

JOY BOMB

U ■■■■■ ■■■■■ E ■■■■■ ■■■
■■■■■ E ■■■■■■■■■ ■■■

TAUREN ■ ELLS

 ZONDERVAN
BOOKS

ZONDERVAN BOOKS

Joy Bomb

Copyright © 2025 by Tauren Wells

Published in Grand Rapids, Michigan, by Zondervan. Zondervan is a registered trademark of The Zondervan Corporation, L.L.C., a wholly owned subsidiary of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc.

Requests for information should be addressed to customer-care@harpercollins.com.

Zondervan titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fundraising, or sales promotional use. For information, please email SpecialMarkets@Zondervan.com.

ISBN 978-0-310-36894-6 (audio)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Wells, Tauren, 1986- author.

Title: Joy bomb : unleash Jesus's explosive joy for an extraordinary life / Tauren Wells.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Zondervan Books, 2025

Identifiers: LCCN 2024060645 (print) LCCN 2024060646 (ebook) ISBN 9780310368908 (hardcover) ISBN 9780310368922 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Joy--Religious aspects--Christianity. Christian life. BISAC: RELIGION Christian Living Inspirational RELIGION Christian Living Personal Growth

Classification: LCC B 4647.J68 W455 2025 (print) LCC B 4647.J68 (ebook) DDC 248.4--dc23 eng 20250216

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2024060645>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2024060646>

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, NIJV. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.Zondervan.com. The "NIJV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation. Copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NRSV are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked AMP are taken from the Amplified Bible (AMP). Copyright © 2015 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.lockman.org.

Any internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers in this book are offered as a resource. They are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement by Zondervan, nor does Zondervan vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Cover design: Aaron Teares

Cover photo:annah orwin

Interior design:ara olley

Printed in the United States of America

PrintCode

To Jesus, who has done more with my
life than I ever thought possible.
To Lorna, Kanaan, Lawson, Navy, Banner—
I have something very important to tell you . . .

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	xi
<i>Introduction</i>	xv
CODE ONE: Happy Are the Spiritually Bankrupt	1
<i>lessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the ingdom of heaven atthew</i>	
CODE TWO: Happy Are the Desperately Sad	27
<i>lessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted atthew</i>	
CODE THREE: Happy Are the Intentionally Humble	59
<i>lessed are the mee for they will inherit the earth atthew</i>	
CODE FOUR: Happy Are the Insatiably Hungry	87
<i>lessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled atthew</i>	
CODE FIVE: Happy Are the Unreasonably Forgiving	109

	<i>lessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy atthew</i>	
CODE SIX: Happy Are the Passionately Pure.....		133
	<i>lessed are the pure in heart for they will see God atthew</i>	
CODE SEVEN: Happy Are the Relentlessly Peaceful		159
	<i>lessed are the peacema ers for they will be called children of God atthew</i>	
CODE EIGHT: Happy Are the Willingly Persecuted		179
	<i>lessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the ingdom of heaven atthew</i>	
BOMBS AWAY: Detonate the Joy Bomb		199
otes.....		211



FOREWORD

When Tauren asked me to write the foreword for his book on joy, it took me a little while to decide whether I could do it. Not because I don't believe in the message, and certainly not because I don't believe in his ability to deliver it. Anyone who has ever encountered the melody and the ministry of Tauren Wells knows how contagious his spirit is. (And if you haven't caught it yet, you will in the pages ahead.)

My hesitation to write this foreword was more about a feeling of my own hypocrisy. Let me explain. A few summers ago, I had taken my wife and three kids on vacation, and one day over lunch I decided to play a conversational game. "Who's the happiest person you know?" I asked. I started by casting my vote for my wife, Holly. I thought maybe she'd reciprocate by naming me when it was her turn. No chance. Nobody in the family nominated me. I don't even think I was in their top ten, honestly.

So you understand now why, when Tauren told me he had written *Joy Bomb* and wanted my voice to introduce the message, I had to pause. I don't exactly feel like most days my



JOY BOMB

attitude is the best endorsement of joy. Even as I was writing this while sitting at my son's wrestling match, a coach walked over to me and said, "You look very stressed. What are you working on?"

foreword for my happy friend's boo about joy if you can believe that

So I am here not only as someone who recommends this book to you but as someone who needs it himself. I need it for my down days, my frequent funks, and the—what shall we call them?—"attitudinal challenges" that I battle daily.

I need a voice to remind me to dig beneath the surface of what the world calls happiness and tap into the "Wells" of joy that God alone can open.

And I don't think there's a better friend than Tauren to explain the nature and habits of sustainable joy that comes straight from the source.

As you'll see, this isn't "seven hacks to have a good day," although this book is loaded with practical application. This is timeless truth of what it means to live in the flow of God's supply instead of in the state of stress and scarcity that comes from self-absorption.

There are very few preachers, singers, and people who can instantly lift an entire room like Tauren does. But his vocal ability and spiritual vocabulary are only a part of his gift. The words he speaks emerge from the life he lives. He has done what one songwriter called "the hard work of happiness." In other words, he's dug deep.

And now he wants to help you do the same.



FOREWORD

You're holding a bomb in your hand. The message God has given my friend has the power to destroy strongholds of depression, fear, and shame.

But you're also holding a balm in your hand. This message will be healing medicine for the wounds of your disappointments, and a shot of strength to your weary soul.

I invite you to join me on this journey called joy.

I've got a long way to go. But I can't think of a better guide.

