

# Enduring Joy

1. Introduction – What makes joy last?
  - a. We know that joy is the “felt pleasure and presence of God.”
    - i. When was the last time you experienced that?
    - ii. Have you been so burdened because of life and its difficulties that joy – the pleasure and presence of God is an afterthought?
  - b. You and I weren’t made for God to be an afterthought in our lives. He desires to be the focal point of our lives.
    - i. As we give Him our attention and obedience, we reap the benefit of His joy.
    - ii. But when we seek our own pleasure, we experience His displeasure – which is manifested in the experience of His absence, and our own guilt.
  - c. Today’s sermon is about “enduring joy,” which implies that joy can be ours to experience in an ongoing way. I don’t know many of us who experience joy that way though, so I began to dig in the bible to find out why.
2. Why does joy not seem to endure?
  - a. **Because it has no “root.”**
    - i. We learned last week about the necessity for a vine’s branches to be connected to the root.
      1. The fruit is the result of a root.
        - a. What fruit you get is the result of what kind of root you’ve got.
        - b. You got a lemon tree, you get lemons.
        - c. You got a oak tree, you get acorns.
        - d. You got a thorn bush, you get thorns!
      2. We learned last week about the two kinds of roots, the root of Adam and the root of Christ.
        - a. My grandfather used to do something quite remarkable that I can still picture in my mind. He would take different roses and graft the branches onto another rose’s root stock. The end result would be a fantastic hybrid as the dna of the life of the root penetrated the life of the branch. My neighbor still has a row of his “customized roses.”
        - b. You and I were born into the root stock of Adam (sinful nature).
        - c. When we are “born again” we are grafted into the root of Christ.
        - d. If we are “in Christ,” no longer will our life find its strength from our old sinful nature but from the new life that is in Christ.
    - ii. Jesus addresses this concept in the parable of the sower.
      1. He is telling a story about the different ways that people react to the good news (the Word) of His love and the results it has in their lives.
      2. *Mark 14:2-17 2 And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching, 3 "Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 "Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. 6 "And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. 7 "Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. 8 "Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." 9 And He was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." 10 As soon as He*

*was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables. 11 And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, 12 so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN."*

3. He explains the parable to the disciples: *13 And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables? 14 "The sower sows the word. 15 "These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. 16 "In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; 17 and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. NAS*
  - iii. Look again at verse 16 *"In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; 17 and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away.*
    1. The people whose lives are represented by these “rocky places” actually receive the good news of Jesus Christ with Joy!
    2. Did you hear that? JOY!
      - a. They experience the pleasure and presence of God!
      - b. They say, “Wow, God is cool! He really cares about me!”
      - c. But v17 tells us what happens when affliction or persecution comes along...these folks have no root...they fall away, they dry up and die.
      - d. I don't know how much gardening some of you do. I do a lot of it. Robert Novak makes his living from farming. Any gardener will tell you that if you take a seed and get it warm, it will sprout.
        - i. But unless it is in soil, it will quickly wither and die.
        - ii. I believe that is what is happening to these “momentary believers” when they hear the Good News of Jesus.
        - iii. They have a crisis or a need in their lives and they call out to God and He reaches out to them in His love.
        - iv. And as long as their lives are going well, they swear allegiance to Him..
          1. But something is wrong. Their desire for God isn't even an inch deep.
          2. They want God only as long as He makes their lives easy.
          3. They really don't want God but a personal magic genie. They want a low cost relationship.
        - v. Because when “affliction” or persecution comes along, they say, “ditch this!” “I didn't sign up for this!” “I thought God was supposed to make my life nice and happy” And they turn their backs on God.
        - vi. Perhaps you know someone like this.
    - b. Lets look at the two elements that Jesus said would cause someone who is not grounded to leave God.
      - i. **Persecution - tests the root of your faith.**

