

The Way of Jesus

Week 4 - God's Joy

Key Verse

*These things I have spoken to you,
that my joy may be in you,
and that your joy may be full.*

John 15:11 (ESV)

Key Term – Joy

“Joy is natural in the presence of God, whose deepest essence is love. Joy is a pervasive sense of well being that is deeper and broader than any pleasure. It is a primary foundation of Kingdom life and ministry. It is a gift and a duty. Jesus gives us his joy. Paul says, ‘rejoice!’ It is essential, not a luxury. You can choose a life of joy.

If we find that we do not have joy, we need to go in search of why. Usually it has to do with doing too much and failing, with being obsessed with ourselves, always looking backward, forward and inward. Basically, we can stop trying so hard, and direct our mind to God and to our place in his world, now and forever. ‘You can always find God at the end of your rope. If you are not there yet, he will wait for you. He will let you try a few more tricks.’”

(DW & J Johnson “Renovation of the Heart in Daily Practice” pp 93-98, and personal notes)

Give the next hour to God and delight in what he gives, the work at hand now.

Look up Prov 15.13,15; 17.22; Psa 90.14-17; 92.4; 97.11-12; Phil 3.1; 4.4

Reflections on God's Joy

In the early weeks of our time together we are stopping to think about God. Most of the barriers to our faith lie in our thoughts and conceptions of God. That is why the Bible makes so much of issues of truth, falsehood, and idols. It is entirely possible to worship a god of our own imaginations, and find that god entirely unable to deliver us! So, it is important to know God as he really is. Consider this comment by Dallas Willard:

"Jesus' good news about the kingdom can be an effective guide for our lives only if we share his view of the world in which we live. To his eyes this is a God bathed and God permeated world... that is inconceivably beautiful and good because of God and because God is always in it... over which he constantly rejoices."

(Dallas Willard, The Divine Conspiracy, p. 61)

So in the past two weeks we have looked at God's goodness and his greatness; they are foundation stones of the good news of the Kingdom. This week we look at his joy, because our confidence in him is linked to our appreciation of the pleasure and delight he takes in our redemption.

We should, to begin with, think that God leads a very interesting life, and that he is full of joy. Undoubtedly he is the most joyous being in the universe. The abundance of his love and generosity is inseparable from his infinite joy.

(Dallas Willard, The Divine Conspiracy, p. 62)

Americans talk a great deal about happiness, but not often of joy. "The pursuit of happiness" is a constitutional right for us, yet as elusive as it is sought. But joy and happiness are not the same thing. Happiness depends upon 'happenings'. It comes from the word "hap" which means "luck, happenstance"; you're just lucky, fortunate, and so you are happy. Happiness is external and based on circumstances; it comes and it goes depending on things you can't control. If the Steelers win, you're happy. If they lose, you're bummed.

But joy is internal and founded upon something far more dependable. The joy the Bible talks about is rooted in the life and character of God himself. When you get it, it stays no matter what your circumstances. No matter who wins and who loses.

This proved a special kind of joy that could withstand the heaviest of blows - that was not dependent on circumstances or events... but was "joy no matter what". Paul wrote his most joyful epistle while he was in jail, including these words:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.
Php 4:4 (ESV)

Remember the words of Habakkuk (3:17-19)

"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vine, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior."

Joy comes from the overwhelming confidence that God is in control, that he loves us with an unstoppable love, and that our future is secure. He can repair the unrepairable. He can control the uncontrollable. He can help you when it's hopeless. No matter what I am up against I shall rejoice. "Joy no matter what."

That joy is what won me to Christ...

Reference: John 16.24

Reference: Neh 8.10

2. How would you summarize God's joy?

3. What seems to give God great joy?

A Prayer Exercise on Joy

As a means of knowing the joy and peace of God, consider praying a few of these prayers of release: "O God, I long for your perfect peace and joy. I know that your peace comes to those who abandon themselves to your Son Jesus. I now release to you the habit of...

- Dwelling on certain past sins and failures, such as...
- Looking forward at what might happen to me if...
- Fixing my eyes inward at struggles with work, responsibilities, temptations, and deficiencies, such as...
- Putting trust in myself to work things out with...
- Having to make things come out right with...
- Being mad at... whose actions I've had to resist.

"Thou wilt keep me in perfect peace as my mind is stayed on thee, because I trust in thee" (Isa 26.3)

(DW & J Johnson "Renovation of the Heart in Daily Practice" pp 93-98)

Spiritual Tool for the Week

The following exercise is to be done this week. Record your experiences in the spaces below.

Spiritual Tool: A Study Sweep of Scripture. Take Jim Smith’s hint (Embracing, pp 116-117) and read through the first half of the Gospel of Mark with a highlighter, underlining every VERB that reflects something Jesus did. We are looking for hints of what God is like, looking at Jesus’ life for our clues. (John 14.9)

For example in the following passages you might underline the following verb, and then reflect on what they tell you about God.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

Mk 1:9-13 (ESV)

Reflections on your experience

Readings for Next Week:

Read “Embracing...”, Chapters 7-8 and answer the following questions.

1. Jim highlights God’s provision (Embracing, pp 117-119 & 121-123) and his presence (pp 119-121) as key components of God’s care. Does God care for you in these ways?

2. Have you ever kept a prayer journal (p. 118)? What has been the result?

3. What are some parts of who we are that need our care (pp. 132-138)?

4. What 6 exercises of abstinence and engagement does Jim recommend (pp. 139-141)?

5. What do you think of Jim’s description of an average day lived with care for yourself and of his “Life is too short to...” list (pp. 142-144)?
