

Good to be with you all today. I trust you had a fantastic lunch. And let's turn together to the Word of God. If you turn in your Bibles or in your bulletin to the Scripture, Galatians 5.22, let's pray first of all. Father in heaven, we thank you for your word. The entirety of your word is truth. It's a light to our path, a lamp to our feet. We pray that you would lead us, oh God, to the springs of everlasting joy today that are found in your being in Christ, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Galatians 5.22, but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. Now, we've been thinking together about this list of virtues, and we began, remember, saying this is not a to-do list. something you must do to kind of earn the favor of God. It's much more of a done list, what Christ has won for you and what the Spirit is doing in you. It's an architectural plan of your growth in grace. And just like if you're having your kitchen renovated, You can look at the plan and see how much work there's left to be done in the process. So this list shows you and can help you measure how you're doing in the grace of God. If you're not yet a Christian this afternoon, we're glad you're here. And you must come to the Holy Spirit. These are supernatural fruits of his presence, actually the fruit singular of his presence. and only He can produce this fruit in your heart and in mine. And we said to bear this fruit, you remember the lesson of Galatians, we keep in step with the gospel that we're saved not because of what God is doing in us, not because of anything God has done to us, but what God has done for us in Christ. We keep in step with the gospel, and then we keep in step with the spirit. As we believe in Jesus, the spirit of God fills our hearts and produces this fruit. And this morning, or this afternoon, we're gonna look at the fruit of the spirit is joy. Now again, if you need to pop out because you gotta get back to work, I completely understand. Don't at all feel embarrassed if you need to nip out as we get near the end of our sermon. Well, Jack Miller, who was the spiritual founder of the Sonship Movement. Now, the Sonship Movement, Jack is a good man, and he raised a good point. And he and his wife did much good work, especially in the PCA. Some of his disciples took that Sonship Movement and absolutized it in a way that Jack never intended, so that we only have grace And there's no sense of duty and oughtness in the Christian life. So I want to say that from the get-go. But Jack Miller, I believe, is a good man and did much good in the PCA. But Jack would always say, one of the most powerful diagnostic questions to ask any Christian is, where is your joy? Because joy, it's just like I said on Sunday about those diagnostic signs for examining a child with appendicitis, there are some key signs you look for to differentiate appendicitis from a much more benign abdominal pain. And one of the key questions to diagnose your spiritual health is your joy. Where is your joy? And if it's gone or it's lapsing, it's always a sign that we've disconnected ourselves from the gospel of God, from the grace of God, from the love of God, from the providence of God, from the promises of God, and we're looking to things that will never give us joy. There's a story about these three older men who went to the doctor to have their memory tested. Now, I recognize that's a very personal concern for some of you with relatives who have Alzheimer's disease. My mother died of Alzheimer's disease a couple of years ago. I'm not making light of that, but it's one of those things, if you didn't laugh, you'd cry, okay? And so, these three men go to the doctor to have their memory tested, and the doctor says, okay, what's the answer to one plus one? And the first man says, Tuesday. And the doctor says, okay. He asked the second man, what's the answer of one plus one? He says, well, here, here, the first man, I thought, Tuesday. Doctor goes, okay. The

third man, he says, do you know the answer of one plus one? And he goes, it's two. And the doctor says, brilliant. He said, do you mind me asking you, sir, how you got that answer? He said, oh, simple. I took 247 and minus Tuesday. And the doctor put his head in his hands, because of course the man was right, but how he got there was wrong. And that's often the case with you and me. We can be joyful people. But how we get there is often wrong. Because we root our joy in all the wrong things. And our reason for joy is wrong. Joy often flows from all the wrong things. And this morning I want to talk with you then about the spiritual fruit of joy in the Christian life to make sure you're looking for joy where it can be found, solidly and securely. Because in one sense a joyless Christian is a contradiction in terms. To be a joyless Christian, you have to forget all of your theology. You have to forget who God is. You have to forget what God is like. You have to forget what God has done for you in Christ, what God has given to you in Christ. You have to forget his promise, his providence, and everything