

Pursuing Joy

- I. Introduction
 - a. This is our last week of learning about Joy – but I hope that you will continually learn about it as one of the most important fruits of the Spirit and evidences of the Christian life.
 - b. Joy is founded in God. It is found in His presence and His pleasure.
 - c. Joy is the bedrock of the Christian who finds joy amid trials, hardship, affliction and persecution.
 - i. All others find only frustration in the midst of those things.
 - ii. Those various difficulties sort the wheat from the chaff, the true Christian from the pretender.

- II. And now as we come to the end of this sermon series on Joy – I want you to ask yourself the same question I am asking myself.
 - a. *“How can I develop a greater passion for the presence and pleasure of God?”*
 - b. *How can I have a greater passion for God Himself? “*
 - c. There is something that I have learned over the last few years. It is that if I want to develop a zeal for God’s glory and the experience of His joy...I am going to have to work at it.
 - i. I will have to battle with my flesh, I will have to battle with the world, and I will have to battle with the devil who desires to steal my joy.
 - ii. Maybe you have been a Christian long enough to have learned that to develop a passion for God, for His presence and His pleasure...that you will have to sacrifice to accomplish it.
 1. It is not something that is going to come from just attending church.
 2. This desire to seek Him and please Him does not seep into us by osmosis
 - iii. It only comes as we exert ourselves against the powers of this dark world and our sinful flesh nature that seek to keep us from being zealous for God’s glory.
 - d. Do you find that it is sometimes very hard to seek God, to pray, to praise, to worship?
 - i. Do you find sometimes that delighting in God doesn’t come easy all of the time?
 - ii. You aren’t alone:
 - iii. During a time while he was hiding from his enemies in Germany and while working on his translation of the Bible, the reformer Martin Luther wrote *“I should be afire in the spirit, in reality I am afire in the flesh, with lust, laziness, idleness, sleepiness.”*
 1. This legend of the faith struggled with having a passion for God at times. He struggled with his flesh.
 - iv. It reminds me of Paul’s exhortation to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6-7, *“For this reason I remind you to fan (kindle afresh) into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”*
 1. Paul is telling Timothy that the passion for God, the very gift of God’s life within Him – the Gift of the Holy Spirit, requires us to cooperate; to FAN INTO FLAME the source of our fire. We can be passive and end up with ashes. Or like the blacksmith who blows air on the embers, we can generate a heat that burns and melts metal! **God provides the fire; we must provide the fan!**
 - a. What does it mean to provide the fan? I believe the “fan” is the action of faith that believes God and acts on what He says.
 - i. Elsewhere we read, *Do not put out the Spirit’s fire” (2 Thessalonians 5:19).*

- ii. Jesus, at least on one occasion, applied the figure of fire to His own ministry: *"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49).*
 - b. It is the action that says, "get off your duff" and engage God.
 - c. It is the action that says, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired."
 - d. It is the action that says, *"God didn't give me timidity, fear, or cowardice, but power, love and self discipline."*
 - i. Timidity: same word used in Mt 8:26 - *He said to them, "Why are you afraid, timid, cowardly, you men of little (oligo: of short intensity) faith ?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm.*
 - ii. The cure to timidity and fear, to passivity is faith. It is a renewed sense of faith.
 - e. Faith sees the embers and kindles the fire again – it says, there is all we need there, we just need some air!
 - f. **Can you imagine owning a house plant and never watering it? Or having a pet and never feeding it? Why do we think that our zeal for our Lord is something that will just "happen?" We must stir it up.**
 - g. What do you feed the fire?
 - i. Feed it the Word of God. Read it. Study it. Learn it. Apply it. Daily.
- e. To counteract our timidity and our passiveness and to redevelop the "wonder" of God, we must confront some of the lies we have believed about God.
 - i. **Lie # 1: God isn't all that excited about me...**in fact, He is waiting to drop the hammer on me for the way I have sinned.
 - 1. Since this sermon is about "pursuing God" we better understand that God is interested in pursuing me!
 - 2. He looks for you. He is waiting for you. He pursues you! And if you have been walking along life's path and wonder where God went, He went no-where. He isn't the one who moved away. You have. You have left Him in your dust in your own pursuits of life.
 - 3. God pursues us first
 - ii. Francis Thompson's famous, but difficult, poem entitled "The Hound of Heaven."
 - 1. The author sets the poem in the context of a life spent running from God. The poem pictures God like an old bloodhound sniffing our scent, always in the distance, occasionally letting out a howl to remind us that he is on our trail.
 - a. I fled Him down the nights and down the days
 - b. I fled Him down the arches of the years
 - c. I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
 - d. Of my own mind, and in the midst of tears I hid from him?."
 - iii. God is the seeker of you.
 - 1. Jesus said, *"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."* (Luke 19:10)
 - 2. He has sought you out. He is hunting you down. How long will you run?
 - 3. I read a testimony of a young man named Mike. He came to a place in his life where he shouted at God, "Jesus, If You Are Real, Prove Yourself To Me Or Just Leave Me Alone." Let me read you just a part of his story:
 - a. In 1979, something happened that God used to change the direction of my life. One summer evening - after I had been drinking and smoking dope since early morning - I went for a ride on my motorcycle. I remember passing cars as if they were standing still and weaving in and out of traffic.

