

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Elements of Joy, Part 3**

Scripture: Philippians 1:7-8

Code: 50-4

This morning, let me ask you to turn in your Bible to Philippians, chapter 1, as we come to our study of God's Word. And I confess to you that this is a remnant, in a sense, this morning. We came very close to finishing our study last week on verses 3 through 8. I had intended to do that, but was unable to cover the final point. And so, contrary to all that I've ever learned about preaching, we will have basically one point today, and try to sum up everything that we've been saying over the last couple of weeks in this great, great text.

As we noted when we began our study of Philippians, the apostle Paul is in prison. He is enduring some very dire circumstances, not only from the standpoint of physical deprivation, from the standpoint of ministerial deprivation in that he has lost his freedom to move about, but also in the sense of a sort of social deprivation, he is cut off from the people he loves. And then he is being rather unfairly and unmercifully attacked by others who name the name of Christ, who are spreading the word around that he is in prison because the Lord had to put him on the shelf because in some way he had failed in his ministry. It's a hard time for him circumstantially, this first imprisonment, which we affirmed to you we believe was in Rome. But in spite of all of that, he expresses joy throughout this epistle.

The occasion of this epistle is that he, while in prison, receives a gift of love from the Philippian Christians. The bearer of that gift is a man named Epaphroditus. He comes with the money to assist Paul and with the instruction to stay with Paul, so that he may be ministered to not only in a financial way but in a personal way. Paul is overwhelmed by the love and the affection of the Philippians, and writes this letter back to them to express to them his love, to express to them his concern that they sustain the unity that he has known them to have, to express to them the fact that he has joy in spite of his negative circumstances, and also to send Epaphroditus back, because he feels they need him more than he does.

So it's an epistle of joy. It's an epistle that in a sense says, "Don't worry about me, I rejoice. Don't be concerned about me, I am fulfilled. God is at work, nothing touches the depth of my joy, not any negative circumstance." So in a very real sense, this is an epistle of joy. It expresses love to the Philippians, who had a very unusual bond with Paul. They had sent to him on numerous occasions financial gifts when no one else did. There was something that bound his heart with theirs like no other church. And so, he writes back to them of his affection, of his joy, something of his instruction, and encouragement as well.

As we open the epistle and find his opening greeting, we note that it contains the elements of joy. Let's look at verse 3. "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

In those verses Paul expresses the facets, the elements of his joy. Though joy is only mentioned once, and that in verse 4, everything ties so tightly together that it is obvious to any reader that the pervasive attitude in all that he says in that opening paragraph is expressive of joy. He has joy. His joy, of course, is the joy of the Lord produced by the Holy Spirit, but it abounds when he thinks about the relationship he has with the Philippians. So we've been talking about joy.

As I was reading the Scripture this week and thinking about what I might share with you by way of introducing again our thoughts here, I came across some passages in my reading which expressed this whole matter of joy from a reverse perspective. We've been talking about the fact that God wants to produce in us joy, but the Bible also teaches that we have the ability to produce in God joy. That's an astounding thought. It is not so remarkable that we who are sinners should rejoice in the grace of our almighty, infinite, and holy God. But it is somewhat shocking that our infinite, almighty, and holy God should rejoice in us, but He does. Let me suggest to you the things that make God rejoice over you and me.

First of all, in Luke chapter 15, you remember a marvelous series of parables that are given there. And in verse 7, our Lord says, "I tell you that in the same way" – that is the parable of the finding of the lost sheep – "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance." And here we find there will be joy in heaven over repentance. Verse 10 says, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." It is not so much the fact that the angels rejoice as that there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels, which would in my mind lead me to assume that it's the joy of God. So the first thing that I would note for you is that God rejoices when you and I repent.

Secondly, in Hebrews, chapter 11, verses 5 and 6, we get another insight into what makes God rejoice. And it says there in 11:5, "By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; he was not found because God took him up, for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God." Or he delighted God. And then in verse 6, it says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." So we would include, secondly, that faith pleases God, faith delights God, our believing in Him brings Him joy.