else to do with God and your relationship with him. And you have to forget, perhaps most supremely of all, what we really deserve from God. And if we just remember that, then we would remember that we always have ample reason to be joyful. What is joy? And how is it different from happiness? Well, Christian joy is a deep, abiding, and settled sense of glad contentment. And unlike happiness and worldly joy, Christian joy is not rooted in our circumstances. That's where we often go wrong. We root our joy in our circumstances. Are things going well with us? Am I happy with the way things are going? Is my life going well? Or do I find in my life lots of reasons for sorrow and frustration and have no way to argue myself toward joy? No, true Christian joy flows from God. The presence of his spirit in us, the union of his son with us that we're united to Jesus Christ, we're part of Christ by faith. It's rooted also and flows from the grace and love of the father for us and the sovereignty of God over us. It's our triune relationship with God. That can never change. That's always the root and foundation of true Christian joy. And so because Christian joy finds no root in favorable circumstances, Christian joy can and must exist in the face of trial and difficulty and what the fathers called losses and crosses, which are the constant fruit of life in a fallen world, even the life of faith. Let me ask quickly this morning, why do so many Christians know so little joy? And there are a number of reasons. First of all, unforsaken idols. Now we need to be quick here. But we're all looking for satisfaction, security, and significance. We all want to be happy, satisfaction. We all want to feel that the people and things that give us happiness are safe and secure, and we want to feel significant. We want to feel that our life is counted for something bigger than ourselves, that we've spent our life doing the right things, making the right difference in the lives of the right people for the right reasons and to the right end, right? Those are the three S's, satisfaction, security, and significance. They're basic human desires. And the problem, of course, is those three S's can only be satisfied in God. Satisfaction, in his presence, there's fullness of joy at his right hand. There are pleasures forevermore. Security, God is our refuge and strength, our help in tight places, always close at hand. Right, security. Significance, let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the wealthy man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts, boast in me, that he knows and understands God. That's the root of, that's where we find those three S's, satisfied in God. The problem is, we take our eyes off God and look down here for our satisfaction, security, and significance. And often we look for those three things. We often look for good things down here, like friendship. On Saturday, I

told you in our Sunday sermon that we got lost going to the Clemson game. And I put the stadium in. and I should have put the Esso Club in because I've been given parking spots and tickets by my dear friend Jimmy Herlong. He'd invited us to tailgate with him and I wanted to be there early and plenty of time to meet him and his family and to enjoy him and his family and to show him how much I appreciate his kindness to us. And so we got to the wrong place and I found myself stuck. I could not get to where I needed to be and we were late and I began to stress and panic. I forgot everything about God's providence. I forgot everything about God's goodness and his promises. And I began to stress that I'd be there late and that Jimmy would think I didn't really care to spend time with his family. That's a good thing, right? Having friendship. But if I allow that good thing to control me the way only God should, I lose my reason for joy. I'm thankful for my wife sitting beside me in the car who was reminding me of God's providence and telling me to wise up and stop being so grumpy in the car with all the policemen. Or on Sundays, I want to preach a good sermon, right? And often, in the run-up to the sermon, things aren't going very well, and I get really stressed. Why? Because last week's sermon's a week late. And I'm terrified of preaching a bad sermon. You'll think, oh no, the bubbles burst. This is the new normal. That's a good thing. It's a good thing for me to want to preach a good sermon, but I've got to be content that maybe the Lord might not give me a good sermon some weeks to teach me humility and to show you that I am a mere man. But if I allow that good desire to control me the way only God should, where does my joy go? It goes. It's gone, right? And so unforsaken idols can be a deep root of a loss of joy. We preached a sermon on that last year in more detail in the Wednesdays. You can find that online later. Email me and I'll find you the title if you want to look at that again. A second reason for we lose joy is unconfessed sin. In Psalm 32, David says, when I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away because of my groaning all