



# The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V27 N34 August 24, 2025

## PSALMS: CELEBRATING CHRIST IN GOD'S HYMNBOOK

### "Psalm 126"

#### THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

##### Joy

I have inner contentment  
and purpose in spite of my  
circumstances.

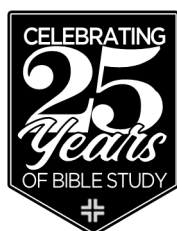
*"I have told you this so that  
my joy may be in you and  
that your joy may  
be complete."*

John 15:11



## Q?

How does joy  
over the past  
help now?



The story goes that in the mid-1600s King Louis XIV asked his brilliant mathematician/physicist, Blaise Pascal, for a proof of the existence of God. Pascal, known for maintaining faith in God while also challenging Enlightenment atheists, informed the king that perhaps the most poignant proof of God's existence was the miraculously persevered presence of God's chosen people, commonly known as "the Jews." While the historicity of this anecdote may be challenged, Pascal's views on the miraculous survivability of the Jewish people and their religion have become well known. Pascal, brilliant as he was, died at the young age of 39. Among his extant writings is the collection of his thoughts regarding his Christian faith. This work, called *Pascal's Pensees*, is the source of the famous apologetic known as Pascal's Wager.

Christian scholar Douglas Groothuis said of Pascal: "Pascal had both a towering intellect and a passionate and convinced Christian faith. This created in him neither intellectual doubt nor existential conflict. He argued ... when we properly consider nature for what God has made it to be (without *a priori* philosophical assumptions), we find no conflict between science and religion. Thus, Pascal engaged in scientific theorizing and scientific experimentation as well as in defending the Christian faith. This is a model that any thinking Christian does well to emulate" (Douglas Groothuis, *Beyond the Wager: The Christian Brilliance of Blaise Pascal*, 19).

In Section 619 of *Pensees*, Pascal marveled at the phenomenon of Jewish perseverance: "This people [the Jewish people] is not eminent solely by their antiquity, but is also singular by their duration, which has always continued from their origin till now. For whereas the nations of Greece and of Italy, of Lacedæmon, of Athens and of Rome, and others who came long after, have long since perished, these ever remain, and in spite of the endeavours of many powerful kings who

have a hundred times tried to destroy them, as their historians testify, and as it is easy to conjecture from the natural order of things during so long a space of years, they have nevertheless been preserved (and this preservation has been foretold); and extending from the earliest times to the latest, their history comprehends in its duration all our histories" (Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Pensees*, 619, 174). Pascal concluded from the inextinguishable history of the Jewish people that "the Jewish religion is wholly divine in its authority, its duration, its perpetuity, its morality, its doctrine, and its effects" (Pascal, 166). Pascal thought that the permanency of the Jewish people argued for their God who was ultimately revealed in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus.

Pascal was not alone in his observations regarding the perseverance of the Jewish people. Mark Twain in the 1800s observed this about the Jewish people: "The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and were gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains" (Mark Twain, *Moments with Mark Twain*, 285).

Pascal and Twain, like the nations (Ps 126:2), wonder with us all at how the Jewish people have survived. The psalmist concludes with joy that the God of Israel has done great things with his people (Ps 126:3)! This contemplated wonder is cause for joy. Because of this historical phenomenon, we anticipate with joy the coming of the One who is to come from this chosen tribe (Deut 18:15-19).

**Read Psalm 126**

*A song of ascents.*

1 *When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dreamed.*

2 *Our mouths were filled with laughter,  
our tongues with songs of joy.*

*Then it was said among the nations,  
"The LORD has done great things for them."*

3 *The LORD has done great things for us,  
and we are filled with joy.*

4 *Restore our fortunes, LORD,  
like streams in the Negev.*

5 *Those who sow with tears  
will reap with songs of joy.*

6 *Those who go out weeping,  
carrying seed to sow,  
will return with songs of joy,  
carrying sheaves with them. [NIV]*

**Read another translation**

1 *When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion,  
We were like those who dream.*