I was on a fairly narrow, two-lane highway south of Anchorage. I came to a straight stretch of the road that goes into a pretty sharp corner. I stomped on the gas and took off like a bullet, I tried to slow down before the corner, but I misjudged my distance and started into it traveling over 80 MPH.

- b. I remember thinking, "I hope there's nobody coming." By that time, I was in the on-coming lane, and, to my horror, I saw that I was headed into the front of a big truck. The truck driver saw what was about to happen and swerved out of the way. I slid past the back bumper of the truck caught me just below my left knee cap, and that threw me off my motorcycle. I went sliding and rolling down the highway and ended up in a ditch. I was shocked when I looked down at my leg. All I saw was white bone and red meat from my knee to my ankle.
 - c. I ended up in the hospital even more angry and bitter. I shared a room with a Christian, Eskimo man. At first, I couldn't stand being stuck in the bed next to a "Christian." We had nothing in common. He loved the things I hated; I loved the things he detested. As time passed, God used that gentle, loving, and very patient man to slowly melt my heart. For the first time since I was a child, I began to wonder if God was real. But I resisted the Spirit's tug on my heart.
 - d. For two years after I got out of the hospital, it seemed that every time I turned around, God had one of His "special agents" cross my path. They all told me, "Jesus loves you." When I hitchhiked, a Christian picked me up and told me about Jesus.
 - e. One morning, I was hung over and sick as could be. I turned on the TV, and a lady looked me square in the eye and said, "Jesus loves you." Then she started singing "Amazing Grace." As I sat there listening, tears began to flow. I couldn't understand what was happening to me. I thought, who is this Jesus that people are talking about? But from there I went from bad to worse. I drank and did drugs even more. Now I wasn't just running from the "emptiness within", I was RUNNING FROM GOD! I couldn't get Jesus out of my mind. No matter how much I tried, there He was.
 - f. Finally, one night as I sat in a bar, I pushed away from the table and looked at what my life had become. Surrounded by the same, old people. Doing the same, old thing. Going to the same, old place - nowhere.
 - g. My life was literally in pieces. I was desperately lonely. Alcohol and drugs had destroyed my relationship with nearly all those who were dear to me. I just couldn't stand it any longer.
 - h. Something had to change - soon. About three o'clock in the morning, I left the bar and started walking-it was cold and dark. I came to a secluded place, stopped, leaned my head back, and yelled, "Jesus, if you're real, then prove yourself to me or just leave me alone!" God did. Mike belongs to Jesus now. <http://www.wewin.org/mike.html>
 - i. Has God been chasing you? Have you been running? Stop running today. Your life won't get any better until you do!
- iv. **Lie #2: Leading a God-centered, God glorifying life is less joyful than living a self-centered, self-glorifying life.**
1. Have you believed that?
 - a. I think that is why there are so few people stepping up to missionary service from the United States.