STEVEN FURTICK



INTRODUCTION

Your joy is under attack.

I know that's not the most encouraging way to start a book you picked up for a dose of encouragement! But hang in there; there's plenty of good stuff coming. We just need to start with a reality check: Invisible forces are trying to mess with your happiness and drain your strength. But of course you know this already.

I don't need to throw a bunch of statistics at you. I could—about the rising rates of depression and anxiety, about the growing number of young people who say that they have no purpose or meaning in their lives, or about the number of people reporting serious mental health struggles. But do we really need the numbers? No. In fact, I'm sure you could tell *me* something about all of this.

Life can be brutal sometimes. We all have moments when it feels as though everything that can go wrong does go wrong. The loss of a loved one, a breakup, a dream that didn't pan out—the hits keep coming. Each one chips away at our



JOY BOMB

resilience, making it tougher to find joy in the chaos. And it's not just the big stuff. The wear and tear of the daily grind has its own challenges. But whether our lives have been easy or we've been through unimaginably hard things, the problem we all face is the same—sometimes *the joy is gone*.

That's why I wrote this book. It's a reminder that even when we hit rock bottom, there's something deeper. Beneath the frozen ground of our tough situations, there's a fresh, powerful current of God's goodness and grace, creating a joy that we can't find on our own.

We often think of joy as something fleeting, a momentary high that comes and goes. We chase after it, thinking the next vacation, promotion, or purchase will make us happy. But joy isn't a passing feeling tied to what happens around us. It's not just a temporary thing that fades. Joy is much deeper and more profound. It's a state of being that can sustain us even in the darkest times.

We were made for joy. We were made for happiness that isn't tied to our next vacation, glass of wine, or new gadget. It's not even about God making all our dreams come true. Our joy is connected to one singular source. The kind of joy we're talking about here isn't superficial or dependent on circumstances; it's divine and eternal. It comes from God and is rooted in his unchanging character and boundless love for us.

The Bible says that the joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). I've found this to be true. When the Enemy targets my strength, he aims to sabotage my joy, because my



INTRODUCTION

strength flows from my joy. So if my strength is powered by my joy, I must ask: What is my joy connected to?



Many of us grapple with the elusive sensation of joy in our lives because we often tether our joy to fleeting and fragile sources. Our spirits will always feel drained when our joy is anchored to something momentary. Imagine if our joy is rooted in a job promotion and then we're passed over—suddenly our spirit feels crushed and our strength depleted. If our joy is wrapped up in another person and that person leaves our life for any reason, our joy goes with them, leaving us hollow. When our joy hinges on the next big achievement and we fall short, our joy perishes alongside our unmet goals. But when our joy is linked to its true and eternal source, a divine conduit designed to perpetuate an endless flow, we can sustain the current of God's power in our lives, even through any season and every storm!

We must recognize that our joy is meant to flow from a single unshakable source, and that source is the Lord. When our joy is intertwined with Jesus, it becomes impervious to the Enemy's assaults, because the Enemy must confront Jesus to even touch our joy! That's why it's crucial to remain in Christ, our supernatural source.

Are you ready for an infusion of encouragement? When you allow the joy of Jesus to surge through you, he imparts the strength you need to navigate whatever challenge you're facing right now and at any point in the future!



JOY BOMB

I know this is a book, but I feel compelled to preach a little bit! Jesus can infuse you with the strength required, by the joy he gives, to overcome any trial. One of my heroes, Pastor Steven Furtick, called me on the phone one night to talk through a message he was about to preach the next morning. I was preparing to walk out on stage for a concert, but I had to take a praise break in my dressing room when he pointed out that David proclaimed, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil” (Psalm 23:4 NKJ). He alluded to the idea that the joy of the Lord transforms your journey through the darkest night into a triumphant procession, allowing you to exclaim “Yea!” even when you’re in the valley. Come on, that’s good! He’s right. This divine joy doesn’t diminish the reality of your pain or the gravity of your struggles; rather, it grants you a steadfast spirit and unwavering confidence, ensuring that as you journey through trials, you are indeed moving through them. There is another side to every valley, and you are going to reach it!

Something caught my attention as I recently read through the Old Testament’s last book, Malachi. The prophet concludes his writing with the word “curse” (4:6 NKJ). The story of God and his people doesn’t exactly end on a high note, I’d say. But it was fitting because in their inability to uphold God’s law, the laws of Moses, and their own stringent traditions, they were left with nothing but a curse. The people of Israel had been given a divine standard to live by, but their repeated failures highlighted their human frailty and the insurmountable gap between divine perfection and human imperfection. This



INTRODUCTION

is where the connections in Scripture find their place and power. As Jesus, God in flesh, began his ministry on earth, as captured in the pages of what we call the New Testament, he opened his first recorded sermon, in Matthew 5, with “Blessed are . . . I hear a dramatic pause before he utters his next words . . . the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 3).

Did you catch it? Do you think his listeners that day, gathered on the quiet, desolate hillside of Eremos, caught it? Jesus connected all that the law left us with—the curse—to the life that now exists for those who come to exist in him:

I G

He brought into view the opportunity to walk away from a cursed life and experience the wonder of a blessed one. This transition from curse to blessing is not just a theological concept; it represents a profound shift in the human condition. Where there was once condemnation and despair, Jesus introduced hope and renewal. He offers a new covenant, one that is based not on human ability to follow laws but on God’s grace and the transformative power of faith in Christ.

Here’s the fascinating thing about the word he chose with divine intentionality to declare first. “Blessed” in the original language would have been understood by those assembled that day as “happy.” This choice of word is significant.