In Psalm 147, chapter near the end of the Psalms, and in verse 11, it says, "The Lord favors those who fear Him." The Lord has a special delight in those who fear Him. Let's assume that that means worship in the truest and purest sense, adoration. How then can we cause God joy? By repenting from sin, believing in Him, worshiping and adoring Him. In Proverbs, chapter 15, verse 8, we read this, "The sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord," and then this, "But the prayer of the upright is His delight." Another thing that brings God joy is prayer – is our communion with Him. In 1 Chronicles, chapter 29, the last chapter of that book, and verse 17, we read, "Since I know, O my God, that Thou triest the heart and delightest in uprightness – delightest in uprightness." We bring God joy through repentance, faith, adoration, prayer and righteousness, or uprightness.

There's also a statement in Proverbs, chapter 11, I think it's verse 20, which adds to our thinking, as it says, "The blameless in their walk are His delight." Blamelessness – not only righteous behavior, but blameless character. And then you remember Matthew 25:21 and 23, in the parable of our Lord there where He says, "Enter into the joy of your Lord," and that, I believe, is the Lord's rejoicing over a faithful servant.

So, we as believers can bring joy to the heart of God by repentance, faith, adoration or worship, prayer, righteous behavior, blameless character, and faithful service. Those things cause God to rejoice over us. What an amazing thought. How much more, then, should we have cause, who are so sinful, and weak, and frail, to rejoice in the God who adores and loves us? We should never be without joy. We should never be joyless. There should never be a time in our life when we do not tap the fruit of the Spirit, which is joy.

Now, remember what I told you, spiritual joy is unrelated to circumstances. Spiritual joy is something completely different than happiness, which is related to happenstance, happenings, chance, occurrences, events. Spiritual joy is a gift of God. Remember the definition? The theology of joy I gave you? Spiritual joy is a gift of God to those who believe the gospel, being produced in them by the Holy Spirit, because they believe and obey the Word mixed with trials, and set their hope on eternal glory. That's the theology of spiritual joy. And so we as believers can know that joy when we walk in the Spirit, and we've gone over that.

Now we come to our last look at this little section, the elements of joy. We have discussed the joy of recollection in verse 3, Paul's joy over all the sweet memories that he had in his mind. We talked about how that the Holy Spirit has a way of erasing the tape of negative memories, and the heart that is tune with the Spirit usually sees people and remembers the causes of joy. Then we talked about the joy of intercession, how his prayers and petitions on their behalf were more joyful to him than anything in his prayer life. His highest joy, in a sense, was praying for them, over against praying for himself. We noticed the joy of participation in verse 5, how he rejoiced in the fact that they had been fellow servants along with him, partners in the extension of the gospel. From the very first day, when

Lydia was converted by the riverside in Philippi, until the present, they were real partners of ministry, a source of joy.

And then last time we looked at the joy of anticipation, how he rejoiced in verse 6 in what they would become. We talked about how important it is in the church to keep our minds on what the church will become. If we look too closely and too long at what the church is, it will steal our joy. If we look at what the church will be, there is great cause for rejoicing.

Now, that brings us to the last point in our little outline, the joy of affection. Paul experienced that joy that wells up in the heart of a person who loves, who has deep affection. And this is a high and rich and wonderful joy. In fact, I guess we could ask the question is there any greater expression of joy than the joy of affection? Is there anything that more exhilarates the heart than the joy of affection?

Verse 7: “It is only right for me to feel this way about you all because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me, for God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.” His heart is gushing at that point. It’s almost a crescendo. He starts out rejoicing in every remembrance, and then rejoicing over the fact that he’s been able to intercede, and then rejoicing because of their participation, and then rejoicing in what they will be. And then he caps it by saying, “And the sum of it is, I have you so deeply in my heart, I care so earnestly for you, that my joy is compelled by deep love.”

Specifically, some of the elements in verse 7 are important for us. “It is only right for me to feel this way about you because I have you in my heart, due to what you’ve done for me.” Because you have been so good to me, you have found a deep place in my heart, and it’s only right that I feel the way I feel about you. He has a great sense of what is right – *dikaïos* in the Greek – more than just expected, more than just protocol, more than just proper, it’s right. It’s morally right, it’s right before God, it honors God, it expresses gratitude. It is the way I ought to respond to you.

Paul had a great sense of right. He was a man deeply compelled by what was right before God. He doesn’t claim some prize for his affection. He doesn’t expect some pat on the back. He is not self-serving and condescending. Emphatically he speaks, “It is right for me to feel this way, because of all that you have done. I’m only doing what is right.” And there’s a humility even in that expression. “It’s right,” he says, “to feel this way.” What way? To feel thankful, verse 3; to feel joyful, verse 4; to feel confident, verse 6; it’s right to feel what I feel about you.

