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

Rejoice Always
Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:16
Code: 80-266

Well as I said, we're taking a little bit of a break from our normal study of Luke to appropriately direct our thoughts toward Thanksgiving. And I want to draw you to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 16, this is one of those verses that are very rare in the Bible, containing only two words, "Rejoice always." Unambiguous, clear, not in need of much interpretation, if any, but opening up for us a great area, a wide range of Christian responsibility. It is a command, "Rejoice always."

No qualifiers, no caveats, no exceptions, no ifs, ands, or buts...in fact, in the Greek the order is reversed and the literal translation would be, "At all times be rejoicing." The Greeks put the word order the way they wanted the emphasis made. It is not then primarily an emphasis on rejoicing, it is primarily an emphasis on "at all times rejoicing," as if to say you haven't obeyed until your joy is unceasing.
Now I want to begin with a statement that may surprise you and perhaps appear a little hard, if not impossible, to believe, but I think it's true and then I'll endeavor to show you why it's true. Here's the statement. There is no event or circumstance that can occur in the life of any Christian that should diminish that Christian's joy. Let me say that again, there is no event or circumstance that can occur in the life of any Christian that should diminish that Christian's joy.
Now let me talk about that from a negative standpoint. If joy is diminished in the Christian's experience, that is sin because it amounts to disobedience to this command. That might sound a little bit ridiculous, given the woes of life, but it is precisely what this command expects of us. And it's not an isolated command, by any means, as we shall see before we're finished, but just comparing it with a couple of places in the Scriptures. For example, Philippians 3:1, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say rejoice," just in case you didn't get it the first time. We are called to this incessant joy. It is a command and the emphasis is on the unceasing aspect of this joy. Even when we suffer, Peter says in 1 Peter 4:13, we are to rejoice with joy, compounding the expression to remind us that this is not some minimal joy, this is not some marginal joy, but this is an incessant kind of joy that gathers up all of our being in its expression.

Now somebody might say, "Well what about Romans 12:15? Romans 12:15 says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep." Well that's right, but it doesn't talk about our internal Christian joy. That is simply saying, "Show compassion and empathy and sympathy with people, join in their laughter when they're happy, join in their weeping when they're sad." Identify outwardly with normal human emotion. But that kind of weeping does not negate joy as is clear from 2 Corinthians

6:10 where Paul says, "As sorrowful yet always rejoicing." Paul gives testimony there that he obeyed this command as a way of life. Even when he was sorrowing, sorrowing with the sorrow of others, sorrowing over the failure of believers in churches, sorrowing over the disaffection of those he loved, sorrowing over the pain of persecution, sorrowing more often than not over the maltreatment that the gospel preachers received, sorrowing over the dishonor that was literally placed upon Christ, and yet all of those kinds of emotional experiences never touched his joy. So in 2 Corinthians 6:10 does he say, "As sorrowful yet always rejoicing."
The command then is that. At all times be rejoicing, the adverb is placed first, as I said, in the original text. The word for rejoice is a Greek verb *chairote*in the imperative mood which means it is a command. That word became an essential element of Christian vocabulary. In fact, when believers met each other they said, *"Chairote."* Sometimes that word is translated in the New Testament as a greeting, "All hail," for example when Jesus came out of the grave in His resurrection and said, "All hail," to the disciples on resurrection morning, it was the word rejoice, rejoice. What a wonderful way to greet one another that would be instead of the ambiguous and sort of pointless "hello," whatever that might mean, or "how are you?" which has always baffled me because it just doesn't say anything. How am I...what? I suppose it means how are you getting along in life. How much better if we greeted each other with *chairote*, rejoice, rejoice as a constant incessant reminder of an incessant spiritual duty and obligation? And so it was that the early church believers greeted each other with rejoice and then they often parted with "Grace and peace."

