

The Believer's Joy
Philippians 4:4
Steve Hereford, Pastor-Teacher
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Transcript provided by: <https://riverside.fm/transcription>

00:00
Amen.

00:03
All of us know and love that blessed hymn it is well with my soul. It was written in 1873 by Horatio Spafford. Sometimes I like to read the stories behind the songs and the story behind this song has great tragedy. That tragedy began in 1871 with the great Chicago fire. Horatio Spafford was

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an attorney, he was a real estate investor and he had a lot of real estate that he lost with that fire. But probably the greatest loss for him was shortly after that was when he lost his four-year son to scarlet fever. And I could just only imagine the grief of his heart in losing a child. I hope that I never

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have to experience that, but we all know death is no respecter of persons, right? So Horatio was thinking that it would do his family some good, so he planned a trip to England so that they could meet up with his dear friend D.L. Moody, who was doing revival meetings. But at the last minute, he had to stay behind to take care of some last minute business, so he sent his wife.

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and his four daughters ahead of him on a ship to England. And he had plans to join up with them later. But while the ship was crossing the Atlantic, it was struck by another ship. And within 12 minutes, it went down, killing all of his children. In fact, they found his wife unconscious, floating on wood in the ocean.

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So they rescued her and many others and they took her to England and she sent a telegram once she recovered to her husband and the telegram basically said, saved alone. What shall I do? Well immediately Horatio set sail for England.

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And it was at the point of the voyage that the captain of the ship, who was aware of the tragedy, he summoned Horatio to tell him that they were now passing over the spot where the

shipwreck occurred. And filled with much grief and much pain, he penned these words, When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like

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See, billows roll, whatever my lot thou has taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.

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My question to you this morning is, when you experience tragedy, can you say the same thing? It is well with my soul. What about just the everyday trials? All of us have them. All of us have had things that have happened to us that has caused us great pain. Peter said that they are distressing or sorrowful, grieving moments.

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It's true, we all grieve and we all experience pain, we all experience suffering at some point in our lives. Paul even said in Acts 14-22 that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. That means we should expect them.

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James 1, 2, and 3 says it this way, consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. He's saying in the midst of those trials, you can evaluate it, and you can find joy.

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Even Jesus said, in the world you will have tribulation. Paul told Timothy to suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ, since all who desire to live godly in Christ will suffer persecution. And those statements not only come from our Lord, who would undergo immense persecution and suffering for us, but it also came from a man who had saw his fair share of suffering.

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I'm talking about the Apostle Paul. After the Lord had saved him, Jesus said to Ananias in a vision, he said, I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake. And just a few days later, Luke records in Acts 9:23 that Jews in Damascus plotted together to do away with him.

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So from his conversion until his death, he suffered in many ways. In fact, he describes some of those ways in 2 Corinthians 6, verses 4 and 5. He describes them as afflictions, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, torments, labor, sleeplessness, and hunger. In chapter 11 of 2 Corinthians, he's even more specific.

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When he says in verses 23 and following, he says, In far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death, five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes, three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep, I've been on frequent journeys.

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in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren. I have been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there's the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.

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Just about every city that he entered, he suffered for the sake of the gospel. When he wrote to the Philippians, he told them in Philippians 1.29 that this was God's will. He says, for to you it has been granted for Christ's sake not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me and now here to be in me.

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But you know, as you read his letters to the churches, not only do you hear about his suffering, but you also hear about his joy.

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He specifically mentions joy in nine of his 13 letters. He mentions it in Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, and his personal letter to Philemon. You know what that tells me? That tells me that joy is possible in the midst of suffering and affliction. It also tells me that

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You can have this joy that he talks about in the midst of suffering.

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On another occasion he said that the Kingdom of God was joy in the Holy Spirit. He also said that his desire was the God of hope fill you with all joy just like God had filled him. And he even said to the Corinthians he was a worker for your joy. That very church it caused him so much grief. He says I'm working for your joy.

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And he even told them that he was overflowing with joy in all of our affliction. So joy is possible.

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And not only is it possible, it's necessary. It's a must.

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Our text this morning is found in Philippians 4 and verse 4. I'd like for you to turn there with me.

