

This article serves as a supplement to the sermons *The Joy That Is Complete*, Parts One and Two. There is a deep burden in my heart as a pastor for believers to experience the joy that comes from knowing and walking with Jesus Christ as the all-sufficient, all-satisfying, and all-sovereign Savior and Lord. Psalm 16:11 reads, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore (English Standard Version). There is a fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore in the presence of God. God is very much concerned for your happiness and joy, yet He does not want you to be deceived into thinking it comes from an earthly kingdom. Jesus would say it this way, “I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). So, believing in Jesus for salvation is embracing Him in such a way as to have my soul’s thirst and hunger satisfied by Him. He is the bread of life! To the hearers in John 6, the connection would have been made to God providing bread from heaven in the Old Testament as they journeyed through the wilderness. Jesus puts himself as that bread from heaven! He, himself, is the bread of heaven that fulfills all happiness and joy in the soul in such a way that they will never thirst or hunger again. This means that the sinner who embraces Jesus will find a perfect Savior and Lord who fulfills the longing in their soul in such a way that the sinner will no longer desire to return to the world for gratification, because Jesus has fulfilled it for them.

Nehemiah 8:10 reads, “For the joy of the Lord is my strength.” The continuing casting of oneself on the Lord in total dependence will serve as ongoing strength for the believer. Joy in the Lord is the believer’s strength. The believer fights for strength by fighting for joy in the Lord. John the Baptist said the same thing in John 3. John 3:29-30 reads, “The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.” John the Baptist’s joy came as Jesus increased in His life. John’s joy increased as he did not focus on the successes of others, even amid his followers trying to make him jealous because many left him and followed Christ. John’s joy increased even in his ministerial decline because this was God’s plan all along (see John 3:28). John the Baptist was the forerunner. He was to prepare the way. We tried to unpack this in part 1.

Next, his joy increased as he sought to make Christ known in his realm of influence. John knew his calling was to be a forerunner to the coming of Christ. It brought John deep and complete joy to see the name of Christ increase in his realm of influence. That is why John existed. His calling was to prepare the way for the coming Messiah. The Messiah is here, and it completes John's joy to see the bridegroom gather the bride. Making the name of Christ known in our realm of influence will always be a joy to a true born-again believer.

Next, John's joy was complete as he embraced Jesus as the supreme authority. Jesus is above all (John 3:31). He is above all because He came from above (John 3:31). This phrase "came from above" is a reference to John 3:3, where Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again. The phrase "born again" literally means "born from above." The sinner can only be born from above by embracing by faith the one who came from above, Jesus Christ. He has authority given to Him by the Father. We examined the book of John closely to understand what Jesus has authority over in part II of The Joy That Is Complete. It brings me great peace to know that Jesus has authority over all. Those who receive the testimony concerning Jesus set their seal to this, that God is true (John 3:33). When I put my seal on something, I attest to it as genuine. When the believer repents of sin and embraces Jesus as Lord and Savior, they discover that God is a gracious, forgiving, and all-satisfying Lord and Savior.

Finally, John's joy is complete as he embraces Jesus as the all-satisfying Savior of the soul. John 3:36 reads, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." This eternal life is not a life into eternal dos and don'ts. It is not a life of spiritual boredom. This is a life of fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11). This does not mean that coming to Christ guarantees a life free from sickness, gaining financial prosperity, or no persecution; however, what this means is Christ so fulfills the hunger of the soul that the external circumstances of the believer cannot touch the internal well-being of the believer. The joy of the Lord is his strength, not the pleasure that comes from circumstances. This means the believer must fight for joy in Christ, resulting in gaining strength from Christ.

How does the believer fight for Joy? How does the believer fight against sin? John the Baptist said his joy was complete when Jesus increased, and He decreased. What does that look like practically in the believer's everyday fight? Jesus said, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:10-11). Jesus obeyed His Father because He loved Him more than anything or anyone. Obedience will always follow affections. You will obey what you love most. You will always be inclined to obey your deepest affections and desires. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Therefore, the believer fights sin by replacing it with a greater desire or affection.

Let me illustrate this from a negative perspective. David sinned against God by committing adultery with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11. God sends a man named Nathan to call David to repentance. David writes a Psalm of repentance in Psalm 51. He writes, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit." David's confession of sin was ultimately a confession of losing the joy of his salvation, resulting in losing his strength and falling into adultery. The root cause of his sin was that he lost the joy of his salvation. The joy of your salvation is your strength to fight sin. The believer fights sin by drowning out that "fake pleasure" with an authentic "pleasure" that comes from the presence of the Lord. There is no substitute for time spent with Jesus.

How does the believer cultivate an affection for Christ that results in an unshakeable obedience to Christ? In the words of John the Baptist, Jesus must increase, and we must decrease. This starts in our mind and heart. We must fight for unhurried, unadulterated, authentic, and intimate time with Jesus daily. Some practical tips include finding a time, place, and a plan, as well as keeping a journal. Before we unpack these, I want to make it clear that these are not commandments but tips to help you fight. They may look different in your life. First, you must select a time and stick to it! Guard it with everything in you! This will be one of your most significant battles. I suggest this time be at the beginning of your day. For some, that is in the morning. For others, that may be in the evening. Doing this at the beginning of your day helps you prepare for the day ahead. Next, you must select a place and make it your designated

spot to meet with God, and nothing else. If you do not, there will be room for distractions, and they will appear in many forms. Third, select a plan. It can be done by studying a book of the Bible or using a reading plan. There will be some suggestions in next month's newsletter. Choosing a plan ahead of time will save you from having to guess where to go in the mornings. Another excellent bible reading plan is called *The Bible Recap* with Tara Leigh Cobble (It is one of my favorites). Finally, start a journal.

I use David Platt's template for journaling called MAPS: Mediate, Apply, Pray, Share. In the meditative section, I aim to journal about what that passage teaches me about God. In the application section, I strive to reflect on myself in light of what I have learned about God. In the prayer section, I use the acronym PRAY to help guide me. I spend time praising him for who he is in light of what I just learned. I spend time repenting of the sin that has been revealed to me in light of what I just learned. I spend time asking for His will to be done in my life based on what I just read. Finally, I spend time yielding myself to Him to be used for His glory.

The final section of my journal is Share. This is a section where I spend time praying for Sola as I seek to share with them what God has shared with me. I also spend time in this section praying for God to grant me the opportunity to share His gospel and the Word I have just learned with someone throughout my day.

The believer's protection against sin is to be so in love with Christ that the world does not appeal to them anymore; however, when the believer loses the joy of his salvation, he is now in an unguarded moment. When David lost the joy of his salvation, he found himself deceived into thinking that committing adultery with Bathsheba would be life-fulfilling. That is some serious deception, yet deception that we are all capable of when we lose the joy of our salvation. You must fight for joy! "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" Psalm 16:11.