In our Lord's final time with His disciples, John 13 to 17, in the Upper Room discourse, when He was celebrating the Last Supper with them, and the night that Judas betrayed Him, He mentions joy and full joy eight times. And this is really quite remarkable because it was in that experience that the disciples would reach the low point of their human lives, never were they so exhilarated as when they had come to faith in the Messiah, when they had seen the power of Messiah, when their full trust was in Him and they saw Him as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior, the one who would bring the Kingdom, the one who forgave their sin and gave to them eternal salvation and the promise of heaven. Never were they more exhilarated than to be with Him and to follow along and have the promise that they would reign with Him in the Kingdom. And so when Jesus started to talk about His death and when it became imminent and they were on the brink, as it were, of that reality and the Jews had already hatched the plot and it was well nigh about to be sprung on Jesus, and now Jesus had been telling them, "I'm leaving, I'm leaving," never was the fear greater, never was the anxiety greater, never was the sense of dread greater, never was there a time in their experience with Him when they would have more justified reason to be sorrowful then that and it is precisely that moment in the Upper Room the night of His betrayal that He reminds them repeatedly of joy, that they are to be joyful. In the fourteenth chapter of that passage Jesus says, "You heard that I said to you, 'I go away and I will come to you, if you love Me you would have rejoiced,'" because you know what this means, this means I'm going through the cross, through the grave to the right hand of the Father to send the Holy Spirit, this is the plan, this is your redemption, your salvation and your sanctification and ultimately your glorification. If you understood it, you would rejoice. He had to say to them, "Let

not your heart be troubled." Don't let it be afraid. "I'm going to prepare a place for you and I'll come and I'll take you to that place."
Again in that same discourse in chapter 15 and verse 11, "These things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you." He promised them peace and He promised them provision and He promised them the Holy Spirit and He promised them the Scripture and He promised them answered prayer, divine resources and all of this that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full. This is not a time for sorrow, even though I'm leaving, this is a time for consequent joy. He even says in chapter 16 verse 22, "Your heart will rejoice and no one will take that joy away from you." When all of these events unfold, you're going to have an unassailable joy that no one can ever take. So the theme of joy was on the heart of Jesus the last night. It was part of His legacy as He left His own, the promises of all the resources of heaven at their disposal, even though He was gone and the coming of the Holy Spirit, there was reason for them to rejoice.
And in that wonderful Philippian epistle, joy is mentioned, some form of the word is mentioned, sixteen times. What makes that, I suppose, remarkable is that that was written as one of Paul's prison epistles. It was written while he was a prisoner, while he was suffering the direst of conditions and persecution and hostility from other Christian evangelists who were accusing him of iniquity and sin and that's why he was in prison because God was chastening him. His reputation was being attacked and sullied by those who also named the name of Christ. And in the midst of that sort of personal persecution from other believers, as well as the hostility and suffering at the hands of the Romans, he mentions joy sixteen times. And joy is continually stressed throughout the New Testament, the gospels, throughout the book of Acts we find the disciples and apostles rejoicing that they were counted privileged to suffer persecution for the cause of Christ. We find it in emphasis in the epistles, the great responsibility to rejoice no matter what is going on, no matter what the conditions. It's kind of an unconditional joy that is incumbent upon believers. Even in times of great adversity, in fact particularly in times of great adversity are we called to this consummate joy. And this really starts all the way back in the Sermon on the Mount early in the book of Matthew at the beginning of the New Testament. When Jesus comes to the end of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 verse 10 it says, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Me...then this...rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great." In the midst of the worst possible circumstance, severe persecution even to death, rejoice. And don't just rejoice, be glad, rejoice over the top because this is earning for you a reward in heaven which you will enjoy forever and ever.

In Luke 6, and it's really an irresistible passage to read because of the expression here, "Blessed are you when men hate you and ostracize you...Jesus said...and cast insults at you and spurn your name as evil for the sake of the Son of Man, be glad in that day...I love this...and leap for joy." It's not just a marginal joy again, it's not just a minimal joy, it's joy that you really can't find an outlet for so you wind up jumping. "Jump for joy for behold your reward is great in heaven." When they hate you, when they ostracize you, when they insult you, when they spurn your name as evil and it's all for the sake of the