1. *"Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. 23 "Be glad in that day and leap (leap/skip like the baby in Elizabeth's womb when it heard Mary's greeting) for joy, for behold, your reward (for your labors) is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. – Luke 6:23-24, 26*
  - a. Persecution should cause us to rejoice instead of ditching God.
  - b. That sounds pretty strange, doesn't it?
  - c. But Jesus tells us that we should leap for joy because our reward is great in heaven.
  - d. He is saying if you withstand persecution with His joy, you will understand how real your faith is and that you belong to Christ.
2. It has been said that **you will never know how strong your faith is until it is tested.**
  - a. How will you react when your faith is tested by persecution?
  - b. What will you do when you are offered to save your life by renouncing something intangible like your faith in Christ?
  - c. This is the question persecution asks us.
3. **Persecution is the fire that tests us to show us if our faith is real.**
  - a. Brother Yun is a Christian in China. He has a different perspective compared to that of Western Christians who can't stand a moment of discomfort: His is a more Biblical one - and considering that he's gone through more than any of us are ever likely to go through, his words are worth listening to.
    - i. *We[, the underground Chinese church,] have also come to understand that the past thirty years of suffering, persecution and torture for the house churches in China were all part of God's training for us. The Lord has perfectly fitted us to go as missionaries to the Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu worlds.*
    - ii. *Once I spoke in the West and a Christian told me, "I've been praying for years that the Communist government in China will collapse, so Christians can live in freedom." This is not what we pray! We never pray against our government or call down curses on them. Instead, we have learned that God is in control of both our own lives and the government we live under.*
    - iii. *God has used China's government for his own purposes, moulding and shaping his children as he sees fit. Instead of focusing our prayers against any political system, we pray that regardless of what happens to us, we will be pleasing to God.*
    - iv. *Don't pray for the persecution to stop! We shouldn't pray for a lighter load to carry, but a stronger back to endure! Then the world will see that God is with us, empowering us to live in a way that reflects his love and power.*
  - b. Have you ever prayed for a stronger back to bear up under a load rather than to have the load removed? Do you pray in the middle of your crisis, "Oh God, make me pleasing to you" or is your prayer, "O God, take this crisis away!"
  - c. I think I often have preferred to have comfort for myself rather than to please God. This has stirred me all week long. How about you?

ii. Affliction

1. Jesus said that two things cause unrooted people to reject Christ after first embracing Him.

- a. One was persecution.
  - b. The other is **affliction**.
2. I looked up what affliction means, “it is a condition of pain, suffering or distress.”
  - a. Anyone here have pain, suffering or distress lately?
  - b. Most of us, actually, are loaded with it.
3. We want Burger King’s slogan, “Have it your way.” We all want life our way, we want it easy. We don’t like it when life gets tough.
4. But we read about a different attitude in James 1:2-4 *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*
  - a. “Consider it pure joy when you suffer or face difficulties”
  - b. Why? Because we need our faith purified. We need our faith tested.
5. Affliction, trials, troubles...they all give us choices to make.
6. We have basically two choices when we face them. We can choose to look at our affliction or at God.
  - a. I like to define **faith is the simple act of looking to God**.
  - b. If you look at your afflictions, your circumstances, you will be defeated.
  - c. If you “look” at/to your Lord Jesus, you will find joy.
    - i. The very act of “looking” is an act of faith.
    - ii. It is also an act of the will.
    - iii. We can do so very little in this world, but we do get to choose what we look at.
    - iv. We can choose to exercise faith (which is the simple act of looking toward God) or we can exercise negative faith, and look at our circumstances and afflictions.
7. The bible tells us that the afflictions last for a short while but the glory ahead lasts forever.
  - a. That is the outlook of faith whose product is joy.
  - b. Amplified: *For our light, momentary affliction (this slight distress of the passing hour) is ever more and more abundantly preparing and producing and achieving for us an everlasting weight of glory [beyond all measure, excessively surpassing all comparisons and all calculations, a vast and transcendent glory and blessedness never to cease!], -- 2 Cor. 4:17*
  - c. Romans 8:18 *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time (this present life) are not worth being compared with the glory that is about to be revealed to us and in us and for us and conferred on us!*
8. **Affliction forces us to make a choice.** What choice will you make?
  - a. The natural tendency of trouble is for us to look away from God and look instead at our circumstances.
  - b. Spurgeon says that “*A man is very apt to become unbelieving under affliction: that is a sin. He is apt to murmur against God under it: that is a sin. He is apt to put forth his hand to some ill way of escaping from his difficulty: and that would be sin.*”
    - i. (Spurgeon, <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1704.htm>)
  - c. Folks, God is sovereign.
    - i. That means He is totally in charge and in control.
    - ii. Our grumbling under affliction, our unbelief (looking away from Him) or our attempts to escape are a way of us saying to God, “You don’t know what you’re doing!”