What does it mean “to feel”? Well, he uses a Greek verb *phrone*, which basically means to think – to think. The term is used primarily for a disposition of mind or an attitude. It runs deeper than just cognition. And I would venture that the best way to translate it would be “to have concern” in this context. By the way, he likes this word in Philippians. He uses it twice in chapter 2, twice in chapter 3,

verse 15, once in chapter 3, verse 19, once in chapter 4, verse 2, and twice in chapter 4, verse 10.

He likes to use this word. It's expressive of heart attitude, of concern, and that's really what he is saying. It's the action of the intellect, yes, but it's the action of the intellect that touches the feelings, and so I like the word "concern." He says, "It's only right for me to be concerned about you, it's only right – because I have you in my heart. I feel the way I feel because I have you in my heart, I hold you in my heart." What does he mean by that? He means that I love you, basically. I have such a deep affection for you. In 2 Corinthians 7:3, he says, "I do not speak to condemn you for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together." I mean the man says, "You're a part of me, you're woven into the warp and woof of my deepest being. I have you in my heart."

There are probably people like that in your life. Subconsciously they're there, and they come to the surface frequently – your thoughts, your affections for them, you think about them, you remember them, you pray for them. It may be long periods of time you don't see them or talk to them, but you carry them in your heart. There's something in their life that inextricably tied them to you, and you have them in your heart, they're deep in your being – deep. And that's what Paul is saying. I hold you in my heart.

What does he mean by his heart? He's just talking about the depth of his person. The heart is simply the center of thought and feeling. You can't really get too technical with how you want to use the heart in Scripture, because it is used in many different ways, but basically speaking, when Proverbs 4:23 says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life," it's just talking about your inner person, the depth of your inner being. "I hold you deep inside myself."

For example, in Scripture, we use the heart to believe, Acts 8:37. We use the heart in service, serving the Lord with all the heart, Deuteronomy 11:13. We use the heart to obey, Deuteronomy 26:16. We use the heart to follow, 1 Kings 2:4. We use the heart to trust, trust the Lord with all your heart, Proverbs 3:5. We use the heart to love, love the Lord your God with all your heart. We use the heart even to do God's will, doing the will of God from the heart, Ephesians says. And we use the heart to worship, 1 Peter 3. It's the center of our being, of our action, of our thought, of our feeling.

That's why the Bible says you're to have a clean heart, Psalm 51:10. You're to have an obedient heart, Psalm 119:36. You're to have a worshiping heart, Psalm 86:11. You're to have a loving heart, as we mentioned, Matthew 22:37 and elsewhere. The heart is the depth of your person. And what Paul is saying is you're deep in me, you're a part of my life. It's a beautiful thing. And every time they came to mind he was filled with joy. It was the joy of affection. He loved them. And it was that love that produced that joy. It's that love that covers a multitude of sins and overlooks weaknesses.

As I pointed out, I think the Philippian church had weaknesses; they were human. I think they may have been struggling with the matter of unity, and that's something he brings up almost in every

chapter in this particular letter. I think there were concerns. I don't think there were major issues in that church; they weren't perfect, but his deep love for them covered over all of those things, in a sense, and just gushed out with joy – the joy of affection. It's a wonderful thing to experience. And Paul experienced it when he thought about the Philippians.

What was it that had caused that? Well, he said, "I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me." It's because of your involvement in my life, that's what endears you to me. It's because of what you have meant to me. In my imprisonment, and as I said he was a prisoner here in Rome, they were compassionate toward him and sent him money and sent him Epaphroditus, instructing Epaphroditus to stay with him. And Epaphroditus was carrying out their wishes to the point that he almost killed himself, he worked so hard. He came close to death, chapter 2, verse 30, says, for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

It's amazing. This Philippian group loved Paul so deeply they sent this man. The man carried their love for Paul in his heart so greatly that he almost killed himself trying to do for Paul what they wanted him to do – deep, deep commitment. And it was that that endeared them to Paul. That's not too hard to understand. When people love like that, they find a place in your heart, don't they? Sure, they do. You, in my imprisonment and in the defense, the *apologia*, and the confirmation, *bebaisis*, which has to do with guaranteeing something – both of them are legal terms used in a court. In my imprisonment and in my defense, you were there, standing with me as I stood for the gospel, whether I'm in prison, arraigned before judges, you are partakers of grace with me.