Son of Man, you ought to be jumping for joy because you have a reward that's going to be yours forever in heaven. Get the heavenly perspective on this.
Paul says in Colossians 1:24, "I rejoice in my sufferings. I rejoice in my sufferings." He obeyed this command and his sufferings were great. You read 2 Corinthians chapter 11, we'll read the whole epistle of 2 Corinthians, this long litany of things that he suffered, shipwrecks and beatings and whippings and stonings and in all of it, he says, in all my sufferings I rejoice. He obeyed this command. It is possible. In fact, James emphasizes, James 1:2, "Consider it all joy," again not a marginal joy, not a minimal joy, but a consummate joy, "my brethren, when you encounter various trials because these trials test your faith and they therefore produce endurance." Tested faith is faith that endures. "And endurance has a perfect result, it makes you mature and complete, lacking in nothing." You want to be a strong Christian, you want to be resolute, persistent, enduring, patient, faithful, then you have to suffer. You have to go through the difficulty.
In fact, Peter says it this way, 1 Peter 1:6, "In this you greatly rejoice," not just rejoice again, but greatly. You see, there's always these adverbs and adjectives that are added to this. "You greatly rejoice even though now for a little while if necessary you've been distressed by various trials that the proof of your faith being more precious than gold which is perishable even though tested by fire may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." You know why it's possible, it's commanded to rejoice in trials? Because trials test your faith and when you pass the test, you know you're real, you know you're genuine, you know you're saved. An untested Christian is a Christian subject to doubt. The longer you live as a Christian, the more trials and troubles you have out of which the Lord not only delivers you, but through which...listen...your faith endures, the more you know it's real...it's real. People who doubt salvation tend to be Christians who are immature and untested. When you go through trial after trial after trial that test your faith and your faith stands and the true faith will stand and it will endure and it will prove to be the real thing, then you know you're saved. Somebody was telling me this morning about an acquaintance who went through a terrible trial, the death of a husband, and is blaming God, cursing God. What is that? This is a person who claimed to be a Christian. This is not a Christian. A trial doesn't make a Christian curse God. A trial, no matter how severe the trial only proves the validity of real faith in God. And so, the trials come to give you the joy of knowing your salvation is the real thing.
Scripture says that true joy is to be great. It is to be abundant. It is to be exceeding. It is to be animated, Psalm 32:11. It is to be unspeakable, 1 Peter 1:8, that is you can't even find words for it, it just wells up and just bubbles up in you. It is to be full of glory, Peter also said that. Psalm 2, it is to be full of awe because you're so overwhelmed with what God is providing for you. It's a kind of over-the-top joy, it's a superabundant joy. This should characterize our lives all the time. In fact, it's commanded.
Now it should be obvious that the command to rejoice is not then dependent upon positive circumstances. We're not talking about that kind of joy, that's the world's joy. And I'll just define the world's joy for you, I mean, you know this. It's obvious to you, before you were a Christian it's obvious to you as you look at the world around you. You know, God has given a common grace, and that is

the ability for people to be happy. Happiness and sadness is frankly a function limited to people. No other part of God's physical creation has that ability. They don't have emotions. Sorry to tell you this, animals don't have emotion. They don't feel things, but people do. And God has as a common grace given human beings the ability to be happy. But it's limited. The kind of joy that the people without the Lord have is derived from the fulfillment of earthly pleasure. In other words, it's directly connected to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. It's what they want and get that makes them happy. And if they don't get what they want, they're not happy. So if they lust after something that their body wants, or they lust after something their eyes see, or they desire strongly something that they think will satisfy their sense of well-being, pride, and they get it, then there's joy. But their joy is derived from earthly pleasure and earthly pleasure is connected to the matrix of desires that are part of man's nature as fallen. You follow the impulses of your heart and if you get what your heart wants, you're happy. You see something, you want it, you go shopping, you get it, you buy it, you find there's a certain high, there's a certain euphoria in that experience of getting what you wanted. But this kind of joy not only is derived from earthly pleasure but it's a delusion. It's a delusion because it never really satisfies because lust never ceases, desire never ceases.
And it can never be ultimately fulfilled so it isn't long after you have what you thought you really wanted and it only brought you a moment of happiness and you find out what Proverbs says, "The end of joy may be grief." You're going to find out that what was such a thrill for you at the moment may be a serious pain for you. That's why people move from material thing, to material thing, to material thing incessantly. That's why they move from partner to partner to partner to partner in relationships incessantly because the momentary thrill in the fulfillment of their lust dissipates very fast, is delusional and they look one day at the person they wanted so badly and they don't want them anymore and now the grief comes...how do I get rid of this person to move on to what my lust wants now? And that's how they live their life, controlled to some degree by conventional expectations and the expectations of people around them. But it's a delusion. They wanted it so badly and then they got it and all that thrill was gone very fast.