- b. That lie says, *“If God called me to the mission field—I would have a miserable life.”* That’s a lie.
 - c. That lie also says, *“It’s out of my comfort zone. I can’t possibly enjoy doing this or that!”*
 - d. And that lie is built on another lie that is even more wicked and that is —*“When God asks a person to be radically obedient to him—to sacrifice for him--he is at one and the same time calling them to misery.”*
2. Counter with truth: **God both commands and expects his children to pursue joy, not misery.**
- a. It’s so easy to miss this when we have bought into the world’s false conception of God as the cosmic killjoy.
 - b. The truth of scripture is God both commands and expects his children to pursue joy.
 - c. Yet so often we pursue misery disguised as pleasure.
 - d. We think that the things that give us pleasure will bring us happiness, but what happens is the opposite. They bring us misery.
 - i. This week there was an article in the paper about teenage parents, (13-16 yr olds) and how they said that the pursuit of pleasure or momentary happiness has led them to a very hard future.
 - ii. They wished they had waited until they had found the person who would marry them before doing the things that led to a child.
 - e. And we think that the things that seem like they will bring us nothing bring us everything.
 - i. We think that God will lead us to be miserable, yet He is the ultimate source of Joy!
 - ii. We think that to leave our self-directed lives behind will mean we are miserable. But just ask most of the people in this room...It wasn’t until Jesus entered their lives that their lives began to make sense and have meaning!
 - iii. We don’t have very many miserable Christians in this church!
 - 1. We have an image in our minds of Christians being dour and lifeless and joyless and unhappy as they sit around and don’t play cards, don’t watch movies, and don’t have fun. That’s the wrong view. Most Christians I know have a great deal of joy and fun in their lives. And they are following Jesus while they are doing so. They listen to Him and mold their lives on Him. \
 - 2. **The miserable Christian is one who is running from God!** They are getting far less than God’s best for them!
- f. **There is a direct correlation between the object of our worship and the joy we experience.**
- i. God has set up the universe in such a way that we cannot rightly worship Him if we are worshipping ourselves.
 - 1. God would never be satisfied to be co-King with us.
 - 2. “Co-king” is a contradiction in terms.
 - 3. Part of being King is having the throne and all the glory that goes with it—all to yourself.
 - 4. **4 Spiritual Laws booklet figure on throne control.**
 - a. I personally don’t believe that Jesus can be your Savior and not your Lord. At least, not for a very long period of time. It is a contradiction. Because

it is saying that you want His benefits but you don't want to worship/submit to Him. That is a contradiction.

5. As King He shares his glory with no one.
- ii. Jesus was speaking of our passion to worship ourselves through our obsession with wealth in Matthew 6:24 and lays out this principle of exclusivity in our worship.
 1. He says, "*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*"
 2. **God will not share the throne of our hearts with anyone or anything.**
 3. He demands and is worthy of our sole, solitary highest devotion.
 4. He designed that exclusivity of worship into the universe.
- iii. Examples of self-worship:
 1. **Anger** - the problem isn't that I get angry—the problem is I worship myself by wanting to place myself at the center of my universe.
 - a. My misbehaving children are keeping me from having what **I want**—peace, quiet, orderliness, an uninterrupted phone conversation.
 - b. So when they get in the way of **what I want**, I scream at them instead of simply correcting their behavior.
 2. **We lust** because we are trying to find short-term pleasure in our flesh instead of trusting God for the eternal pleasure he provides.
 3. **We covet** because we are not content with what God has given us and we want MORE because in fact we have often selfishly chosen to believe the lie that we NEED more and perhaps even (way down in our hearts) that we DESERVE more.
 4. **We lie** and are deceitful to others to hide an ugly truth about ourselves because, if that person knew it, they might be disappointed in ME or think less of ME.
 - a. Self-worshippers can't stomach the thought of having anyone else thinking less of them.
- iv. Can you see how all of these sins ultimately come as a result of the fact that deep down, we worship ourselves and not God?
 1. These sins and sinful attitudes that God reveals to you for what they are.
 2. **They are ultimately expressions of self-worship** and we must put them to death through the cross

III. Pursuing God & the Affections of our Hearts

- a. *Oh God, show me how to pursue You in such a way that I desire You above television, hobbies, minor distractions, and even sleep.*
- b. How can I come to the truth of the affections of my heart?
- c. Jonathan Edwards' tells us to ask ourselves, "*What is your greatest delight? When nobody else is around, what occupies your mind? What truths arouse your heart more than any others?*"
 - i. How you answer these kinds of questions determines the inclination of your affections.
 - ii. Does your job arouse more delight and satisfaction in you than Christ..
 - iii. Do your kids arouse more delight and joy in you than Christ?
 - iv. Does your hobby, television or leisure activity bring more delight to you than spending time in the presence of Jesus?
- d. These are hard questions to ask ourselves. They are questions not just about how we live our lives, but what we have set our hearts upon.
 - i. Jesus said, "*Where your treasure is, there your heart is also.*"
- e. Would you like to discover this morning where your treasure is?
 - i. Be careful, you might not like what you learn about yourself.