His imprisonment is clear. What he means by "the defense and confirmation of the gospel" could be specifically referring to the first phase of his trial, which had incarcerated him, the second phase of which was coming and would decide his fate, and did decide that he would be released, at least this time, until a later imprisonment, when he lost his life. He could be speaking of that. He could be speaking of the wider defense and confirmation of the gospel that was a part of the fullness of his ministry.

In either case, he is saying, "You were there, and you were partaking of that same enabling grace along with me. You stood by me – you weren't ashamed of me, you weren't afraid of the identification, you weren't afraid of the price or the cost. You assisted me, you were *sugkoinnos*, you were partners together, of that divine enabling grace. You alleviated my suffering. You cooperated with me in the defense of the gospel, willing to suffer. That's why I have you in my heart, and that's why my heart leaps with joy.

And then he brings that affection down to something very, very expressive in verse 8. "God is my witness," he says. He uses that phrase on several occasions when he wants to confirm something beyond questionable doubt. He calls on God to attest to the truthfulness of his heart attitude. He is

dealing here with something that people can't see. They can't see his heart. They can't see his affection. So wanting them to understand how genuinely he feels, he says, "God is my witness; God can see it. God is the one who can attest to the truth of what I say. I long for you, I long for you all."

He loves to use that word "all." I thank my God in all my remembrance, verse 3. I pray for you with joy in my every prayer. All these people were a cause of joy for him, and he expresses that. I long for you all. The word there means to yearn; it's the idea of eager longing, a yearning heart. He uses it in chapter 2, verse 26, speaking of Epaphroditus, because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you heard that he was sick. Boy, this is an affectionate group. Here is this guy, goes to be with Paul, he gets sick. The Philippians are so concerned that he is sick that they're sad. He's so sad that they're sad that he yearns for them. Paul's so sad that he's sad because they're sad because he's sick that he sends him back.

I'm telling you, this is an affectionate gang. These people are really tied to each other. And he uses it again in chapter 4, verse 1, the same verb, he says, "My beloved brethren, again whom I yearn to see, my joy and crown." He loves them. "My beloved," he calls them. Boy, they had a wonderful relationship – wonderful. And he says, "Here's how deep this love is, I yearn for you with the affection of Christ Jesus." It's supernatural. It's not natural. It's the affection of Christ Jesus. It's not a natural human attraction; it's much deeper than that. It's given by Christ to those who are Christ's. It's the love of God shed abroad in the heart. It's the love that is the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, beginning the list of Galatians 5:22. He says, "I love you, and I long for you with the affection of Christ Jesus." A supernatural one – it's a Christly affection, and it's a deep yearning.

It's an interesting thing to look at that word "affection." The translators of the New American have chosen the word "affection." The old Authorized said "The bowels." The word *splagchnon*, the Greek, basically refers to I guess what you could call the area of soft internal organs in the body. It's an interesting term. By the way, it's the strongest word in the Greek language to express compassionate love. When they really wanted to express compassion, they would say, "I love you with my bowels." Try that on your next Hallmark card – viscera. One lexicon says it has to do with the inner soft parts of the body where emotions were felt.

This part of your body, where all of your internal organs are, reacts to your emotions, no question about it. You get highly emotional, and your lungs start to react, you get short of what? Breath. You get involved in some emotion, and your heart begins to beat. You look at the person you love, and your heart begins to beat – changes the palpitations of your heart. You go through some kind of stress, some kind of deep feeling, and it starts to curl your stomach, and your stomach starts sending up signals. This part of your body has a way of reacting to deep yearnings. That's what the word has in mind. It's very expressive. And what Paul is saying is everything in me, even my physical body, longs for you. I think about you and my heart runs a little faster, and my breath is a little shorter, and I feel it in my stomach, because I have such deep feeling for you.

It's true. What else would compel a man to pray for some people like that, day in, day out, as he did for so many of the churches? He had a supernatural love, enhanced and enriched by the warm affection and kind compassionate care of the Philippians that touched him so deeply. They were woven into the warp and woof of his life, and he thought about them, and when he thought about them, he felt it deep inside of him, and it caused him joy. That's the joy of affection. That's an element of joy. That's an element of joy, and maybe the sweetest element of joy of all.