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It's a very short verse. In fact, it would be even shorter if it wasn't for the fact that he repeats what he says. But notice what he says. He says, rejoice in the Lord. Again, I will say rejoice. Now, sometimes we hear those words and we wonder if that's even possible in this life, right? Some of you may have

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had some trials this morning as you're making your way here. I know sometimes when you have kids or even grandkids and you're trying to usher them all together and get them to the place so you can leave, that can create some trouble.

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But it is possible that we can have joy in this life. Otherwise, we wouldn't find it mentioned in Scripture. J.I. Packer said, joy is not an accident of temperament or an unpredictable providence. Joy is a matter of choice. You choose joy just like you choose sorrow. Or you choose anger.

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But I would venture to say that joy is even more than an emotion, it's more of a state of mind.

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And your choice cannot and should not be based upon circumstances. It should not be based upon how you feel. In fact, I want to give you a new way to answer when someone asks you how you are doing. D. James Kennedy said this years ago, I love it. He says, better than I deserve. That just kind of covers it all, right? I mean, because you could be in hell.

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That's what we deserve, right? We don't deserve heaven. We don't deserve any joy. We don't deserve any forgiveness or righteousness that Christ offers to us.

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Our joy, according to Philippians 4.4, is in the Lord. Please get that because that is so key. It's in the Lord. And Paul wanted the Philippians to choose joy, but first they needed to know how even to get there.

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I mean throughout the letter, Philippians has been called the Epistle of Joy, but many times even Paul talks about the conflicts that he had. He even talks about the imprisonment that he experienced.

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But they needed to see how joy and suffering work together.

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The writer of Hebrews said this in Hebrews 12, verses 1 and 2, Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him

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despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

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I love that line, who for the joy set before him endured the cross.

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You too need to run with endurance. Because joy is the prize.

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And it's not a prize just for the future, it's a prize for now.

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So this morning, I want to give you the three C's for joy. And I only mention three C's because they all start with a C. So it should help you to remember it. And the first one is in the first part of verse 4. And it's the first word. It says, rejoice.

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Now this is what I would call commanded joy. And the reason why we call it commanded joy because the word rejoice is a command. It's an imperative in the Greek language. And it's something that is to be obeyed regardless of how you feel or regardless of what you experience. In fact, what's really interesting in the Greek, it's used in what scholars call the active voice. Active voice means the subject is causing the action. You're causing this joy.

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Now I know the joy comes from the Holy Spirit, so don't misunderstand me. But it's not passive. It doesn't mean that you sit back and wait for it to happen. You cause it by how you look at your circumstances, by how you look at the Lord, how you rejoice in Him. Your focus is on Him.

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The same is true when I read to you James 1, 2, and 3. Let me let you hear it again. It says, counted all joy or considered all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing

that the testing of your faith produces endurance. Did you hear that? Counted all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials. And the little English word when means that you can't pinpoint when they're gonna happen.

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The only preparation that you can make is what he's saying here. Have a life of joy. Have a state of mind of joy that where all your focus is on God and not on yourself and not on your circumstances. Don't be like a thermostat that continues to adjust in the room, right?

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James connects joy with trials. And he connects this joy with what you know. He says, consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing. Knowing what? Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. This is a must in your life. You must have these trials so that you can persevere and you can learn what perseverance is all about.

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And you can learn what dependence on God is all about instead of depending on yourself.

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Paul emphasizes this again by repeating it a second time there in verse 4. He says, again, I will say, rejoice. And I love that he does that because, you know, sometimes we just forget, don't we? It seems like the older that I get, the more I forget about things.

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And I can lay there at night sometimes and I'm praying. And I can see a person's face in my brain and I can't remember their name. And I was just with them. Do you have any of that problem? Maybe it's part of getting older, I don't know.

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But then I'll lay there and I'll go, Lord, why can't I remember their name? This is crazy. I won't tell you anybody in this room who I thought of. No one should feel bad. But he says, again, rejoice. Now he's already stated that in chapter 3. Look at verse 1 of chapter 3. He says, finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me.

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And it is a safeguard for you. It was a safeguard because of what he said in verse 2 when he warns them about the influence of false teachers.

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these false teachers would cause them to stumble. He calls these false teachers various names in verse 2. He calls them dogs. He calls them evil workers. He calls them the false circumcision. And he's basically saying to them, if they were going to rejoice, they needed to

understand who these people were, because these are people that would come along and steal their joy by teaching them things that were not true.