day long. All day long, your hand was heavy upon me. My vitality, my life, wasted away like the fever heat of summer. It was only when David confessed his sin, and immediately God forgave him, did the blessedness of joy come back to his soul. So unconfessed sin is another reason we lack joy. A third reason we lack joy is the sense of unsatisfactory performance. What I mean by there is that we're basing our relationship with God on how we are doing. And we think that if I do better, God will love me more. And we get stressed because we forget the gospel. A dear friend of mine, a godly, godly friend of mine, in another part of the world, said to me once, when he was a much younger Christian, being interviewed for the office of deacon, he was talking to his pastor, and he said to his pastor, I can't stop watching pornography, and I'm frightened that God won't love me anymore, until I do. Now, porn is a wicked sin, we must turn from it if ever it gets its clutches on us, right? And his pastor looked at him and said, that really concerns me, he said, really concerns me. So let me ask you a question. When did you start believing that if you stopped watching porn, God would love you? That was a telling and wise pastoral answer. We must repent from our sins. As I said, unconfessed sin is a source of joy. It's a source of joylessness. But we mustn't believe that God only loves us when we do. God's love is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And it's not based on your goodness. It flows from his goodness. God loved you when there was nothing but sin in you. He won't stop loving you now that his grace is hard at work in you. and you have a bad day, he doesn't love you any less. When you have a good day, he doesn't love you any more. A fourth reason for a loss of joy is unforgiving brokenness and bitterness in our relationships. Such is the natural

relationship or the natural emotions of an unconverted soul. Paul says in Titus 3.3, we, not just you, Cretans, but we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. That's the way we naturally respond to other human beings who frustrate us and wrong us. But as Christians, we have to learn to let that go, otherwise bitterness will get a hold of us. And as one man said, bitterness is the poison you drink, hoping others will die. As you look back over your life, who has wronged you? And perhaps it only takes your spouse or a friend to mention their name or to see them in church, and you find all kinds of resentment and animosity rising up in your soul. You gotta learn to let that go if ever you're going to find joy. Unforgiving brokenness and bitterness. And then lastly, a common cause for a loss of joy is an unbelieving perspective, especially when it comes to trials. If you look over your page, in our James 1 passage, it's that famous passage, count it all joy, my brothers. when you meet trials of various kinds. And the word various is poklos, from which we get poklodot. Lots of different sizes and shapes of dots on a lady's dress, right, poklodot. Lots of trials come into our life, big trials, small trials, easy trials, hard trials, all different types of trials. And James says, you must learn to count it all joy. Well, how? For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. You know, James says, that trials are designed by a tester to produce in you steadfastness, that habit of soul not to stop even when you want to, to keep pressing on and laying hold of the hope of God in Christ. And James says, let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. And what he means there is don't short circuit the trial. Like when you go to the gym and your trainer gives you work to do, well, if you grumble and complain, he says do four sets of 10, and you do four sets of one, or one set of one, you think, oh, it's too hard. What are you doing? You're short-circuiting your trainer's efforts to grow you up and make you stronger, fitter, and healthier. And likewise, when God sends trials into your life and you become a grumbolina, You are short-circuiting the purpose of the tester. You're doubting his wisdom, and you're downward spiraling into selfishness. And James says, don't do that. Lean into the trial, counting it all joy, that steadfastness might have its full effect, that you might grow to full maturity. You may be perfect, mature, and complete, lacking in nothing. Now it's hard to view our trials that way, so James says, if anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose he will receive anything from the Lord. He is double-minded, literally double-souled, unstable in all of his ways, right? Now, the wisdom there, we often use that verse as the kind of the patron saint of all of our life decisions. And it has relevance there, but the particular context, remember, a text without a context is a pretext. The particular context of that verse is learning to view our trials wisely. Now when you ask for that wisdom, Paul says, or James says, don't ask it, don't doubt. Don't be caught in the horns of, I want less trials. No, no, no, no. I want more wisdom. And you've got to root your soul, Lord, give me the wisdom to count this trial all joy. Don't get caught up in thinking, I can only be joyful if the trial goes away. That double-mindedness is what James is speaking about. And if you lean into the trial like that, you'll never benefit from it the way you should and the way you ought. And if you lean into trials that way, it tends to produce an anxious discontentment and an angry