2 *Then our mouth was filled with laughter  
And our tongue with joyful shouting;  
Then they said among the nations,  
"The LORD has done great things for them."*

3 *The LORD has done great things for us;  
We are joyful.*

4 *Restore our fortunes, LORD,  
As the streams in the South.*

5 *Those who sow in tears shall harvest with joyful shouting.*

6 *One who goes here and there weeping, carrying his bag of  
seed,  
Shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his  
sheaves with him. [NASB]*

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Double underline each occurrence of the name LORD in Psalm 126.
- Circle all the occurrences of "joy" in Psalm 126.
- Underline the word "when" in v. 1.
- Draw a line connecting the words "fortunes" in v. 1 and v. 4.
- Draw a box around each use of "we" and "our" in Psalm 126.
- Draw a line connecting words of sorrow in v. 5 and v. 6.
- Double circle the words "song(s)" in Psalm 126.
- Draw a line connecting the words "carrying" in v. 6.

What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the **THEME** of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about \_\_\_\_\_."



## DIG DEEPER

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Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Describe what the psalmist could be referring to in v. 1 when speaking of Zion and restoration.
2. What was the response to v. 1a (see vv. 1b-2)? Why so extreme?
3. What was the response of the nations (v. 2)? How does this compare with other responses of nations toward the LORD found in the book of Psalms (compare with Psalm 2:1-2; 115:2)?
4. Who are the “us” and “we” of v. 3?
5. If God restored the fortunes of Zion, why is the psalmist asking the LORD to restore his fortunes in v. 4?
6. What contrast do you see between v. 4 and v. 5?
7. Why are tears and weeping connected to sowing seed (vv. 5-6)?
8. Why are “shouts of joy” connected with harvest (vv. 5-6)?
9. Is Psalm 126:4-6 a prayer only for farmers? How might a follower of Jesus use the prayer of vv. 4-6?
10. What does Psalm 126 teach us about joy?

Joy is often thought of as only an internal experience of praise and gratitude that can be had by followers of Christ in spite of any negative occurrences. We often hear presentations that contrast happiness with joy. “Happiness comes from happenings” and “joy comes from internal confidence in Christ.” Psalm 126 suggests that joy may also come as a response to the “great things” God has done for us. Joy may be more than only an internal experience. Joy, as described in Psalm 126, is loud and external, called a “song” or “shout” of joy.

Psalm 126 is a psalm of remembrance. As a Song of Ascent (see note), this psalm was often sung by followers of God as they made their way to Jerusalem for annual feasts. Today this psalm is sung by Jewish observers of Passover who seek to retell the miraculous story of God’s deliverance from exile in Egypt. Remembering the past works of God moves Passover participants to proclaim at the end of their celebrations, “Next year in Jerusalem!” This declaration is an expression of hope in the return of the Messiah, trusting that God will do great things again as he has done in the past. Pausing to recount God’s character played out in history is a life-transforming experience. We can experience joy when we actively recall God’s actuated goodness.

Psalm 126 can be divided into two sections. Psalm 126:1-3 recalls the great things God has done in the past for his people. God’s enactment of “great things” caused great joy at the time among his people (vv. 1-2) and even had a residual effect of joy upon people in the present (v. 3). Psalm 126:4-6, the second section of the psalm, forms a prayer calling upon God to do great things again at a time of great need. The prayer of v. 4 and the anticipation of its answer in vv. 5-6 are inflamed with the fuel of remembered joys found in vv. 1-3.

Restoration produces joy (vv. 1 and 4). New life is exciting but somewhat expected. Renewed life is miraculous and unexpected. The psalmist refers to such a restoration of life and fortune for Zion in v. 1. This restoration is most likely a reference to the return of Israel to its homeland after exile. “Babylon took great delight in the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of its inhabitants (c. 586 B.C.). ... Cyrus’s decree (Ezra 1:1-4) allowed the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland and restore their city and temple. This was marvelous in the eyes of God’s people and even of the world’s nations. Yet, the restoration would prove difficult and long in coming” (S. Edward Tesh and Walter D. Zorn, *Psalms*, The College Press NIV Commentary, 416). Psalm 126:1-3 most likely refers to the time of the miraculous return from Babylonian exile. Psalm 126:4-6 most likely refers to a time after the return when the initial excitement had worn off and rebuilding required great persistence.