Over and over again, eight times, Jesus used the word “happy” in communicating how profoundly heaven’s principles



JOY BOMB

could affect our lives. Happiness, as Jesus described it, is not a fleeting emotion based on external circumstances but a deep, abiding sense of well-being that comes from a right relationship with God. The essence of his first message was how to be happy!

With this inaugural message, Jesus dropped a joy bomb.

This message, at the intersection of happiness and heaven, would disrupt the collective and individual spiritual paradigms in a way that would send shock waves through their souls, tremors through their teachings, and rivets through their religiosity. It detonated the possibility of a joy the money, entertainment, sex, pleasure, or success never could. This book will show you how to detonate that joy bomb in your own life, giving you the “codes” to unleash a joy beyond imagination.

■ HO HIJACKED HAPPINESS ■

When you flip through the pages of the Bible, you’ll quickly notice that terms such as “happy,” “joyful,” and “blessed” seem to dance around one another, often used interchangeably to paint a picture of a life full of divine favor and contentment. It’s as if they’re three best friends on a mission to highlight the good life according to Scripture.

Take James, for instance, who didn’t shy away from proclaiming that those who endure trials are “happy, spiritually prosperous, and favored by God” (1:12 AMP). This phrase

■

INTRODUCTION

might sound a bit grandiose, but it's spot-on. James 1:12 says, "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life." Here, "blessed" isn't just a simple pat on the back; it's an acknowledgment of deep, enduring joy.

John Piper has said, "If you have nice little categories for 'joy is what Christians have' and 'happiness is what the world has,' you can scrap those when you go to the Bible, because the Bible is indiscriminate in its uses of the language of happiness and joy and contentment and satisfaction."¹ Joni Eareckson Tada echoes this sentiment, pointing out that Scripture uses these terms interchangeably along with words such as "delight," "gladness," and "blessed." She emphasizes that there is no scale of relative spiritual values applied to any of these.²

Then there's Psalm 1:1, which starts with "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked." Swap out "blessed" for "happy" or "joyful" and the meaning remains rich and clear. The psalmist was celebrating a life aligned with divine wisdom, where happiness naturally follows.

Interestingly, the distinction between "happy" and "blessed" is a relatively new development in Christian thought. Traditionally, biblical texts did not differentiate between these states. The Hebrew word *asher* and the Greek word *ma arios* are often translated as both "happy" and "blessed" in various contexts. So who hijacked the happiness we find in the Scriptures? This modern distinction might stem from an attempt to highlight the depth and divine origin of



JOY BOMB

“blessedness” as opposed to the more everyday, fleeting notion of “happiness.” This distinction, however, doesn’t hold up when we examine Scripture closely.

Randy Alcorn, in an interview on the *Stastor Ohn* podcast, introduces a concept developed by pastor and author David Murray. Murray identified six kinds of happiness: nature happiness, social happiness, vocational happiness, physical happiness, intellectual happiness, and humor happiness. Alcorn says, “All of those, in God’s common grace, are available to everyone, except the final one, which Murray calls ‘spiritual happiness.’” This, according to Murray, is “a joy that at times contains more pleasure and delight than the other six put together.”³ Psalm 32:1 reflects this, using the Hebrew word *asher*: “Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven” (NRS ue) and in verse 2, “Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity” (NRS ue). This happiness, rooted in reconciliation with God, transcends all others.⁴

In the Beatitudes, Jesus repeatedly declared people “blessed” in various states of life, from the poor in spirit to the peacemakers. Matthew 5:3–12 is a litany of blessings, each one promising joy despite circumstances that might not outwardly seem happy. Yet the underlying message is one of profound joy, a happiness rooted in spiritual fulfillment.⁵

Alcorn states: “When you find happiness in God, then you can look at nature and have greater pleasure in it. It is what C. S. Lewis talked about with the first things and the second things. . . . If you put the first things first, and the first thing is really the first person, who is God, then everything else falls in



INTRODUCTION

place.”⁶ Whether it’s the unwavering joy of enduring faith, the simple happiness of righteous living, or the blessed assurance of divine favor, the Bible wraps these terms around a core truth: A life lived in harmony with God’s will is a life overflowing with true happiness, joy, and blessing.⁷

This truth even flows into this very moment. Right now. Wherever you find yourself with these pages. It’s not just I who wants you to know that you can be happy—God does too. Forget the scowl of the religious in their disdain for the idea of a “happy Christian.” Set aside for a moment the idea that deep joy is based on your personality or emotional state. True joy, as Jesus presented it, is accessible to all, regardless of temperament or circumstance. Turn down the noise that fights to drown out the whisper that echoes throughout the vastness of your soul and tells you there is more. Not just more for someone else. More for you. More joy, fulfillment, purpose, freedom, possibility, and love than you could ever imagine.

You were wired to experience happiness because you were created by the God of infinite joy.

This divine wiring is not an accident; it reflects the very nature of God, who is the source of all true joy. Embracing this joy means aligning yourself with the reality of God’s love and purpose for your life. It means stepping into a life that is defined not by the limitations of the old covenant but by the limitless possibilities of the new covenant in Christ.

How important to the heart of God must your joy be if it’s the first thing Jesus spoke of in his first recorded sermon on planet Earth?



JOY BOMB

Your happiness *matters* to God.

Here's the truth: Where that joy comes from has been atrociously misattributed. What you will discover in the pages of this book is that Jesus is the singular source of happiness and that he has principles, ways of living, that not only bring happy feelings to us but create wells of deep joy within us.