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So he wanted them to rejoice. And even in the midst of his tribulation, he still wanted them to rejoice. How do we know that? Go over to chapter 2 and look at verse 17 and 18. He says, but even if I am being poured out as a drink offering, that's referring to death. Even if I'm dying, he says, even if I'm being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice.

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and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me. Here he's talking about mutual joy. I'm sharing my joy with you, you share your joy with me. And really, that is a good reason for us to be together and why we shouldn't forsake the assembling at any time when it's possible for us to be here, right? Because we share in that mutual commonness, we share in that mutual joy.

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I know sometimes we get great encouragement just by the fact of seeing somebody and seeing them faithful.

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So he wanted to share his joy with them, and he wanted them to share their joy with him. He wanted them to have this mutual joy. And you know, Paul wasn't alone with that desire. The psalmist, he called on God's people to rejoice as well. Psalm 68, 3, but let the righteous be glad, let them exult before God. Yes, let them rejoice with gladness. And you know, 43 times the psalmist calls on God's people to rejoice.

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Paul is echoing that same command. So it starts with a commanded joy. Yes, we're told to do this. We're told this by Scripture. We're told this by God's Word. We are told that God's will for our life is to rejoice. That's God's will for us. Regardless of the situations, regardless of the circumstances, because all of us can say, but Lord you know what my life is like. Lord you know how difficult it

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husband left me and I'm left here to care for all the kids or maybe it's the other way around or whatever tragedy is in your life, whatever difficulty is in your life. He didn't say anything about those things. He says rejoice in the Lord. That's not denying the pain of those circumstances. As I said, we all grieve and over in 1st Thessalonians 4.13

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The Thessalonians were grieving over their loved ones who had died. And he says, I don't want you to sorrow as those who have no hope. Why? Because they have hope. You and I have hope, but that doesn't mean we don't grieve.

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So the first C was commanded joy. The second C is centered joy. Centered joy. That just means your joy is in the Lord. It's centered on the Lord.

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He didn't say rejoice in your church. He didn't say rejoice in your job.

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You didn't even say rejoice in your family. Though all those things are good and we can do that, but no, the focus, the center is on Jesus. Focus on Jesus. I mean, it's just like what we read in Hebrews 12, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

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Someone said that joy is to behold God in everything.

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everything. The good times, the bad times. You know, as Paul writes this letter, as I said a moment ago, he mentions four times that he's in prison. And that's before he even gets out of chapter 1. He mentions it in chapter 1 verse 7, verse 13, verse 14, verse 17. But in spite of all of that, he rejoiced in the Lord. Why? Because he knew the Lord.

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And in knowing the Lord, he knew that any conflict he experienced was by the gracious hand of his Lord.

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All that Job experience was only possible because God allowed that to happen. And there was a lesson for Job that God was teaching him to, even though he was a blameless and upright man, fearing God and shunning evil. But you know, Acts 16 is really the background to the letter to Philippians. And in Acts 16, it records what happened after he arrived. First they went down to where there was prayer.

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And as he's preaching the gospel, God opens Lydia's heart to give heed to the things that were spoken and she gets saved. And shortly after that, there was a demon-possessed girl, referred to in the text as a slave girl.

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She was walking around saying, these are the servants of the Most High God. And she did that for many days. And the text says that Paul was very annoyed at this. And he turned to the spirit and said, come out of her. And immediately that impure spirit came out.

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And after that happened, it says in verse 19, they were seized, they were dragged into the marketplace before the authorities, they were falsely accused by the slave girls' masters, as plural, she didn't have just one master, she had more than one. It says they were beaten with rods, they were put in the inner jail, their feet were fastened in the stocks. But I want you to hear this, verse 25 says this at midnight.

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Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God.

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Did you hear that?

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They had been falsely accused. They had been beaten. Their feet were fastened in the stock, so they didn't have any way to move around. They were confined to that inner prison.

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and they were praying and singing hymns of praise to God. The false accusations did not take their joy. The beatings didn't take their joy. They rejoiced and they worshiped God regardless because they knew God was in control. They knew they were there because the Holy Spirit had already told him to go into Macedonia.

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Now, God could have taken it away. God could have stopped it from happening, but He didn't. And it's just like 2 Corinthians 12, when Paul was tormented by a demon. He prayed three times that God would remove it, and God didn't. He said, my grace is sufficient for you. So Paul then said, listen, if grace is sufficient, then I'm gonna start boasting in my weaknesses. And that's exactly what he did. See, God's purposes are much bigger than ours.