discontentment. So let's look together at Philippians 4 and ask the question, how can I refine my joy if I've lost it? Let's pick up the room. I'm going to read a little bit you haven't got. We couldn't fit it onto the page. I entreat Judea and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. These are two ladies who are fighting. Imagine having your names immortalized forever. One commentator calls them odious and soon touchy. And Paul's exhortation to them and the Philippians is verse 4. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. Your gentleness, the Lord is at hand. God is at work in this situation, even through this conflict, and you must rejoice at all times. Now is always a time for joy in the Christian life. Why? Well, Paul says, watch how you pray. Do not be anxious about anything, he says. The word anxious there is the Greek word *miraminao*, which describes someone who's caught like a deer in the headlights, caught in the teeth of real or imagined danger. And often the imagining of the trouble is worse than the reality. How do you respond? Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. I love Dave Paulson's definition of prayer. What is prayer? It is straight talk with the real God about what really, sorry, it is straight talk with the real God about what is really going on and about what really matters. We need to lay our burdens, our anxieties before God. Too often we approach our prayer list like a to-do list. Pray for Sally, pray for Barbara, pray for John, pray for Candace, and you go through the list. It's good to have a list, keeps us faithful. But at the top of my prayer list, every day I have one sentence. Be still and know that I am God. Still yourself in the presence of God. Cast your burdens before him. What's bothering you? What's bending you out of shape? Give it to God, Paul says, and then you'll see your troubles shrink to their true size. And you'll know the peace of God garrisoning about your heart in Christ Jesus. Watch how you pray. Then secondly, Paul says, watch what you ponder, verse eight. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there's any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Now, there's much we could say there. I preached on Philippians. You can find it at a different church, but you can find it under my name on Sermon Audio. I've gone through all of these texts in more detail, and you can look at it there. What Paul is saying there is, how you think matters. Because we develop habits of thought. It's like learning to play the piano. You learn to play a Chopin waltz, and your fingers struggle to find the notes. But as you practice, you develop muscle memory, and your fingers just find the notes the way Judy does so beautifully in the piano when she plays here, and her other pianists as well. Muscle memory. But it's not just muscle memory and actions. muscle memory in responses, mental thoughts. As human beings, when life doesn't go our way, we develop habits of thought that are just as powerful as habits of muscle memory. Muscle memory, you think when Thomas is playing Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven, he's played it so many times, he doesn't have to think. His fingers just find the notes. Well, the problem you and I have is we have learned, we have habituated habits of thought when trials come, when difficulty come, and those habits of thought are often unbelieving thoughts, evil thoughts, malicious, bitter, oh, woe is me thoughts, and those thoughts lead you away from joy. And if you want to feel a way you've never felt before, you must learn to think a way you've never thought before. You must learn to think gospel thoughts,

God-centered thoughts. You've got to grab your trials, your worries, your anxieties, your fears, your anger, your malice, and drag it like an unruly toddler off the playground. You've got to drag it off the playground of your mind and bring it to the gospel and what you know about God and the world in which you live as defined by his word, not by your worries and anxieties and fears. Watch how you pray. Watch what you ponder. And that takes practice, Paul says, what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. Like when Paul's in prison, full of, I mean, he's stressed out, he wants to be out preaching, evangelizing, doing the work of God, and he's the prisoner of Rome. What does Paul remind himself? I'm not really the prisoner of Rome, I'm the prisoner of Jesus Christ. I'm not a prisoner of circumstance. These circumstances are a prisoner of Christ. And I am exactly where Christ wants me to be. One of my friends, an older preacher now, in a nursing home, but he was