It's short-lived, Job 20 verse 5, "The joy of the godless is momentary." The joy of the godless is momentary, it comes, it goes, it's that quick. Ecclesiastes 7:6 says, "Like kindling, it burns up fast." Isaiah 16:10 says, "The joy of gladness is taken away." That's the joy of the world. The joy of the world is connected to the desire of the heart, the impulse of the heart. It's connected to the fulfillment of pleasure. It's very, very delusionary because it just promises something it can't deliver because your lust is never satisfied and then you've got a problem of what you do with this thing that you once wanted so badly and now it's a pain to you because you want something else, or someone else. But this is the nature of the joy of the natural man, the natural fallen heart. I'm not talking about that. We experience that as fallen creatures. Sometimes you think if you just had this house, or that car, or this piece of furniture or that wardrobe thing, or whatever achievement or that job, or that position, or that degree, or whatever it might be, or that person, it would be the end of all your desires, you would have been there and you have reached the summit of human existence and everything that mattered to you is wrapped up in that one thing for that moment and that would satisfy you. And it just doesn't

because it is the very essence of humanness in a fallen condition to desire and desire and desire and desire and never ever be ultimately or finally or permanently satiated.
We're not talking about that. We're not talking about that kind of joy. That is not supernatural joy. We're talking about supernatural joy, something that is not natural, something that comes from God, not from our humanness. We're talking about a joy that is impossible to a non-believer. It's a joy that comes from God.
Let me give you a little bit of a paradigm as to think about this kind of joy we're talking of. First of all, and I'll give you a flow here, it comes from God. That's where it starts. It comes from God. There are a number of passages that undergird that statement. Psalm 4 would be sufficient, verse 7, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart more than where their grain and new wine abound." God, You did something in my heart that is more than the natural joy that I received when all my crops came in, and I had all I wanted to eat and all I wanted to drink and all the resources and money that I needed. You did something in my heart way more than that. You, he says, gave me peace so that I can lie down and sleep, You make me dwell in safety, You take all the anxiety out of my life. You gave me more than when I got everything that the world could give me. This is the joy that comes from God. In Psalm 16 verse 11, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy."
So we're talking about a joy that comes from God. It's a full joy. It's a spiritual joy. It's a supernatural joy. It comes from God. Secondly, it comes through Jesus Christ. It comes through Jesus Christ. God gives it, but He only gives it to those who are in Christ. It is reserved for those who are Christ's. John 15:11, "These things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you that your joy may be made full." Jesus saying to the disciples, the apostles, "You're Mine and with Me in the relationship that we have, you get My joy, My full joy." From God through Christ. It is the very joy of which the angels spoke to the shepherds in Luke 2, "Good news of great joy which shall be for all the people, for today in the city of David has been born for you a Savior, Christ the Lord." It is the joy that comes through faith in the Savior.
There's a third element in this flow. From God, through Christ this joy...God is the source, Christ is the mediator, and the Holy Spirit is the energizer of that joy. Romans 14, chapter 14 and verse 17, a wonderful verse and it's a contrast, "For the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking." The Kingdom of God is not satisfaction from the physical. "But righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." From God as source, through Christ as mediator, by the Holy Spirit as energizer. That is why Galatians 5:22 says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love...what's the second one?...joy...joy." God is the source, Christ is the mediator, that joy is only available through Christ. It comes into our lives through Christ. My joy is given to you so your joy is complete. It is an unlimited, undiminished, full joy. It is as if God fills a well with joy out of which you can draw your whole life and never diminish the source.

But the drawing of that joy is dependent upon the Holy Spirit. That is to say, walking in the Spirit, obeying the Spirit, being filled with the Spirit. That's what delivers that joy. But there's a fourth element in this. It is also a product of receiving the Scripture...of receiving the Scripture. First John 1:4, "These things we write unto you that your joy may be full." It is related to the Scripture. It is from God through Christ by the Holy Spirit as we understand the Scripture.

And then one other element. It is enhanced and enriched through trials. James 1:2, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials." This joy comes from God, mediated by Christ, energized by the Holy Spirit as we receive the Word in the midst of trials. This is not natural joy. This is supernatural joy. This is what Peter calls rejoicing with joy inexpressible and full of glory. This is an inexpressible joy that has a divine glory to it. No circumstance affects it. No event affects it. No acquisition affects it and no loss affects it. No gain affects it, no deprivation affects it. The kind of joy we're talking about is not related to your position in life or your possessions in life.