Joy, then, comes from God. It's expressed in our relationships to others, as we've been seeing. As we share our lives with them, that joy overflows to touch and to be reciprocated in that relationship. Let me just sum it up. The fellowship of God's people should be a fellowship of joy. We should experience that Spirit-given joy which has joyous memories and joyous recollections, which rejoices for the privilege of petitioning on behalf of others more than itself. We should experience the joy of thanking God for the rich fellowship of those who have come alongside and enabled us to rejoice in the success of ministry and the richness of fellowship. We should know the joy of one who knows what people are becoming in the plan of the God who began the work and will fulfill it. And we should rejoice in the joy of a fervent affection that is bound together by a deep love because of mutual selfless sacrifice.

That's the joy that Paul had. That's the joy that negative circumstances couldn't touch. You see, the Christian is satisfied in a completely different dimension than the non-Christian. For the non-Christian, joy must come from the outside. For us, it wells up from the inside. And outside joy is short-lived and inside joy is long-term, permanent, deep, and satisfying. And none of us needs to live without joy. In conclusion, I want to give you a list. We've talked about the positive elements of joy. I want you to know something. We're going to be talking about joy more in Philippians, and I know enough to know that if we're going to talk about joy, we're probably going to have a battle on our hands, and the enemy may decide that he's going to take away our joy through a myriad of means.

And I thought it might be good to just share with you a few principles, things that cause you to lose your joy. Okay? These are the things we need to be on guard against as we see what God produces in us by the Spirit in the name of joy. What is it that can steal our joy? What causes the absence of joy?

Number one: false salvation – false salvation; that is to say, seeking joy without the Holy Spirit.

There are some people who seek joy. It is elusive. They become immensely frustrated. Their lives are not happy. And maybe they're in the church, and involved in some way or another in the church, and active in some way or another, and maybe they think they're pursuing righteous activities, and they're trying desperately to be religious and experience joy, and it never comes, because it is the work of the Spirit, and they have not the Spirit, because they are not Christ's. There will be no true joy. And



when there is no true capacity for joy because Christ is not there, the Spirit is not there, the process becomes very frustrating.

And I personally believe that churches are filled with people who are not genuinely saved; they therefore do not possess the Holy Spirit and joy therefore is elusive, absent.

Many of those people spend some time in the church, never able to discover and affect joy in their life. They leave, frustrated and lost. So if you have an absence of joy in your life, if it seems consistently elusive to you, go back to the beginning somewhere. And as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourself to see if you're in the faith." You may be pursuing something you will never catch. You may be seeking something you will never find, because you do not possess God's Holy Spirit at all. In other words, be sure you're saved – be sure you're saved.

Secondly, Satan and demons may do all they can to steal your joy. After all, 1 Peter 5:8 says that the devil is a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. And there may be efforts made on the part of the hosts of hell to rob you of joy in a myriad of ways. We need to be aware and alerted to the fact that definitely is Satan's ploy and effort, to take away the joy of believers. That could come in many, many forms. We have to understand the source of that.

Thirdly, and now we're going to talk about Christians specifically, Satan obviously is the thief of joy, and the absence of salvation mean the absence of joy – but thirdly, one of the things that has a tendency to steal joy is an inadequate understanding of God's sovereignty – an inadequate understanding of God's sovereignty. In other words, fretting as if God was not in control, worrying, anxiety ridden, feeling the threat of others controlling your life, or of your own inability to control it, and ignoring the reality that God is sovereign. That no matter what is going on or what is happening, God is in control, that all things – in the classic terms of Romans 8:28 – are working together according to His purpose for your benefit.

The sovereignty of God is the surpassing doctrine for Christians to understand. It is the overarching, encompassing reality that keeps everything in perspective. God is in control of all it. If you don't understand that, you're going to struggle with your joy – an inadequate understanding of God's sovereignty will take your joy. It took Habakkuk's joy. He cries out, "How long – how long – how long?" And he gives God all this distress, and then he starts to recite what he knows about God, and by the time he gets to the end of his prophecy the circumstances haven't changed at all, not one bit, but his attitude has changed. His attitude is changed so that he says, "I rejoice in the God of my salvation." If you understand the sovereignty of God, you rejoice.