- ii. I read this week that prayer is the revealer the of the heart.
 - 1. What a person prays for unveils their spiritual condition.
 - a. If they pray for material things, that is where their heart is, amid the material things or the comforts they bring.
 - b. If they pray for spiritual things...like to glorify God, to be pleasing to Him, for the souls of others, for the advancement of the gospel, for holiness, for the fullness of the Spirit, the coming of the kingdom, for the joy of Christ...that reveals their heart as well.
- iii. What do you pray for?
 - 1. J. Packer said, "Prayer is the measure of a man."
 - 2. **How we pray reveals the desires of our hearts.**
 - 3. how do you know what you treasure, what the desires of your heart is?
 - a. Look at what you pray for!
 - b. You may be praying for your comfort and for release of affliction like we spoke of last week, rather than for your affliction to cause you to glorify God.
 - c. You might be so preoccupied with your personal or physical needs that you become blind or shortsighted toward God.
- f. So what do we do, when we don't WANT to pursue Joy, when we aren't excited about pursuing God, about wanting Him?
 - i. We must ASK for it.
 - ii. Praying for Joy in God is one of the most worshipful things we can do, but also one of the most dangerous.
 - 1. Praying for joy is not praying for emotional or physical pampering.
 - 2. It is praying for sacrificial living.
 - 3. When Paul said to the Corinthians, "*We work with you for your joy*" (2 Cor 1:24) he wasn't saying, "we are working so that you can be pampered and feel good" but rather "we are preparing you for radical, Christ exalting sacrifices of love."
 - iii. The early Christians prayed for joy...by praying the psalms.
 - 1. "*satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*" (Ps. 90:14)
 - 2. "*let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice*" (Ps. 51:8)
 - 3. "*Restore to me the joy of your salvation*" (Ps. 51:12)
 - 4. "*Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us.*" (Ps 90:15)
 - 5. These cries assume that God has the power to in us what we cannot do for ourselves, that is, find our total satisfaction in Him. Dare you pray them?
- g. Here is a prayer that John Piper uses an acronym to help him remember: IOUS (fitting, I owe You plural) This is your action step today.
- h. Ask God to give you a desire for Him. As God to renew the JOY of your salvation. He will. Here's how:
 - i. **I – incline.** My soul needs an inclination toward God and His word. Without it nothing will happen.
 - 1. I need to WANT to know God and to draw near to Him.
 - 2. Psalm 119:36 says, "Incline *my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain.*"
 - 3. We have to ask God to change our heart to desire Him above the morning paper, above sleep, above tv – incline my heart toward YOU!
 - 4. Give me the desire to desire You!
 - ii. **O – Open.** I need my spiritual eyes opened.

1. Ps. 119:18 says, “*Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things out of your law.*”
 - a. Ephesians 1:8, “*Open I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...*”
 - b. Ask God to open your eyes to see Him, His glory, His presence, and His hand! Every day! Every moment!

- iii. **U – Unite.** We have divided hearts. Divided affections.
 1. Part of us wants God and part of us does not.
 2. James 1:7-8 “*For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways*”
 3. Where can unity of my heart come from?
 4. Ps. 86:11 “*Unite my heart to fear your name.*”
 - a. Ask God to unite your heart and mind, cease being double minded and have a united heart for Him.
 5. James 4:8 “*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*”
 - a. Draw near to God. Approach Him. He has chased you your whole life long, and you have run from Him. Stop running and hiding.
- iv. **S – Satisfy.** We too easily find temporary satisfaction in the world instead of in Christ.
 1. We must ask God to be our sole satisfaction.
 2. We need to replace the stagnant water we have been drinking with God
 3. Ps. 90:14 “*Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.*”
 4. Come thou fount of every blessing says,
 - a. O to grace how great a debtor
 - b. Daily I’m constrained to be!
 - c. Let thy goodness, like a fetter
 - d. Bind my wandering heart to thee.
 - e. Prone to wander, Lord I feel it.
 - f. Prone to leave the God I love;
 - g. Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,
 - h. Seal it for Thy courts above.

- i. We cannot change our own hearts. They are flesh. They are hard.
 - i. “*the mind that is set on the flesh does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who walk after the flesh cannot please God.*” (Romans 8:7-8)
 1. No pleasure of God, no joy. Our pleasure of our flesh will last only a short while, but the joys of God last forever!

- IV. So when God’s presence seems distant, what do you do? Do you pursue? Pursuit is the measure of your devotion. The pursuit of the suitor tells his bride how valuable she is.
 - a. Will you dare to ask God to give you the DESIRE for Him? It will change your life...today!