Read the next portion of this book carefully; every page turned and word read is like a secret code that when punched in will trigger a detonation sequence sure to bring all your misconceptions about a joy-filled, happiness-fueled life crumbling to the ground. Here comes the joy bomb!



CODE ONE

HAPPY ARE THE SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

MATTHEW 5:3



THE TOPOGRAPHY OF JOY

I'm the proud dad of four incredible boys. Yes, four. Pray for Lorna and me! There's Kanaan Crue, Lawson Mayer, Navy Elliot, and Banner Paul. Within the first couple of years after having my oldest son, Kanaan, a friend shared an idea with me: Every five years he and his wife did something special and exclusive, a trip, with one of their children, since, like us, they had so many. I thought this was a great idea and couldn't wait for Kanaan's fifth birthday so we could take him on his five-year trip! The plan was that he would get to choose anywhere in the US he wanted to go, alone with Mom and Dad and, more importantly, away from his brothers. He loved the idea!

Little did I know he would choose the location of all locations, the trip of all trips—Disney World in Orlando, Florida. This set a precedent I didn't anticipate and was definitely not prepared for because, after Kanaan, Lawson wanted to go to Disney World, and then Navy, and, if history repeats itself, Banner will too! *What in the world have I gotten myself into?* So we've been to Disney multiple times now and we've had an amazing time. But it's always so interesting to observe that even there, at what has been dubbed "the happiest place on Earth," you see small children weeping, exhausted, and stomping their feet in disapproval of Mom and Dad's plans. This, of course,

JOY BOMB

while Mom and Dad argue about which ride they should go on next and who was responsible for the sunscreen that was left behind. You can feel the irony in the reality that Disney is the home not only of Mickey Mouse and Tinker Bell but of melt-downs, bitter tears, and family feuds. The happiest place on Earth doesn't always live up to our expectations.

The truth is, there are expectations that we associate with certain locations. I believe that Jesus understood this principle when he chose the place from which he would deliver a powerful yet paradoxical message.

Jesus was very intentional about the spaces he occupied and the places he chose to be. In Matthew 5 we find Jesus beginning his ministry on a hillside, getting ready to teach his disciples, and the place he chose was the side of a mountain called Eremos, from a word meaning isolated, desolate, or strong.

Now, I have been a part of a few staff retreats and camps, and part of the magic is in the location. A great spot with a vibe in the city or a beautiful retreat in the mountains creates an elevated experience, but Jesus didn't choose a grand location. Quite the opposite. This setting was deliberately dedicated to the message he would teach, the message we have come to call the Beatitudes.

There's a good chance that you are somewhat familiar with this message:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom
of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

HAPPY ARE THE SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called
children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because
of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of
heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute
you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you
because of me. (Matthew 5:3–11)

In the Beatitudes, Jesus shared eight life-changing ways of life. The translation we have says “blessed,” but the word in its original form means happy or joyful.

This is wild. It’s revolutionary. In Jesus’s first recorded moment of public preaching, he told his followers how to be . . . happy? Not holy or reputable (although he would get to that later)—but happy. Oh, the self-made religious talking heads of our day wouldn’t be able to get to their pulpits or YouTube soapboxes fast enough to upload a video and discredit the message and ministry of this new feel-good preacher! Jesus didn’t start his message calling people out or talking about sin; he was giving them keys to joy. Heresy! The question it really suggests for me is this: How important must people’s experiencing the joy of the Lord be if God himself chose this

JOY BOMB

topic to address first? Not only that, but we cannot forget that the place he chose to hand us the keys to joy, Eremos, was a place of both desolation and strength.

Jesus uses the topography to illustrate the topic and reveal the tension in this truth: *the strength God gives through joy can be produced in desolate places*. That reveals to us that our joy is not dependent on a structure, a system, or circumstances. It also declares that joy can be found in isolated places. It's not determined by people, possessions, or popularity. He's pointing us to a notion that's hard for us to grasp—that happiness has little to do with what we have or where we are.

Let's look more closely at where Jesus taught from. Hills and mountains were significant in the history of the people he was speaking to. Throughout the Bible, mountains often symbolize places of divine revelation and encounter. For instance, Mount Sinai holds profound importance as it was the site where God gave the law to Moses. The dramatic events on Sinai, where the law was etched on tablets for Moses to carry to the people, are detailed in Exodus 19–20. This moment marked the establishment of the covenant between God and Israel, emphasizing the sacred and binding nature of God's commandments.

Another crucial mountain is Mount Zion, which became a symbol of the very church that Christ would build. Zion is frequently mentioned in the Psalms and the Prophets as a place of divine dwelling and ultimate redemption. Psalm 2:6 declares, "I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain." In the

HAPPY ARE THE SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT

New Testament the writer of Hebrews also referred to Mount Zion, describing it as the “city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22), symbolizing the ultimate gathering of God’s people and the establishment of his kingdom.

Jesus’s ministry was connected to mountains and hills as well. He often sought the solitude of hills for prayer and teaching. One of the most poignant connections is Golgotha, the hill where Jesus was crucified, fulfilling his mission to redeem humanity (Luke 23:33). Before this ultimate sacrifice, Jesus proclaimed his message from various elevated places, symbolizing the higher spiritual perspectives he offered.