Fourthly, another thing that steals joy is prayerlessness – prayerlessness. That is failing to commit things to the Lord, leaving them to yourself to fret and worry and fume. Trying to orchestrate all of life's elements yourself and never going to the place of prayer breeds frustration rather than

dependence. Boy, I really believe this is such a vital thing, and so missing in the church today. It literally is replaced today by what we call counseling. Instead of going to God with your needs, you go to somebody, who sits across a desk and supposedly tells you things that are neither sovereign nor supernatural, in many cases – in most cases. And the best of human insight is a far cry from divine assistance.

No wonder James said when you reach a place of impotence in your life, when you reach a place of total weakness, when you no longer can tap the divine resource for yourself, go to the elders of the church and let them pray over you. The effectual, fervent, prayer of a righteous man has tremendous effect. “Commit your way unto the Lord,” Proverbs says, “trust also in Him.” Take it to Him. Get the divine resource involved. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. In all your ways acknowledge Him, focus on Him. And then he says in chapter 4 of this very letter, doesn’t he, in verse 6, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication let your request be made known to God.” Go to God. Go to the Lord. And if you don’t have the strength, and you feel like you’re in such shambles spiritually you can’t do that, then get some godly people to go.

Prayerlessness will steal your joy, because you’ll scramble all over this world trying to find solutions to the dilemmas that only God can solve. Don’t you try to orchestrate life. Don’t you try to find some guru behind a desk who can orchestrate life. Go to God. Now, those are some sort of theological things that steal your joy, theological perspectives on things that steal your joy. Let me give you some real practical ones, okay?

Continuing our list – number five: one of the things that tends to steal joy is a low after a spiritual high. Have you noticed that? Monday after Sunday. You’re here and it’s glorious, and you’re enriched and blessed and encouraged. And you walk in that place you work and it’s humdrum, or you get up in the morning and mother’s got dirty clothes, and the weekend blitzed the kitchen and blitzed the laundry room, and all the cars are filthy again, and it’s all there. And you go from the spiritual high to the humdrum low of life – to say nothing of going from some great spiritual experience to a severe trial.

Classic, of course, is Elijah, who goes on Mount Carmel and withstands the priests of Baal, takes out a sword and massacres the priests, defeats 450 priests of Baal on a mountain. And God sends fire from heaven, burns up a sacrifice, the wood, the stones, licks up the water – an incredible supernatural event. And Elijah has just seen the great God, the almighty God act in his behalf in response to his prayer in a monumental way. Spiritual high on Mount Carmel has few equals in the history of the prophets. And he goes right from there to wanting to commit suicide. He wants God to kill him. He runs like a maniac down a path and sits down in the sun and says, “Kill me, kill me, kill me, I can’t stand it, there’s a woman after me.”

That’s hard to understand – 450 men gave him no problem, one woman scares the living daylight out of him. “Kill me, Lord.” He went from the height of spiritual victory to the depths of spiritual

depression, even to the point of true depression, where he wanted to die. Sometimes severe trials – Jezebel did have some power to throw around – severe trial following immediately upon the heels of some great spiritual experience causes us to lose our joy by contrast. If we just sort of go along in life, maybe we don't sense it that way, but when you go from the very high to the very low, it can take your joy. So be aware of that.

Sixthly, another thing that I believe steals joy is a circumstance orientation. There are some people in this life as Christians who will know very little joy because they take all their signals from the material world. In other words, their emotion is controlled by the shallowness of the world. It is a substitute for the true joy. If their husband treats them the way they like him to treat them, they have joy. If he doesn't, they don't. If their kids do what they want them to do, they have joy. If they don't, they lose it. If they can own what they want to own, they have joy. If they can't, they don't. In other words, they get all of the signals for response from the material world.

Materialism is what it is. It's a lack of focus on God. It's a lack of contentment with God. They don't see God at work. Every response is controlled by the things of time and space. Most people live like that. They're joyous because it's a big event. Their joy rises and falls on whether they get something new, whether they have some special event, whether they're going on a trip or not, all of that controls their responses, because they are totally linked to a circumstance orientation, and taking all their cues from the material world. That will rob you of joy, and put you on a roller coaster that's unrelated to true spiritual joy.