lost on the way to a preaching assignment in Chula, Mississippi, and he pulled up to this young African-American lad, and he said to him, son, do you know where I am? And the wee boy said, mister, you is right there. Do you know where you are this morning? You are right where God wants you to be. God's works of, in the car this morning, on the way to school, I was doing catechism with Sammy, and I reminded him of one of my favorite catechism questions, what are God's works of providence? God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful. They're holy, never impure. They're wise, they're never foolish, and they're powerful, they're never weak. God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful, preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions. Even the mistakes you make, even the sins you commit in a wondrous way are governed by God to feed into all things worked together for good, even those. So if you could go back over your life and tip X out, sorry, white out out the mistakes you made, you'd be the first Christian in all the world. for whom Romans 8, 28 no longer had relevance, because you took some of the things God has worked for your good out of the equation, and you done messed it all up then. And when you do that, when you watch how you pray, you watch what you ponder, and you watch what you practice in terms of your thinking, then you're in a position to practice the grace of true contentment. Paul says, as he's asking for help from the Philippians, not that I'm speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content. I've learned. Didn't come naturally, Paul says. I had to learn it. In whatever state I am, it's not found externally in my circumstances. But I know how to be brought low. I know how to abound in any and every circumstance. I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. There's another verse that's the patron saint of every quarterback, right? They'll have it written in black under their eyes sometimes. But it's got nothing to do with throwing a pigskin down the football pitch. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. It's learning how to find contentment when everything in your life would be pushing you in the opposite direction. And it's not found naturally, you have to learn it. It's not found externally in your circumstances, in whatever state I am. It's found in Christ. That I am one with him and he is one with me. He's not ashamed to call me brother. He died in my place for my sins while I was still without strength. In due time Christ died for ungodly me. And therefore you'll not stop loving ungodly me in the here and now. And therefore, I can count it all joy when I fall into diverse trials. I can rejoice, I can glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character,

hope, and a hope that does not disappoint. If I learn these lessons, the love of God is poured into my heart, and I can find deep and solid contentment, rooted not in circumstance, but in Christ. And so wherever you are this morning, Christian, you have a reason, a solid reason, a lasting reason to be joyful. I ask you again, my brother and my sister, where's your joy? Don't be a contradiction in terms, but resolve to be joyful. One of my friends in ministry, when you ask him how he's doing, Every day, he says, I am fantastic, he says, and he says it like he means it. And it's amazing the difference. I started doing that myself. It's amazing the difference it makes to your soul when you make yourself saying, I am fantastic. On my worst day, because God is my God, I am fantastic. And when I do that, in the grocery store, I said it to a lady once in the food dog, sorry, the food lion. And she was there at the till having an awful day. How are you doing? I said, I am fantastic, I said. And she looked at me and she goes, that's the first time I've heard that all day. And you'll find it'll not just only bring joy to your heart, it'll bring joy to everyone around you. Because joy is magnetic and joy is contagious. And joy is a decision made not about how you feel, but it's made about who God is in himself. and more particularly who God is for you, you can come into the presence of the God of heaven and earth and call him Father. And that really does make all the difference in the world. Let's pray together. Father in heaven, we thank you, O God, for your mercies to us. Forgive me, O God, For often grumbling and complaining and allowing myself to fall into the depths of discouragement, there's always more with me and for me than against me, because with me is the Lord my God to help me and to fight my battles with me. And that's true of me and every other Christian in this place. Give us grace to rejoice at all times, and even for all things, because of the God who's behind them, beneath them, around them, and in them. For while many are the sorrows of the wicked, he who trusts in the Lord, loving kindness shall surround him, shall surround her. We're surrounded by a shield of grace and mercy and love all day, every day. We offer these prayers in Christ's name. Amen.