Mountains in the Bible are not just geographical features; they represent moments when heaven and earth met, where God revealed his purposes, and where significant spiritual truths were imparted. In choosing these locations, God underscored their importance in the narrative of faith. This pattern continued with Jesus, whose teachings from hillsides and mountains echoed the profound significance of these elevated places in biblical history. His Sermon on the Mount, for example, is one of his most famous discourses, providing a new law that emphasizes inner righteousness over mere external behavior (Matthew 5–7).

So the association of God with mountains and hilltops highlights the idea of elevation—not just physical elevation, but spiritual elevation, calling people to a higher understanding for a deeper relationship with the divine. This moment in Jesus’s ministry, his teaching the Beatitudes from an elevated place, is in perfect continuity with the rich biblical symbolism as he

JOY BOMB

invited his followers to see life, faith, and spirituality from a vantage point aligned with God's perspective.

It's important to note that Jesus's teachings came from a higher perspective, one that we often lack. Jesus could "see" something that the world couldn't. I am talking about his divine perspective—one that goes far beyond human understanding. He wasn't limited by time, place, or circumstance. He saw not only what was happening in front of him but also the eternal implications and hidden layers behind every situation. His view stretched across the past, present, and future, connecting moments in a way we often miss. This is reinforced by the image of the story: Jesus sat above the people as the hillside sloped downward, placing them beneath him. From his vantage point, Jesus could see far beyond the people, but the people looking up at him could see only Jesus. In other words, they didn't share Jesus's broader perspective; they simply saw him. They couldn't see all that he could see, but they could see him. This is a beautiful picture for our lives because, most of the time, we can't see what Jesus sees. We don't have the vantage point he has. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are his ways above ours (Isaiah 55:9). But what we can see, when we can't see, is Jesus. We look to Jesus, who is the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Through his teaching we get to see the world and our lives through his eyes.

This picture speaks to us today because, let's face it, most of the time we don't have Jesus's perspective. We're usually wrapped up in whatever's right in front of us, trying to make

HAPPY ARE THE SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT

sense of our own little slice of the moment. But Jesus? He sees our lives with a much bigger, broader understanding. While we're staring at a single piece of the puzzle, he's looking at the whole thing put together.

Think about it. Maybe you're in a job you're not thrilled about, but you need it to pay the bills. It's easy to feel stuck and frustrated and wonder why you're there. Jesus, though, can see how this job could be laying the groundwork for a future opportunity you can't even imagine yet. He knows the people you're meeting, what skills you're learning, and how all of that might fit into his bigger plan for you down the road.

Or think about your relationships. Have you ever had a relationship that ended, leaving you feeling hurt and confused? In the moment it's hard to understand why something like that would happen, and all you can see is the pain right in front of you. But Jesus can see the long-term picture. Maybe he knows this separation will help you grow, or maybe he's preparing someone new to come into your life who will bring a whole new level of empathy and support you never knew you needed.

Then there are those times when we face health challenges—something that's slowing us down or making life feel a lot harder. We naturally focus on the discomfort and start worrying about what this might mean for our future. But Jesus has the bigger view here too. He sees how this season could bring us closer to people who understand what we're going through or how it might strengthen our faith in ways we never imagined.

JOY BOMB

These everyday moments remind us that even when we don't see the full picture, we can still look to Jesus. When we can't see what's ahead, we can still see him, and that's what really matters.

Now, I want to point out something I find encouraging. Jesus and the crowds that came to him didn't ascend to the pinnacle of this mountain, which could represent the highest heights of success, affluence, or influence. But they weren't at the very bottom of the mountain in a low place either, which could represent a place of defeat, failure, or insignificance. The place Jesus chose to give a master class on joy was somewhere in the middle, somewhere fairly underwhelming and, well, ordinary. Some would even say it was less of a mountain and more of a hill. No, there was nothing about the situation that was spectacular, but just because it wasn't spectacular doesn't mean it was insignificant.

Consider the simplicity of a conversation over a cup of coffee with a friend. You might be discussing everyday things, yet one sentence or piece of advice could have a profound effect on you. Or think about how you show faithfulness at work, completing daily tasks with a good attitude. These actions might seem mundane, but they often lead to personal growth, recognition, and unexpected opportunities. There have been times I've been doing something as simple as taking a walk and suddenly experienced a moment when God gave me divine direction for my life. These moments illustrate how the miraculous can happen in the mundane.

We often rob ourselves of life's most significant moments

HAPPY ARE THE SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT

because we have been convinced that something extraordinary or spectacular must take place for something to be supernatural and significant. Jesus illustrated that it *can* happen like that, but also that the miracles of life happen in the mundanity of life. In the Beatitudes, Jesus was communicating one of the most important truths we will discover in this life: Joy is generated from within. Our external surroundings do not have the power to bring us joy. Happiness is ignited within our spirits. When Jesus points to joy, he first points us inward, to our spirits (John 15:11; Galatians 5:22).

Just as Jesus gave powerful words to his followers in a desolate place, we can find strength in our empty places too. These experiences can strip away superficial sources of happiness and help us discover a deeper, more resilient joy that is not dependent on what's happening around us but on what God is doing within us. By turning inward and connecting with the Spirit of God, we can ignite a joy that is rooted in our inner strength and faith, providing us with the resilience to navigate life's toughest challenges.

THE PARADOX OF JOY

This is a truth we see repeatedly in Scripture but one that is always being challenged by our humanity.

We think we can get joy. In fact, we have been programmed to believe that happiness is something that can be siphoned from an earthly source. Multimillion-dollar marketing

JOY BOMB

campaigns coined as “joy marketing” pervade the culture. Companies have discovered that 93 percent of Americans are on a quest to find joy in their lives.¹ With advertising slogans such as Coca-Cola’s “Open a Coke, open happiness” or McDonald’s “I’m lovin’ it,” the message is clear.