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We see that in Acts 16 in this story. It starts out with the salvation of Lydia. They get thrown in prison. And guess what? Their praising God in the midst of their suffering had a tremendous effect on the jailer. Because all of a sudden, there was an earthquake that happened. All the doors flew open to the prison cells. All the chains fell off on all the prisoners. And the guard had been asleep.

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And when he woke up and he saw the doors open, he thought maybe they were gone, so he pulled out his sword. He was about to kill himself because he was gonna be killed anyway. You lose a prisoner, you lose your life. And it was at that moment that Paul called out to him, "Do yourself no harm. "We're all here."

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And you know what the jailer said? Sirs, what must I do to be saved? Listen, how we react in our situations can have that kind of effect on people. People are always watching us. You claim to be a Christian, then you're scrutinized even more. People are watching, they're waiting to see if you fall, they're waiting to see how you respond in difficulties because you know what? They're going through difficulties too.

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But the scriptures tell us in 31 and 32.

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that the jailer and his household got saved.

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Paul preached the gospel to his entire household, and they all got saved. See, that's the bigger picture. That's the bigger picture that we don't always see.

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Circumstances should never determine our joy, because our joy is in the Lord. Psalm 89, 16, In your name they rejoice all the day. Psalm 149, 2, Let Israel be glad in his maker. Let the sons of Zion rejoice in their king.

26:29

Habakkuk 3.18, yet I will exalt in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. Romans 5.11, and not only this, but we also exalt in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Our joy is in the Lord, not in people, it's not in circumstances. But many of us do base it on circumstances, don't we? That's because happiness depends.

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what happens. Joy doesn't. Joy, as D.L. Moody said, flows right on through trouble. Joy flows on through the day. Joy flows in the night as well as in the day. Joy flows through persecution and opposition. It's an unceasing fountain bubbling up in the heart. A secret spring the world can't see and doesn't know anything about. It's no wonder that Charles Spurgeon said, if the Lord is your joy, your joy will never end.

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He's right.

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But for that to happen...

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Our joy must be in the Lord. John Piper said, Joy in the heart of the creature corresponds to the goodness in the heart of the creator. He says, one reason the Bible is so relentless in insisting on our joy is because of the goodness of God. The imperative to joy in us is based on the indicative of good in Him. God is good, is He not?

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The writer of Psalm 73 had to get that understanding. As he looked at his neighbors who didn't know the Lord and saw them prospering, he looked at his own life and saw the struggles that he had. And he reveals in that text that he couldn't immediately say that God was good.

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But then when he considered their fate, he considered their end. God is good. Deuteronomy 26-11 says, You shall rejoice in all the good which the Lord your God has given you. God has showered His goodness on us. So joy then is the fitting response to the goodness of the giver. Just ask yourself, what is all the good which the Lord has given me?

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Psalm 103 verse 2 mentions His benefits that we're not to forget. And what are those benefits? Forgiveness, healing, redemption, loving kindness, compassion, satisfaction. Listen to what it says. It says, who pardons all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with loving kindness and compassion, who satisfies your years with good things so that your youth is renewed.

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like the eagle. That's why two chapters later the psalmist says in Psalm 105 to remember his wonders which he has done his marvels and the judgments uttered by his mouth. In other words don't forget all the good things our good God has done for us.

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And if that's not enough, here's more. According to Ephesians 1-3, He's blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. According to Ephesians 2-8, He's given us the gift of faith. According to 2nd Timothy 2-24, He's given us the gift of repentance. According to Psalm 103-3 and 4, He's given us the gift of salvation and forgiveness. According to Romans 8-1, He's given us a no condemnation status, taking our punishment for us. Every day.

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He gives us victory over our sin. Every day, He gives us deliverance from temptation. Every day, Hebrews 7.25 says He intercedes for us. Every day, Matthew 6 says He provides food and clothing and shelter and refuge.

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See, it's no wonder that Paul tells us to rejoice two times in the same verse, because there is so much in the Lord that we can rejoice about.

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That leads us to the third C, constant joy. You have commanded joy, centered joy, and now constant joy. What's he say? Again, I will say rejoice, but before he says that, what's he say? That one word, always. Rejoice in the Lord, always. Again, I will say rejoice. How long is always? It's all the time. It's continual.