Let me tell you what it is. Christian joy is an experience that springs from the deep-down confidence in the Christian that Christ is sufficient and God is in perfect control of everything, bringing it all to our good in time and eternity.

It's that joy that's unassailable because it's below the surface, unaffected by the winds and the waves of experience on a human level. It's the joy that comes out of that eternal, unchanging, unalterable, rich relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit as we receive the Scripture in the midst of trials.

Now let me expand on this a little bit, just enrich it for you. The command then is to rejoice always. And this joy is yours. God was the source. Christ brought it to you. The Spirit energizes it in you. The Word of God enriches it, along with trials. It's there. It's yours. You can claim it. You've got this deep well. But as you think practically about the motivation to obey the command, you can...you've got to get beyond the facts. And so, let's go back over what we said from a little bit different angle.

As I think about why...and I just jotted these things down because they're personal to me, but I think they're universal for Christians...what makes me obey this command to rejoice always? What is it that motivates me to do that? And here's the way that has to go. You go back to where you started. I am motivated to rejoice always as an immediate response to the character of God...to the character of God. What do I mean by that? Well it's like Nehemiah 8:10 says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." What strengthens me in the midst of difficulty and trial is the joy I find in the rock of my God. It is my theology proper, to be technical. It is my knowledge of who God is as Creator and Sustainer of the universe, as sovereign over everything, as the lover of my soul, the Redeemer of my life, as the gracious God, as the wise God. It is my understanding of the character and nature of God that anchors my joy. God is too wise to ever make a mistake. God is too loving to be unkind to His children. God is too gracious not to overlook my sin. God is too merciful to allow me to be devastated. God is my protector. God is more powerful than Satan. God is more powerful than demons. God overrules all circumstances. And I belong to that God. He's my God. Scripture is filled with these confidences. You can read them for yourself through the Psalms and through the prophets and elsewhere. My joy is, first of all, anchored in my God.

There are many people who are Christians who struggle with joy because they don't understand God the way He's revealed in Scripture. That's tragic. We'll talk about that in a few minutes. So what motivates me to be joyful in everything is my understanding of God and His sovereign love and His infinite wisdom and grace.

Secondly, I am motivated to rejoice always in appreciation for the work of Jesus Christ...in appreciation for the work of Jesus Christ. Paul in Philippians 3 expresses this and it ought to be all of our testimonies, "We are the true circumcision who worship in the Spirit of God and rejoice in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh." That's a definition of...that's one of my favorite definitions of a Christian. What's a Christian? Somebody who worships in the Spirit of God, rejoices in Christ Jesus and puts no confidence in the flesh. It doesn't matter to me what happens to the flesh. It doesn't matter to me in the sense of what happens to the earthly thing. What is important to me is what happens on the spiritual level, worshiping God and rejoicing in Jesus Christ. What a tremendous, tremendous reality that is. I have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, Ephesians 1 says. Everything is mine because of His death, resurrection, ascension, intercession, Second Coming and eternal reign. Everything that Christ has done is now doing and will yet do accrues to my personal benefit because I am Christ's and Christ is mine, nothing can overrule that, nothing can change that, nothing can ever separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, nothing. You can be reminded by reading Romans 8:38 and 39, nothing. The work of Christ has purchased for me eternal redemption with all of its blessings and all the riches of heaven are promised to me and are already being dispensed at my...at the point of my need even in this life, and some day in the life to come in greater measure.
I am rejoicing always because of the character of God, because of the wonder of the work of Christ, and thirdly, because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. How can I not rejoice when I know the Spirit of God is leading me to understand the truth, when I know the Spirit of God is an anointing from God that teaches me all things so that I don't need to listen to human teachers because I have an anointing from God that teaches me all things, 1 John 2. When I have the Spirit of Christ who is in me, when the Spirit has gifted me for Christian ministry, when the Spirit is my Comforter and my strengthener and the one who comes alongside to help and aid me, when the Spirit of God is the guarantor of my eternal redemption, the seal of my salvation, I have no fear that my God will fail, I have no fear that my Christ will fail, I have no fear that the Spirit will fail. And my joy is anchored there. And I know the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all work together for my good to accomplish the plan of eternal redemption in me, therefore the gracious work of the triune God is the foundation of my unceasing joy.