These campaigns tap into a fundamental human desire for happiness and satisfaction, presenting their products as shortcuts to these emotions. The idea is that by consuming their products, we can instantly experience joy. This notion is both compelling and misleading. It suggests that joy is something external that can be bought and consumed, rather than an internal state that we cultivate through our thoughts, actions, and relationships.

The prevalence of these types of marketing strategies raises questions about the impact on our collective psyche. If joy is continually portrayed as something that can be purchased, it may lead to a consumerist mindset by which we constantly seek external validation and gratification. This can result in a cycle of temporary happiness followed by inevitable disappointment when the initial thrill fades, prompting us to buy more in search of the next fix.

Long before joy was positioned as a commodity by commercials, ads, and efforts that drove us to empty places promising lasting joy that never came, there has been the broken compass of the human heart, guiding us to much of the same.

Remember the story of Abraham and Sarah? Sarah, unable to have children, found herself in a state of deep despair that

HAPPY ARE THE SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT

led her to a scandalous decision. In their desperation the couple tried to solve their problem by seeking joy externally through Sarah's servant Hagar (Genesis 16:1–4). Hagar conceived and bore a child, but this situation didn't bring the joy they had hoped for; instead, it created turmoil and heartache, weaving an endless web of difficulty and strife within their household that has created generations of conflict (Genesis 16:5–6).

Eventually, God miraculously intervened. Sarah finally became pregnant, fulfilling God's promise (Genesis 21:1–2). This miraculous event was a testament to the joy bomb that God ignites when we trust in divine timing. Similarly, when we yearn for joy, we often look outside ourselves and God's provision, seeking it in transient, external things. But true joy doesn't come from the outside in. As Isaac, Sarah's long-awaited son, grew within her, so joy flourishes from the inside out, nurtured by faith and prepared through patience (Genesis 21:6–7).

Let's sharpen our focus a bit on the opening words of Jesus's message: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).

Happy are the "poor" in spirit. At first glance this may seem paradoxical. How can being poor in spirit lead to joy? To understand this we need to delve deeper into what it means to be poor in spirit.

Being poor in spirit means recognizing our own spiritual poverty and our utter dependence on God. It is an acknowledgment that we are insufficient and that we need God's

JOY BOMB

grace and mercy in every aspect of our lives. This recognition of our neediness allows us to let go of pride and self-reliance and open our hearts to receive the fullness of God's blessings.

Oswald Chambers once wrote, "The knowledge of our own poverty brings us to the moral frontier where Jesus Christ works."² This profound insight highlights the transformative power of recognizing our limitations and spiritual insufficiency. By acknowledging our own poverty, we come to the end of ourselves and stand at the threshold of divine intervention. This "moral frontier" is the point where human effort and pride cease and we become fully open to the work of Jesus Christ. It is here that Jesus meets us, not with condemnation for our inadequacies, but with grace and redemption. At this frontier we experience the beginning of true spiritual growth and renewal as we allow Christ to work within us, shaping us into the people God intended us to be. This is a place of deep humility, where we understand that our strength is found not in our own abilities but in our dependence on him. Chambers's words remind us that spiritual poverty is not a state of despair but a gateway to the transformative and redemptive work of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Matthew 5:3; 2 Corinthians 12:9–10). By embracing our spiritual poverty, we invite Jesus to fill our emptiness with his presence and power. It is a continuous journey of surrender, where we move beyond mere moral striving into a relationship characterized by faith, trust, and reliance on God's grace. In this place of humble dependence, we find the true essence of Christian living and the fullness of life that Jesus promised (John 10:10).

HAPPY ARE THE SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT

When we are poor in spirit, we are able to receive joy because we are not trying to manufacture it ourselves through external circumstances or achievements. Instead, we understand that true joy comes from a personal relationship with God. This joy is not contingent on our situations or possessions but is rooted in the assurance of God's love for us.

The spirit that acknowledges consistent dependency on God is the spirit that is filled with joy. This is because such a spirit is constantly connected to the source of all joy—God himself. When we live in this state of dependency, we experience the peace and contentment that comes from trusting in God's plan and provision.

It's important to understand that what we lack is just as significant as what we possess. This shift in perspective is essential if we are to acknowledge that there are some things only God can generate in our lives. Even if we were to possess much of what the world offers and become rich by cultural standards, we could still find ourselves spiritually bankrupt. The truth is, we are all poor in some area. We don't have the ability to save ourselves, so we rejoice in a Savior who came to save us. We don't have the ability to forgive, redeem, and sanctify ourselves by any means, so we rejoice in the reality that Jesus forgives, redeems, and sanctifies us.

A poignant example of spiritual bankruptcy is found in the story of the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17–27). This man approached Jesus seeking the way to eternal life. He was wealthy, respected, and morally upright, adhering to all the commandments from his youth. But when Jesus told him to

JOY BOMB

sell all his possessions, give the money to the poor, and follow him, the young ruler went away sad. He lacked the willingness to surrender fully to God. His wealth was a barrier, and this interaction revealed his spiritual poverty despite his material abundance.