9. Suffering: Suffering is always unpleasant, but for those who have been saved through the suffering of their Lord, the meaning of suffering has been changed.
    - a. **Suffering for the Christian, stimulate and increase, rather than diminish our joy.** Look at what Peter says:
    - b. 1 Peter 4:12-14(Phi) *And now, dear friends of mine, I beg you not to be unduly alarmed at the fiery ordeals which come to test your faith, as though this were some abnormal experience. You should be glad, because it means that you are sharing in Christ's sufferings. One day, when he shows himself in full splendor, you will be filled with the most tremendous joy. If you are reproached for being Christ's followers, that is a cause for joy, for you can be sure that God's Spirit of glory is resting upon you.*
    - c. I read somewhere that, *"The degree in which the believer is allowed to participate in the sufferings of his Lord should be the measure of his joy"*
    - d. Paul taught the Philippians in 1:29: *"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake..."*
  10. It seems that those who suffer as Christians, seem to be the most joy filled, while those who have it "easy" seem to be the most miserable. Is it because we are looking for our satisfaction in the ease of life instead of Christ?
  11. Oswald Chambers: *"The [wave] that distresses the ordinary swimmer produces in the surfer, the super-joy of going clean through it. Apply that to our own circumstances, these very things--tribulation, distress, persecution, produce in us the super-joy; they are not things to fight. We are more than conquerors... super-victors, with a joy we would not have but for the very things which look as if they are going to overwhelm us.. **The saint knows the joy of the Lord not in spite of tribulation, but because of it.**"*
- iii. **Affliction has the power to refine us.**
1. Malach 3:2 *But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver;*
    - a. It does not say in verse 2 that he is like a forest fire. It says that he is like a refiner's fire.
      - i. He is a refiner's fire, and that makes all the difference.
      - ii. A refiner's fire does not destroy indiscriminately like a forest fire.
      - iii. A refiner's fire does not consume completely like the fire of an incinerator.
      - iv. A refiner's fire refines. It purifies. It melts down the bar of silver or gold, separates out the impurities that ruin its value, burns them up, and leaves the silver and gold intact.
      - v. He is like a refiner's fire.
    - b. It does, however, say FIRE.
      - i. Purity and holiness are always a dreadful thing.
      - ii. We will always have a reluctance to enter the process of becoming pure, because we are dealing with fire.
      - iii. We learn if from the time we are little children: never play with fire! And it's a good lesson!
      - iv. But thank God that it says that He is like a REFINER'S fire.
      - v. **The furnace of affliction in the family of God is always for refinement, never for destruction.**
    - c. We are impure by nature by nature and by practice.

- i. But God will have no alloys in heaven. *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."*
- ii. And yet he will have someone in heaven. He will have a redeemed people. His banquet hall will be full.
  1. Therefore he must be a refiner's fire.
  2. If he were only a forest fire, heaven would be empty.
  3. If he were only an incinerating fire, heaven would be empty.
  4. And if he were no fire, heaven would be empty.
  5. But the fire of affliction will purify you for Christ.
2. 1 Peter 1:6-7 *"Now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."*
3. Hebrews 12:5-10,14 *"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord . . . for the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives . . . If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children . . . he disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness. . . Pursue holiness without which no one will see the Lord."*
  - a. Just like last week when we talked about pruning and discipline. Pruning is for MORE fruit. Discipline is for sin/disobedience.

There is one more reason why we find joy not lasting in our lives.:

- c. **We lose our joy because we are not invested in other people's lives.**
  - i. **Christian Joy comes from watching and participating in the Success of the Gospel**
    1. Acts 15:3 *Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.*
    2. Do you rejoice when someone receives Christ? Do you ache for others to know Christ the way you do?
    3. This is the reason we exist as a church – to be a part of people finding their eternal destiny in Christ.
    4. There is joy that you cannot even imagine from participating in this.
    5. I recall the first person I led to Christ. (tell story) (tell joy).
    6. You never forget the changed life and the experience of joy.
  - ii. **Christian Joy comes from watching and participating in other Christian's Growth.**
    1. Phil 4:1 *1. Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.*
    2. Paul said that his disciples were his crown and joy.
    3. 1 Th 2:19-20 *For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy*
    4. 3 Jn 1:4 *For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. 4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth*
    5. Spiritual children are our joy and crown.
      - a. Compare to physical children – parents, grandparents, why do we like to invest our time in our kids and grandkids? We want to leave a legacy. We want to be a part of their growth.

- b. Why do people teach SS classes, VBS, Bible studies? B/c of this same reason. We want to be a part of someone else's growth. We are driven by the joy God promises.
  - c. Paul said, "for you are our glory and joy!"
  - d. John said, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth."
  - e. Have you experienced that kind of joy? You can. Invest yourself in other young Christians.
    - i. Over the next few years we will need encouragers for new Christians, people who will be friends to them, who will be a part of their growth. Will you consider doing this?
- iii. Last week we talked about the joy that comes from uniting ourselves with what God expresses His greatest pleasure in – the spiritual re-birth of a person through belief in His Son.
- 1. When we live to please ourselves, we will not feel the pleasure of God.
  - 2. The Cross is the source of offense. It means I die to my wishes, desires and wants. I die to self. I live for God now.
  - 3.
- d. Make a choice. What has been your reaction to the trials, the difficulties you have been going through? Are you running from them or embracing them? Do you see them as a means to the end of Growing closer to Christ?
- i. Through it all...
  - ii.

*I've had many tears and sorrows,  
 I've had questions for tomorrow,  
 There've been times I didn't know right from wrong:  
 But in every situation God gave blessed consolation  
 That my trials come to only make me strong.*

*Through it all, through it all,  
 I've learned to trust in Jesus,  
 I've learned to trust in God;  
 Through it all, through it all,  
 I've learned to depend upon His Word.*