Now we move from that perhaps some particulars that rise out of that. I rejoice always as an act of reasonable response to spiritual blessings continually given. You start with who God is, who Christ is, who the Spirit is, then you move to what they do on our behalf. Being blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, knowing that nothing is held back. As Peter put it, you have all things pertaining to life and godliness. If you have all that you could possibly need and there isn't anything more that you need and it's all at your disposal all the time, as Paul tells the Ephesians that God gives us everything we need out of the abundance of His riches, there's only one reasonable response to that and that is joy, deep down joy.
There's a wonderful testimony to the sufficiency of God toward His people in the brief twelfth chapter of Isaiah. And I just want to read that to you because I think it's so helpful. "Then you will say on that

day, 'I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord...why?...for although Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away and Thou dost comfort me.' Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord God is my strength and song and He has become my salvation, therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation."

In other words, salvation is like a well of blessing and once you have salvation you go back to the well and everything you ever need can be drawn out of that well. "In that day you will say, 'Give thanks to the Lord, call on His name. Make known His deeds among the peoples. Make them remember that His name is exalted. Praise the Lord in song for He has done excellent things. Let this be known throughout the earth. Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.'" You have a God who is your Savior and He has provided for you in the well of salvation everything you ever need to draw on. Blessed with all spiritual blessings.

And then next, I rejoice always as an act of reasonable response to divine providence...to divine providence. Providence is a wonderful doctrine. The doctrine of providence simply means that God takes all the events, all the actions of all the people in the world all the time, moving with a measure of self-determination and freedom and weaves them together to accomplish perfectly His sovereign and perfect plan. That to me is mind-boggling. My life gets hopelessly complicated with just a few contingencies, doesn't yours? You're struggling because you've got to pick up three kids in three locations, get the groceries, make dinner for your husband and you're overwhelmed. And God has the almost infinite number of independent contingencies which He perfectly orchestrates to accomplish exactly what He intended from before time began. It's absolutely inconceivable to the human mind. That is to say, I don't have to control everything in my life, I don't have to manipulate everything in my life. I can let life bring what it brings and move through life knowing that whatever happens God providentially orders it to work together for good to those that love Him and are called according to His purpose, Romans 8. It's just a staggering reality. It's a lot easier from a human perspective if God just did a miracle, if He just invaded all these contingencies and says, "I'm moving these aside, I'm going to make the axe head float, I'm going to make the sea part, I'm going to raise the dead, I'm going to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, I'm going to walk on water, that's miraculous. That is understandable to me. I can understand that, I can manage that information better than I can manage the information of providence. It's just too staggering. But because God is a God of absolute sovereign providence, I rejoice because nothing is outside His plan.

I also rejoice always as an act of reasonable response to answered prayer. John 16:24, "Ask and you shall receive that your joy may be full." I rejoice that God answers prayer. That in itself is enough to keep the joy flowing. I rejoice as an act of reasonable response to the truth of Scripture. In 1 John 1:4, "These things are written that your joy may be full." Jeremiah 15:16, "Thy words were found and I did eat them, Thy Word was the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Psalm 119 closes in toward the end of that lengthy Psalm in verse, I think it's 162, "I rejoice at Thy Word as one who finds great spoil." And this was the attitude of the psalmist, there are several more like that in that Psalm, but I find in the Word cause for joy...incessant, unending joy. And when the Word of Christ dwells in me richly, Colossians 3:16, I wind up speaking in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody and