Being rich in knowledge, wealth, or relationships can't bring us the same joy as the eternal promise of heaven does. This joy comes from being poor in spirit, as we recognize our need for God and experience the fullness of his love and grace. It is this humble, dependent spirit that unlocks the door to lasting and profound joy. The story of the rich young ruler teaches us that no matter how much we possess in worldly terms, or how much religious equity we have invested in even minute spiritual disciplines or principles, we fall short of what is required to inherit the kingdom of God. True richness comes from acknowledging our spiritual need and embracing the transformative power of God's grace.

It can't be overlooked that Scripture uses the term "inherit" to describe the transfer of spiritual wealth from God to his children (Mark 10:17). "Inherit" implies an act of transfer based on relationship, not to be confused with wages that comes from works. Jesus is leading our souls to the reality that God allows us to receive his kingdom based on our relationship with him and nothing else.

In an interview the great NBA center Shaquille O'Neal jokingly said of his multimillion-dollar fortune, "I told my kids, 'We ain't rich, I'm rich!'"³ implying that just because they are his kids doesn't mean they have what he has. The good news

HAPPY ARE THE SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT

for the knowingly bankrupt children of God is that he is gracious and generous, and everything he possesses he pours into our hearts and lives! As it says in Ephesians 1:3, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”

THE PROSPECTS FOR JOY

It feels as though it was just a few short years ago when I turned in my sixth-grade paper, struggling to answer a question that was too complicated for a twelve-year-old to fully understand and express. Our assignment was to answer “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Admittedly, I’ve already asked my boys, all younger now than I was then, the same question. Somehow our answers fell into the same category: professional athlete. Inspired by stars such as Grant Hill, my favorite at the time (I am from Michigan—go Pistons!), and Michael Jordan, what twelve-year-old boy didn’t want to be an NBA star? I proudly turned in my paper, confidently professing my aspirations as a future pro with a grin on my face. I was shocked when that paper was returned to me with a big red *F* at the top, circled twice for added emphasis, I guess. When I asked my teacher why my effort received a failing grade, he said it was “unrealistic” and that I did not take the assignment seriously. His wasn’t the best approach for inspiring the next generation to dream, but I don’t hold anything against him. The

JOY BOMB

truth is, there were some natural qualities I lacked to achieve such a lofty ambition, height being at the top of the list!

Our natural response to these types of deficits is to create an against-all-odds, if-you-can-dream-it-you-can-achieve-it attitude. I am all about that! Yet, at the same time, our deficits give us just as many clues about our destiny as our strengths do. Some achieve despite what they lack; others rise in light of it. Acknowledging what we don't have gives us the awareness to sharpen our focus on what we do. And, at times, what we lack creates space for God to fill our lives with his supernatural power and possibilities.

This is certainly true in our spiritual lives. Throughout Scripture we see God using what people like you and me lacked as a catalyst to display his wonder in their stories. The examples are almost too many to count! A shepherd boy didn't measure up to his brothers, the king, or the giant, but God made up the difference for David (1 Samuel 16–17). The adopted son of a pharaoh had an identity crisis, blind spots in leadership, and speech problems, yet Moses was handpicked by God to lead (Exodus 2–4). A woman with just a little oil and flour realized that her greatest asset was her emptiness, and that oil flowed until it filled every pot she could find (1 Kings 17:8–16). Another woman came to Jesus with the deficit of a terrible reputation, but she worshipped at Jesus's feet, and he declared that wherever the gospel was preached in the world, she would be remembered not for her past but for her praise (Luke 7:36–50). In another instance, while other women donned their heels, rare jewels, and makeup, Esther wowed

HAPPY ARE THE SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT

the royal court and won the king's affection with her natural beauty (Esther 1–10). The Scripture is loaded with stories of people who, when evaluated against their odds or compared to others, were found wanting, and still God beautifully filled their empty spaces with his glory.

As I reflect on these biblical narratives, I can't help but draw parallels to my own life and the lives of those around me. We often focus so much on what we lack that we forget to see the bigger picture. We forget that our deficiencies can be the very things that lead us to our true calling. Think about it: How many times have you felt inadequate, only to realize later that those very inadequacies led you to a path you might not have otherwise considered? It's as if our weaknesses are guiding lights, redirecting us to where we're meant to be.

When I think about my own journey, it's clear that my perceived shortcomings have shaped who I am today. I didn't grow up to be an NBA star, but I found other passions and talents that I might not have explored if I had been solely focused on one unrealistic dream. It's in the exploration of these other paths that we find our strengths, capabilities, and callings.

In the end it's about perspective. We can view our deficits as obstacles or opportunities. The difference lies in how we choose to respond to them. Will we let them discourage us, or will we let them lead us to new and unexpected places? Will we focus on what we lack, or will we embrace the journey of discovering what we possess?

Embracing this perspective brings joy in the realization

JOY BOMB

that our lives are unfolding according to a greater plan, in which even our weaknesses and setbacks play a crucial role. This joy comes not from achieving perfection or meeting society's expectations but from understanding and accepting that God's purpose for us transcends our limitations. It's in this understanding that we find true happiness—a happiness that comes from aligning ourselves with God's will and discovering the unique path he has laid out for each of us.

So the next time you feel disheartened by your shortcomings, remember the stories of David, Moses, the widow of Zarephath, Esther, and the woman who anointed Jesus. Remember that God uses our weaknesses to show his strength. And remember that sometimes what we think we want isn't what we need. Our true calling might be just around the corner, hidden in the very areas where we feel we lack the most. Trust the process, embrace your journey, and let your deficits guide you to your destiny.