The joy that resulted from the initial return of the exiles from Babylon was overwhelming. Their return was so revitalizing that it was hard to believe that it could be true, almost “dreamlike” (v. 1b). This return also caused laughter and songs of joy (v. 2). These de-

scriptions of verbal exclamation appear to be loud shouts of emotional excitement. This externally expressed joy was also internally experienced as it is described that the participants were also “filled with joy” (v.3). This exuberant joy experienced by the members of the original exile could also be shared by the remembrance of later generations. Psalm 126:3 could be read, “Just like God did great things for the returnees many years ago, so today God has done great things for us” (v. 3). We can be filled with joy as we share in the memories of previous generations. This “remembrance” of past victories is the purpose of many of Israel’s festivals. Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, Hanukkah and Purim all celebrate “the great things” God did in the past for his chosen people. As we walk through our daily lives, it is good to remember the great things God has done in the past. We can experience a shared joy in such remembrances.

Joy is not only an exercise in recall. Joy can also be anticipation of God doing great things in our own time. The psalmist, after remembering what God had done in the past (vv. 1-3), then petitioned God to restore in his time (vv. 4-6). The joy experienced in our time can come in two different forms. First, the psalmist speaks of God restoring “like streams in the Negev.” This is a miraculous and instantaneous working of God to bring immediate solutions to our need. “Sudden bounty has its perfect illustration here, since few places are more arid than the Negev, and few transformations more dramatic than that of a dry gully into a torrent. Such can be the effect of a downpour, which can also turn the surrounding desert into a place of grass and flowers overnight” (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, vol. 16, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, 475). God can answer our prayers quickly and inspire surprised joy.

At other times, we may have to wait upon God and trust him for future provision. Psalm 126:5-6 uses a farming metaphor in which sowing seeds is considered hard and arduous labor, often accompanied with tears. But we should not lose hope, because if we sow seed, we can anticipate the joys of a future harvest. This sowing could include acts of righteousness, evangelism or service. “Matching this is the other picture of revival, in terms of farming at its most heart-breaking; all its joys hard-won (cf. 2 Cor. 9:6) and long-awaited (Gal. 6:7-10; Jas 5:7f.). But whatever the uncertainties of literal farming, the psalmist is as sure of this harvest – God’s blessing of seed sown, and his visiting of his people (Kidner, 476).

Joy should give us inner contentment in spite of our circumstances. But according to Psalm 126, joy may not be able to be contained to just an inner expression. Joy may be the appropriate extroverted and expressive response to our circumstances as God may either instantly or protractedly do great things on our behalf. We can experience joy through remembrance of God’s past miracles and through anticipation of God’s work and provision in our own lives.

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## Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 *Song of Ascents* “Psalm 126 is the seventh psalm in the collection of fifteen psalms known as the Songs of the Ascents, psalms sung by pilgrims during various festal celebrations in Jerusalem – Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Tabernacles. It is a community lament – one of only two in the Songs of the Ascents. The psalm-singers begin by remembering a time in their past when God restored their lives and did great things among them, and then they petition God to once again restore their lives so that they may rejoice. Mays summarizes Psalm 126 as ‘joy remembered and joy anticipated’” (Nancy deClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, “The Songs of the Ascents: Psalms,” in *The Book of Psalms*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, 913).