rejoicing in my heart because of the truth.
What else can I do as a Christian when I know my God, when I know my Christ, when I know my Holy Spirit and I understand all the spiritual blessings, all of the workings of divine providence, and all of answered prayer and everything in the Word of God is working together in my life to produce the purposes of God for my eternal blessing, what can I do but rejoice? I even think, and here's another one, joy is a reasonable response to Christian fellowship. I don't mind being around unconverted people, but I prefer you, I prefer to be with believers because there is a level of joy that I don't experience with non-believers. First Thessalonians chapter 3, Paul says this is what he experienced. Verse 9, "What thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God because of you?" You bring me so much joy, he says. I can't even count it, I can't even sum up enough thanks for it. The wonderful privilege and pleasure, the overwhelming joy that comes from Christian fellowship. Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:4 he wanted to come and see Timothy so he could be filled with joy. He found such consummate joy in the experience of Christian fellowship. Paul writes to Philemon, verse 7, "I've come to have much joy in your love...much joy in your love." No matter how you look at the Christian life, you look at all the blessings as they're poured out to us, divine providence orchestrating everything, you look at answered prayer, you look at the Scripture, you look at Christian fellowship, and then you could even include the promise of future glory...the promise that is yet to be unfolded for us in the glory which is to come. That certainly is cause for joy. So there are plenty of motivations, aren't there?
Let me close with just some hindrances. If you're not rejoicing, there are maybe some reasons. One, you're not a Christian, you just think you are. You're going through a trial, you're cursing God, you're mad at God. Or you just generally don't have any joy. Some of you are living with a spouse like that, or you're living with a child like that, or some of you young people are living with a parent like that who maybe claims to be a Christian but you just don't see any joy. Pretty good evidence that that person is not a Christian because this is a gift from God through Christ planted in the heart. There's a well of joy in the believer. If you don't see it, start at that point questioning whether that person is really saved. There may have been momentary joy in the past, you know, like the seed that went into the rocky soil and it was received with joy and sprung up for a while and as soon as trouble came, remember? As soon as trouble came and tested that faith, it perished because it wasn't the real thing. That's why trials are so helpful because when you pass the test you know your faith is the real thing.
I think ignorance can steal your joy. See, ignorance can devastate joy. I mean, for example, if I believed in this modern openness theology that says that God is not sovereign, God doesn't know the future, doesn't...God doesn't determine the future because He doesn't know it. God is just up there in heaven watching things happen like a film or a movie He's never seen. And as it moves along He watches and says, "Wow, oh, never expected...that's a surprise. Wow, that was a tricky ending on that deal." And God doesn't know any more about it than you do watching a film you've never seen or reading a book you've never read. If I believed that that was true of God, I wouldn't have any joy. If I believed God had to react to the millions and millions of actions and events that go on in the world and try to sort out some way to make sense out of it all, I would have plenty of reason to fear and my

joy would be gone.
Some families who came to our church from another church expressed to me that what brought them to this church out of a charismatic background was one message that I preached when they came and visited. I preached a message on the sovereignty of God and they said it was absolutely transforming. Some people might think that the message on the sovereignty of God is a little thick, a little technical, a little theological. The truth of the matter is, they expressed to me with real zeal and passion, we lived our whole lives under the sovereignty of Satan. Our whole theological experience in our church was that Satan wants to kill you, Satan wants to make your baby sick, Satan wants to break your marriage up, Satan wants to get in your house and put his demons in your bedrooms. You've got to plead the blood and you've got to get Satan out of this and that. Satan wants to steal your job. He wants to give you cancer. And here they were always under the sovereignty of Satan and busy, busy, busy, busy talking to the demons and talking to the devil to try to pronounce formulas on them to get them out of their lives. And it created palpitations of the heart, panic attacks, etc. Who wants to live like that?
Listen, Satan is not sovereign. Satan is a servant of God who can't move in one direction, one spiritual millimeter unless God allows it. And he's already been crushed under your feet, Romans says, and greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world, meaning Satan. You have nothing to fear from him at all because God is sovereign. If you have an aberrant theology, no wonder you don't have any joy, if you believe Satan is running your life. Bad theology steals joy. If you believe you can lose your salvation, that's a bummer. That will make you unhappy.
False expectations will steal your joy. The idea somehow that...Wait a minute, I came to Jesus and, you know, isn't Jesus the one that always helps you win the championship? Isn't Jesus the one to help you throw the touchdown pass, or make the basket at the buzzer? Isn't Jesus the one that, you know, made your company really big and you really rich? I came to Jesus and I lost my job and I got cut from the team. What happened? Isn't Jesus supposed to make life happy? Am I not supposed to have healing at my disposal? Isn't He suppose to answer all my prayers and shouldn't my life be sort of filled with a healthy dose of miracles? There was a book a few years ago, called A Miracle a Day Keeps the Devil Away. Shouldn't I expect that?
I remember one person who was raised in that theology. He came to our church and I said, "Why did you leave and come?" He said, "Because they wouldn't let me be poor or sick." False expectations, that's a deadly setup. I don't know what you expect the Lord to deliver you, but I'll tell you what He promised. John 16:33, "In this world you'll have trouble, I promise you that. But I have overcome the world." So it's not fatal, it's just part of your perfection, "Count it all joy because it's perfecting your faith." It's proving the reality of your faith, strengthening it to enduring faith.
Forgetfulness will steal your joy. We'll put a lid on the well so you can't draw the joy. What do you mean by forgetfulness? Psalm 103:2, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits." You know, it's really good to just remember and remember and remember and remember the history of God's goodness throughout redemptive history as well as throughout your life because it helps you draw the well of joy.