Seventh, another thing that I believe steals joy is ingratitude – ingratitude. In fact there are few things in human life uglier than ingratitude – few things. If I were a parent all over again, raising the children I've already raised, I would spank them oftener, and longer, and harder for ingratitude than I think almost anything I can think of. Certainly that would be worthy of a spanking far more than if they spilled the milk or dumped the paint or whatever other things we spank them for out of anger so often. Do you train your children to be grateful? How sharper than a serpent's tooth is a thankless child. Ingratitude, failure to be thankful; instead of focusing on things which you have received from the Lord, and in everything giving thanks, whatever the circumstances, whether they seem positive or negative, some people are never thankful, because they are never satisfied. They don't see life's trials as blessings from God, conforming them to Christ. They're never satisfied, they never say thanks. It has to do with pride, unquestionably, ingratitude.

Another one is forgetfulness. I think forgetfulness will steal your joy. You say, "What do you mean by that?" Well, failure to keep the memory of what you were saved from. Why is it that new Christians always seem full of joy, and you get to the people who have been saved 40 years or so, and they begin, many of them, to look really sour? Have you noticed that? Why is that? I never knew a church split led by new Christians – never. Never heard of a major church problem created by new babes in Christ – never heard of it. Never heard of conflict in a church between a group of brand-new

Christians – never heard of it. Never heard of a group of miserable, griping, murmuring, complaining people in a church, all of whom were just saved. Ridiculous thought. You've got to be a long-time Christian to be like that. Why? Because somehow, we forget what we were saved from. We lost the freshness, when new Christians seem to have that joy of the psalmist in Psalm 103:2 says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits." Cultivate a memory of good things, will you? Don't be a joyless, cranky, sour, dour person. What kind of an advertisement is that? You're going to have the young Christians saying, "Lord," you know, "take me home soon. Don't let that happen."

Number nine, in my list, another thing that will steal your joy is dissatisfaction with your earthly condition – dissatisfaction with your earthly condition. Some people lose their joy because they don't like the way they look. They don't like where they live. They don't like the gifts or lack of gifts that they have. They don't like the particular place in life they have been given. They're always living as if they were the recipient of something less than they deserved. Paul said, "I have learned in whatever state I am therewith to be – what – content," Philippians 4:12. "I know how to be abased and how to abound." It's the same to me. I don't care. I can have it or not have it. But some people lose their joy because they're basically dissatisfied.

We all have disabilities. We all have handicaps. Some people lose their joy because they're in a wheelchair. Some people lose their joy because they can't get a job they think lifts them to the level of their ability. Some people don't have joy because they feel that they ought to be more appreciated. They don't like where they fit in the church structure. They wish they could be doing something more significant. They wish they were prettier, or more handsome, or more capable athletically, or mathematically, or academically, or whatever it is. And it goes into the dimension of whether they have or have not material things as well.

Number ten, here's another thing that will steal your joy, fear of the future – fear of the future. Why do some people always imagine that the worst possible thing is going to happen in everything? They just go around in fear all the time. Fear of failure, fear they will lose what they have, fear they might lose their power, they might lose their reputation, fear of illness, fear of death. Fear – constant fear of the future. Jesus says, "Take no thought for what you shall eat and drink, what you shall wear, I'll take care of that," Matthew 6. Jesus said, "I'm going away, but whatever you ask in My name, I'll send it to you. Don't let your heart be – what – troubled, neither let it be afraid." What are you afraid of? Some people live in fear, fear of all kinds of things that aren't happening. Have you noticed that? Fear of things that aren't happening. It's the "what if" syndrome.

Number eleven in my list that will steal your joy is to live by uncontrolled feelings – to live by uncontrolled feelings. Let me give you the definition of a weak person. A weak person doesn't talk to himself enough. You say, "What do you mean by that?" You've got to get yourself under control. If you live by your uncontrolled feelings, you'll be a victim. That's living by the flesh. I think Martyn Lloyd-Jones said it best in his book, *Spiritual Depression*; listen to this: "I suggest that the main

trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression is this: that we allow our self to talk to us instead of talking to our self." That's good.

"Have you realized," he writes, "that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself rather than talking to yourself?" And the art of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. Psalm 42, he moans and groans, and then he says, "Why are you disquieted, O my soul?" Quiet, soul. "Hope thou in God." Why are you doing that? Soliloquy, talks to himself. Some people just listen to themselves, whatever their emotions say they are victim of. Don't do that, talk to yourself. Control – live not by uncontrolled feelings, but by controlling those feelings in the power of the Spirit of God. Bring yourself into submission.

