaming up all sorts of terrible outcomes, I use anxiety as a call to prayer. As soon as I notice that I am anxious, I pause where ever I am and focus my thoughts on God and pray. I finish up by reciting a verse that directly relates to the anxiety at hand. I can attest that this method works! Anxiety has become is an indication that I need to pray.

How about trust, perseverance, kindness, goodness and self control? Shouldn't all of these attributes be unconditional as well? They should be, but for me unfortunately, they often are not. For instance, the other day I went to the drug store to pick up a prescription. I turned off the main thoroughfare, drove into the parking lot and headed towards the



Drive-thru window. As I came around the west side of the building, I cut the corner a little close, leaving the driver coming in the opposite direction very little room to turn the. Instead of putting a kind look on my face and offering a request for forgiveness, I felt myself checking the other woman's face to see how she reacting and prepared to gage my reaction accordingly. If she was going to be nasty to me, I would be nasty back. If she was going to be nice to me, I would be nice back. Fine Christian attitude. Do unto others as they do unto me (my paraphrase). My kindness should not depend on the kindness of others, it should be unconditional. God showed me that I need a lot of work in the kindness department. Yikes!

How can faith, love, joy, peace, trust, kindness, goodness, perseverance and self-control be unconditional? For the answer, please look up Hebrews 13:8.

How is God described in this verse?

All of these things can be lived out unconditionally, because they are not based on conditions; they are based on God and He is unchangeable! As mentioned in the story above, not only should my kindness to others not depend on their kindness to me, but neither should my love for others depend on their love for me. Let's transfer this concept to our relationship with God. Our trust in Him should not depend on any circumstance either. Do you have an area in your life in which you have said any of the following:

- "I will trust you with anything God except _____."
- "I follow you anywhere, but not to _____."
- "I'll be faithful to you God as long as _____ doesn't happen."
- "I'll trust you with all of my relationships except my relationship with _____."

Conditional love. Conditional trust. Conditional faith. I have put conditions like these on my friendships, on my marriage, on my children and on my relationship with God, and they are wrong. When I live conditionally, I'm not living in freedom, I'm living in bondage; I will only be ok as long as my conditions are met. Conditions=distrust.

In closing, let's look up a final verse.

Please write Proverbs 3:6 in the space provided:

In Hebrew, the word *heart* refers to emotions, passions, mind, wisdom, intellect, will manner of thinking, way of life, beliefs, convictions etc. When I trust God with every facet of my life from my relationships, career choices, ministry opportunities, and family concerns, I will be able to walk in unconditional peace, love, joy, kindness, goodness, trust and faithfulness, not because of who I am, but because the Great I AM.

Live unconditionally!

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ⁱ Jamieson, Robert; A.R. Fausset; and David Brown. "Commentary on Isaiah 26." . Blue Letter Bible. 19 Feb 2000. 2010. 4 Dec 2010. <http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=7&contentID=2592&commInfo=6&topic=Isaiah&ar=Isa_26_3>