Self-absorption will steal your joy. We start worrying about all the little things in your life that aren't the way you want them. Sort of narcissistic navel, sort of self-centeredness, self-analysis, analytical baggage, getting all caught up in trying to interpret every little thing in your life. That will steal it.
And there's one other thing and it's a big one, feelings...feelings. I just don't feel joyful. Well, what you've just admitted is you don't have the mental discipline to control your emotions. Sometimes I'm sure people think that I'm not very emotional. I'm very emotional. Well, you know, you know I'm emotional when I preach, but sometimes people think maybe I'm not emotional on the compassionate side or whatever. I feel things very deeply I think the way everybody, anybody does. I feel emotional joys and emotional sorrows, I feel highs and lows like everybody does. I understand disappointment and grief as well as exhilarating happiness and experiencing not only in my own personal life and the life of my family, but in the lives of the people who are part of my life, your lives as well. But as you grow in the Lord your life is not controlled by those feelings. Those feelings are controlled by the truth so that the emotions serve your understanding. It's...it's not acceptable to say to God, "I'm sorry, God, I would like to rejoice, but I can't control my feelings." That's a problem, that's a spiritual problem because it says...One, you don't know enough about your God to rejoice in spite of the circumstance; or there's some sin in your life that's stealing that joy; or you don't trust God to be who He reveals Himself to be. I think what might appear as a lack of emotion or compassion is really a confident joy.
I was reading a book this week about the death of children. It was talking about a great theologian who lost a son in death. In fact, he lost the third of five, two dying within the same week and a third son dying later. And the biographer said that he had never seen such an attitude as he saw in this man at the funeral of his third child. There...he said, I can't remember exact words, I should have brought it to read, but he said something like this, "He had never seen such a sense of the depth of loss without tears." And what he was saying was that the man had so totally committed that little one to God that it was that confidence that took away the sort of dominant abandonment feeling. Now that's not necessarily virtuous, you could call it a hard heart except for the fact that this man went on to explain in his own words in a beautiful section of his own writing what it was like to lose that third son. His feeling was the servant of his trust in God. You want to be...you don't want to be ruled by your emotions. You want to express them, they're wonderful gifts from God. But feelings as a control device will steal your joy.
Summing up. The ground of our rejoicing is the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It is the commitment of the triune God to us in promises that govern the past, the present and the future. The ground of our rejoicing is that everything we need in life is available to us and provided for us and that God controls everything to His glory and our good. And so, when we're commanded to rejoice always, that's a reasonable command. When we're told again to rejoice in the Lord always and again I will say rejoice, when it's reiterated, we bow the knee again and say, "That's exactly right," and we have the resource to do that. And the key, of course, is to look away from the changing circumstance to the unchangeable God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the unchangeable benefits and blessings of our salvation and the unchangeable promise of eternal heaven so that the joyful Christian thinks more of his Lord than his personal difficulties, more of his spiritual riches in Christ

than his poverty on earth, and more of his glorious fulfillment in heaven than his present pain. Therein lies our joy.

Father, we are aware again of Your Word speaking so penetratingly to our hearts. Perhaps we didn't know all of this before we came, but now we're aware of it. We're commanded to this joy because not to have this joy would be to disdain all the reason You've given for it, would be to diminish Your generosity, that would be unconscionable apart from what we might have or not have in this world which doesn't matter. We lack nothing in the spiritual realm, What generosity. What magnanimity, what lavish goodness is poured out on us. Forgive us for being joyless and fill us with this joy. May we take all the hindering lids off the well and draw from it incessantly that even in the midst of the woes of this life our joy would shine in tribute to the greatness of our God, the faithfulness of our Redeemer and the comfort of the blessed Holy Spirit.Amen.

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