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Hebrews 13, 15 says, through him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. That is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name.

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And if that's not enough, you know both times the word rejoice is used in Greek in the present tense. The present tense means ongoing action. He wants them to keep on rejoicing in the Lord. And you know Paul wrote the same thing to the Thessalonians. He used the same breakdown of the verb. And he told them in 1 Thessalonians 5 16 to rejoice always. Keep on rejoicing. Don't stop.

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And if you're so overwhelmed by your circumstances, you're so overwhelmed by the trials of your life, get your focus on Jesus. Keep on rejoicing regardless of those circumstances. Because it's only possible through Christ. It's only possible through His Spirit. It's only possible that...

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If we remember Romans 8 28, that we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. It's only possible if we're doing what Ephesians 5 18 says, being kept filled with the Spirit.

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because it's the Holy Spirit that produces the joy. You remember Galatians 5, 22 and 23? The fruit of the Spirit is what? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such, there is no law. Why would he say that? Well, you don't want to restrain the fruit of the Spirit. You want to restrain the flesh, which is what he talked about

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But you don't want to restrain the spirit. You don't want to restrain love and joy and peace and so forth. You don't want to stop that. You want that to be ongoing.

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So there's commanded joy, centered joy, constant joy, and again, all this is possible. This can happen in your life. You can do this, and you can do it right now.

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that you have to die to yourself.

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You have to die to self. Self doesn't want to do this. The flesh does not want to do this. The flesh wants to complain. The flesh loves to be miserable.

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And so you have to harness the flesh. You have to beat your body into submission, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9.

34:04

And when you do that, you're gonna be filled with the Spirit. And you're gonna walk that moment by moment with Christ in full joy. But keep in mind, it says, be being kept filled with the Spirit. That's the little rendering of Ephesians 5:18 in the Greek. You have to die. And that.

34:28

Verse is passive to be filled. You have to get out of the way and let the Spirit of God control you. And we talked about this before because in the results that occur in that passage are the same as Colossians 3. And in Colossians 3, he says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." And so he's telling us what it means to be filled with the Spirit. It means to be controlled by the Word of God. See why it's important that we're in the Scriptures? Why we're always letting the Word get in us?

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It's because that's how God leads you. He leads you through Scripture. And I can't tell you how many times when I'm talking with someone and they say something, and especially if it's something questionable or something contrary to Scripture, I have Scripture come to my mind. That addresses the very same thing that they're talking about. Now I don't say that in a boast. I say that in praise God for that because you know what?

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What that means is as you saturate your mind with scripture, that's what's gonna happen. You're gonna have the scripture constantly coming up, constantly coming to your mind, constantly giving you direction, constantly giving you guidance. But you gotta put him first.

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Augustine said, There is a joy which is not given to the ungodly, but to those who love thee for thine own sake, whose joy thou thyself art. And this is the happy life to rejoice to thee, of thee, for thee. This is it. And there is no other.

36:10

So joy begins with the Lord.

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question to you this morning is, do you know the Lord? Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ? Here's an even greater question. Does Jesus know you?

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Is he calling you to follow him?

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He said in Luke 9, 23, and 24, if anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he is the one who will save it.

36:56

So save your life this morning by surrendering to Him. Deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow Him. That's where joy begins. Let's pray. We thank you, Heavenly Father, for the opportunity to be reminded of what your word says about this wonderful, wonderful blessing of joy.

37:23

We know it's only possible because of the joy that was set before Christ as He endured the cross, as He bore in His own body our sin, and that we too could have that same joy that you offer, Lord, when we surrender our life to you. Lord Jesus, cause everyone in here who has never surrendered their life to you to empty themselves right now.

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to call upon your name. You said in Matthew 11, 28, come to me. All who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.

38:09

Take my yoke upon you. I pray this morning that they will do just that. They will come as a beggar comes, pleading for mercy, pleading for forgiveness. And I know, Lord, as your word tells us, that if we call upon you, and that we confess you as Lord, and believe in our heart that you raised Jesus from the dead.

38:38

we would be saved. So Lord, save those this morning that need saving. And Lord, stir up the hearts of all of us in here that we would exhibit this kind of joy that we've heard about this morning. And we thank you and we praise you in Jesus' name.