v. 1 *restored* “The word *shibat* [restored] does not appear elsewhere in the Old Testament, thus making its precise meaning even more difficult to determine. Translators have understood the term to derive from the Hebrew root *shbh*, ‘to take captive.’ ... The term *shibat* need not be limited to the notion of captivity and may also include the larger meaning of ‘the restoration of a previous situation.’ ... The imperative phrase in verse 4a, *shub shebut*, ‘Restore our fortunes,’ is the more expected form and normally refers to the returning of possessions (cf. Pss 14:7; 85:2). This same phrase in verse 4a (*shub shebut*, ‘Restore our fortunes’) appears in the prophetic literature associated with the exile (cf. Jer 32:44; 33:26; Ezek 16:53) and seems to refer to the restoration of Zion. Thus, the phrase in verse 1a, *shub shibat*, and the phrase in verse 4a, *shub shebut*, function synonymously and serve to introduce the two main sections of the psalm. The first section recalls when God did restore the fortunes of Zion, and the second pleads with Yahweh to act once more in Zion’s behalf” (W. Dennis Tucker Jr., “Psalms 107–150,” in *Psalms*, vol. 2, The NIV Application Commentary, 781).

v. 1 *dreamed* “The simile might then refer to the experience of a wonderful dream; we were like people waking after what we took to be a great dream and finding that the dream is reality (contrast Isa. 29:7–8; also Ps. 73:20; Job 20:8). We pinched ourselves to check that we were awake, and found we were. But OT reference to dreaming commonly alludes not merely to that regular human experience but to dreams as a means of revelation (e.g., Dan. 7; Joel 2:28 [3:1]). So the psalm may also refer to Yhwh’s having given Israel visionary dreams of restoration from exile. They had turned out not to be empty dreams such as Jeremiah dismissed (Jer. 23:25–28; 29:8). They had come true” (John Goldingay, *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms 90–150*, vol. 3, 492).

v. 2 *songs of joy* “The ‘song’ was a ‘ringing cry’ or ‘shouts of joy’ (TWOT 2:851). Great had been the sorrow of God’s people in exile (cf. Pss 42–43; 79; 89; 137; La 3:1–21), but the restoration from exile soon quieted and comforted the hearts of the returnees, as they were filled with happiness and proclaimed with laughter and shouts of joy what God had done for them” (Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms*, vol. 5, 909).

v. 2 *nations* “Through Yhwh’s return to (restored) Zion and Yhwh’s wondrous action on behalf of his people, the nations arrive at the insight that ‘Yhwh has shown himself great by acting in this way on and with them.’ This corresponds exactly to the message of Deutero-Isaiah [Isa 40–55], according to which the nations come to acknowledge Yhwh through the rescue of Israel, accomplished by Yhwh (with the help of his ‘anointed,’ Cyrus) – cf. especially Isa 42:10–12\*; 45:14–22\*; 48:20” (Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150*, Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, 376).

v. 3 *filled with joy* “The term ‘filled with joy’ is different from ‘songs of joy’ (v. 2a). It is the plural form of the word for ‘joy,’ or ‘happy,’ סַמְחָה *samēhām*, ‘happinesses, i.e., filled with joy’” (S. Edward Tesh and Walter D. Zorn, *Psalms*, The College Press NIV Commentary, 418).

v. 4 *streams* “Yhwh should return to his congregation, to his people – as the streams in the Negev return; in summer they fail and dry up, but in winter, after the rains, they are suddenly full of water again and transform the Negev, almost from one day to the next, into a blooming landscape and fertile plowland. Verse 4 pleads for Yhwh’s returning, ‘surprising as the return of water into a dried-up riverbed: what is important in the comparison is that it emphasizes the unpredictability (but not the impossibility! On the contrary, this is something that may happen at any time, even in riverbeds) of the return’” (Zenger, 377).

v. 5 *sows with tears* “The idea is drawn from the struggle of the people to get crops to grow in a land that had been largely left uncultivated for many years: the labor was hard and the results meager at first. The psalmist, therefore, is making a comparison: in the spiritual task of promoting God’s renewed program back in the land, whether by prayer or by direct appeals, the effort will be disappointing and frustrating at times but must be tireless – the ‘sowing’ must continue” (Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150)*, vol. 3, Kregel Exegetical Library, 671).



## APPLY THE TEXT

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### CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Persistently serve God, joyfully remembering the great things God has done for his people and trusting that he will do great things for you.

### CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



## 3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What does this passage lead me to do?



## PARENT CONNECTION

Life has a way of distracting us from what's truly important. Sometimes we're just trying to get through the day and check all the boxes – work, grocery shopping, exercise, soccer practice, quiet time, ballet, carpool, the forgotten project supply, and of course dinner, the meal that happens every single night. We're so busy living life that we forget that we're supposed to be living the abundant life, the life focused on the One who saves. Think through your life for a quick minute. What has God done for you? How has He blessed you? Remember that one time He.... Stories of God's goodness are meant to be recalled. They should well up inside you like a spring bubbling to the surface ready to be recounted to the next generation and the next. They bring unbelievable feelings of joy and songs of laughter. When we remember what God has done for us, we're drawn into a deeper relationship with Him. Our kids need to hear our stories. They need to begin talking about God's goodness with others. At a ministry retreat a few months ago, we were each given stones on which we were to write something to help us remember God's goodness. Maybe your family can do this or something similar. This week, begin a family journal or memory jar. Map out space in your yard for a stone garden, create a framed photo collage and display it in your living room or write a song that your family can sing that will tell of God's goodness. God is good to us! Let's share these stories with others so they can know Him.

### What Does The Bible Say?

Read Psalm 126

1. What did the Lord do?
2. How did the people react and what did they say?
3. What did the people ask the Lord to do?

### What Do You Think?

If God had already restored His people, why did they ask Him to restore them again?

### What Do You Do?

Make a family journal using craft supplies around the home. Have each member of the family write down the good things God is doing for you this week.

## CORE COMPETENCY: Joy

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

## MEMORY VERSE: Galatians 5:22-23

*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."*

## KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: [kids@wearecentral.org](mailto:kids@wearecentral.org)

- \_\_\_\_\_ I completed my Bible Study
- \_\_\_\_\_ I memorized this week's verse
- \_\_\_\_\_ I brought my Bible to church
- \_\_\_\_\_ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

# OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

## CENTRAL BELIEFS

**Authority of the Bible** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)  
*I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.*

**Church** (Ephesians 4:15-16)

*I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.*

**Eternity** (John 14:1-4)

*I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.*

**The Holy Spirit** (Romans 8:9)

*I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.*

**Humanity** (John 3:16)

*I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.*

**Identity in Christ** (John 1:12)

*I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.*

**Jesus Christ** (Hebrews 1:1-4)

*I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.*

**Life Purpose** (Acts 20:24)

*I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.*

**Personal God** (Psalm 121:1-2)

*I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.*

**Salvation by Grace** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

*I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.*



## CENTRAL VIRTUES

**Love** (1 John 4:10-12)

*I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.*

**Joy** (John 15:11)

*I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.*

**Peace** (Philippians 4:6-7)

*I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.*

**Patience** (Proverbs 14:29)

*I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.*

**Kindness/Goodness** (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

*I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others*

**Faithfulness** (Proverbs 3:3-4)

*I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.*

**Gentleness** (Philippians 4:5)

*I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.*

**Self-Control** (Titus 2:11-13)

*I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.*

**Grace** (Colossians 3:13)

*I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.*

**Hope** (1 Peter 1:3-5)

*I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.*

**Humility** (Philippians 2:3-4)

*I choose to esteem others above myself.*



## CENTRAL PRACTICES

**Bible Study** (Hebrews 4:12)

*I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Biblical Community** (Acts 2:44-47)

*I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.*

**Compassion** (Psalm 82:3-4)

*I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.*

**Disciple-Making** (2 Timothy 2:2)

*I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.*

**Evangelism** (Acts 1:8)

*I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.*

**Generosity** (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

*I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.*

**Prayer** (Psalm 66:16-20)

*I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Single-Mindedness** (Matthew 6:33)

*I focus on God and His priorities for my life.*

**Spiritual Gifts** (Romans 12:4-6)

*I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.*

**Worship** (Psalm 95:1-7)

*I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.*

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### OUR MISSION

Making God known by making disciples who are changed by God to change their world.