Twelve, another thing that I really believe will steal your joy is morbid self-analysis – morbid self-analysis. That's why I have such an aversion to psychology. In the first place, it seems to me utterly unnecessary, since the Scriptures give us all we need for life and godliness. But secondly, because it tends to make a person concentrate on his own navel, to the degree where he becomes morbidly and self-centeredly, if there is such a word, analytical. Worrying about his failures, worrying about the possibility of negative attitudes, negative results, negative actions, worrying about the fact that somewhere deep down inside there's something that needs to be uncovered, poking around and scrambling around in a pile of whatever is going on in the past, trying to uncover some secret to spring him loose. And what he winds up with is a whole ton of morbidly self-analytical baggage that doesn't help him at all.

Hey, we're inadequate. That's generic enough to satisfy me; I'm not going to poke around in it forever. I mess up, I know that. I'm not going to dwell on that, I'm not going to poke around in it, "O you did this, O my, there you did that, here's your problem, you've got to pull all this stuff and find the" – you know. And somewhere down the line, you got abused, and somebody didn't treat you well, and now you can blame all of it on that, and that isn't going to make you happy. Morbid self-analysis will take your joy. Forgetting the things that are behind, looking not on your own things but the things of others, move ahead.

Thirteen sort of pulls together a lot of them: self-centeredness. Self-centered people are always unhappy because they're always unsatisfied. That is a dead end. Show me a self-centered person, and I'll show you a miserable person. Self-centered people can't be satisfied. They can't be. Unselfish people are satisfied all along, because they don't ask you for anything.

And then finally, another thing that will steal your joy is guilt, the unwillingness to accept forgiveness – the unwillingness to accept forgiveness. You just won't accept forgiveness. For many people, you see, it goes like this, "I just can't forgive myself," and you remind them, "But God forgave you." "I know, I know, but God does not understand my standards." You have a God complex, my friend. You have just crawled up one ahead of the trinity. You can't forgive you for what God has long ago

forgiven you for.

That is a massive ego problem. And for many people it's that one sin, they've got one sin somewhere in their life, or one little period of sin, and they can't forgive themselves for that, so they literally limp through life, always going back to that one thing, which is a non-issue with God, which is a joy thief in their life. What a waste of energy; what a waste of needless guilt. That's why I don't see any virtue in poking around to discover sin. Somebody said to me recently, "You know, we need to discover the sin that is hidden." What do you mean by that? I don't think I need to poke around to find hidden sin. If God is in my life at work, He'll bring it to the fore. The problem isn't finding it, the problem is dealing with it. I don't need to poke around to discover stuff that the Lord has already what? Forgiven. Why would I waste my energy doing that? It will steal your joy.

Well, I hope those are practical and that you can be on guard a little bit, because when we get into studying joy and pursue a life of joy in the Holy Spirit, you may have a little bit of resistance. Let me close by reading you a prayer of one of my favorite mothers in the Bible, Hannah. First Samuel 2:1, "Hannah prayed and said, 'My heart exalts in the Lord; My horn is exalted in the Lord, My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, Because I rejoice in Thy salvation.'" That's the attitude, isn't it? That's the attitude. "There is no one holy like the Lord, there is no one besides Thee, there is no rock like our God." She rejoiced. She rejoiced. And that's the attitude we need to have. It's an attitude of joy that spills out in our relationships and allows us to see people the way Paul saw these dear Philippians. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we are reminded of the prophet Zephaniah, who said, "The Lord will rejoice over you with shouts of joy." And we are amazed that You rejoice over us. O Lord, may we rejoice over You in everything – in everything. May we hear the injunction of Paul, who said, "Rejoice always and again I say rejoice." And may we not let the thieves of joy steal away the delight of our heart. Help us to be on guard. Help us to walk in the Spirit, being filled with the Spirit, experiencing what He produces, namely love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. May we know the delight, the delight that the Spirit will produce in us. Accomplish all Your good and gracious work, Lord, and may we in this life be joyful and in the life to come know joy unspeakable and full of glory. Thank You, Father, for what You're working in all of our hearts through Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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