It comes as no surprise, then, that as Jesus began his earthly ministry, meeting all kinds of people, he chose twelve young men with various shortcomings and deficiencies. He could have picked kings and influencers, the wealthy and the charming, but he chose the least likely to change the world. The disciples we've come to know and admire were not impressive people. We know that all of these young men had gone “spiritually undrafted,” or unqualified to serve and lead by every religious standard of their day.

Jewish boys would begin memorizing the Torah, the first five books of what we call the Old Testament, early in their lives

HAPPY ARE THE SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT

and throughout their adolescence. They would then either be chosen to continue studying with a rabbi or be rejected from further study and commissioned to learn their father's trade. So the fact that Peter, James, John, Matthew, Andrew, and the other disciples were working in their fathers' trades gives us the insight that these men had been rejected, in a sense, from the prospect of becoming "holy men."

The good news for them and the good news for us is that this is exactly who God gives his kingdom to: not the polished, accomplished, or spiritually elite, but people who can readily admit who they are not, what they lack, and where they come up short.

It's a powerful reminder that God doesn't call the qualified; he qualifies the called. In choosing those who seemed least capable, Jesus demonstrated that it's not about our abilities but about our availability to his will. Each disciple brought something unique to the table despite his imperfections. Peter's passion, though sometimes misguided, became a cornerstone of the early church. Matthew, a tax collector despised by his own people, showed that redemption and transformation are possible for anyone. James and John, known as the "Sons of Thunder" for their fiery tempers, became voices of love and commitment.

Their stories remind us that our past does not define our future in God's kingdom. It doesn't matter where we've been or how many times we've failed; what matters is our willingness to follow and trust in his plan. The disciples' journey with Jesus was filled with growth, mistakes, and learning moments, much

JOY BOMB

like our spiritual journeys. They walked beside him, witnessed miracles, and slowly transformed into the pillars of faith.

The disciples, with their humble beginnings and lack of spiritual accolades, epitomized the beatitude of Matthew 5:3. They were poor in spirit, acknowledging their need for God and their dependence on him. It is precisely this recognition of our own insufficiency and God's sufficiency that opens the door to the kingdom of heaven.

So as we reflect on these ordinary men chosen for an extraordinary mission, let's find encouragement in knowing that God sees potential in each of us, even when we don't see it in ourselves. He calls us to step out in faith, embrace our shortcomings, and allow his strength to be made perfect in our weakness. Just as the disciples did, we, too, can become instruments of his love and grace, influencing the world in ways we never imagined. In our humility and poverty of spirit we find the true richness of his kingdom.

The Sermon on the Mount offers insights more valuable than the rarest treasures. When I read Scripture, I always note the spaces and places Jesus chose to occupy, knowing that everything he did and everywhere he went was intentional. I also consider the audience and the implications of what he was saying for the people in his presence when he spoke. What were they feeling, hearing, and seeing in light of their personal lives, history, culture, paradigms, and expectations? When these factors are considered, many of Jesus's words hit differently. Then, of course, I ask, *What are the implications for me?*

HAPPY ARE THE SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT

There were likely at least two audiences present that day on Eremos to hear Jesus speak. One was the disciples. These followers of Jesus were not on the same religious, political, or societal levels as the other group present: the Pharisees and religious leaders. So two groups of people were hearing one message in at least two different ways as Jesus declared, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

For the disciples these words might have been incredibly empowering and comforting. They were often marginalized and overlooked by the society around them, struggling with their own doubts and spiritual poverty. Hearing that the kingdom of heaven belonged to them would have been a profound affirmation of their worth. This message would have strengthened their resolve and deepened their commitment to following Jesus.

On the other hand, the Pharisees and religious leaders likely interpreted Jesus’s words through a different lens. Accustomed to viewing themselves as the spiritual elite, they might have felt challenged or even threatened by Jesus’s assertion that the kingdom of heaven was accessible to those who were poor in spirit. This was a radical departure from the prevailing religious thought that emphasized strict adherence to the law and ritual purity as pathways to God’s favor.

The Sermon on the Mount is a call to a radical transformation of the heart and mind. It invites us to embrace a new way of living that transcends societal norms and

JOY BOMB

expectations, challenging us to live with greater compassion, humility, and love.

For the religious leaders to hear these words associated with the kingdom of heaven was certainly infuriating. This is when they realized that Jesus was a problem. With these words and this belief, he was undermining everything for which they had worked. The idea of being poor in spirit indicated that the kingdom of heaven was not accessed by the mere study of the Torah, memorization of teachings, or ostentatious offerings or prayers. It disrupted their belief that their coveted status in society would eventually be traded in for status in heaven.

They were offended by the idea that to inherit this kingdom you had to get low, decrease, and take joyful inventory of what you lacked. Neither achievement nor affluence nor adulation was the price of admission into this party. No, for the first time they realized that they weren't as great of candidates for the kingdom as they had thought.

This message hit the rest of those gathered on the hillside—namely, the disciples—differently. For them this was the best thing they had ever heard! After being rejected in so many ways, there was now a path to acceptance and purpose. They were “undrafted” but got to walk on with a scholarship they didn't qualify for and take their place in the kingdom.

When the prevailing religious belief perpetuated the idea that it was who you were and what you had done that justified you for a position in the kingdom, Jesus reoriented

HAPPY ARE THE SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT

his listeners to the truth that no matter who you are or what you've done, the joy of belonging to the kingdom is yours!

This is the lesson for us today: The kingdom of God is available to us, here and now, regardless of our status or position or place in society. When you take in *that* truth and make it real to your heart, you've activated the first code to unleash the joy bomb in your own life.