



PURSUING HAPPINESS: 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

PURSUING JOY.

But now you're in college-surrounded by a world that rejects that message. It casts it off as silly, childish, fairy-tail stuff not meant for the real world. Well... most of the message. They can't reject the part about searching for life-everyone is looking for life. Ultimate happiness. This world, this campus, your major, your professors are looking for happiness and are following the promise of finding real happiness just around the corner.

And where do we look to find happiness? How does this world define happiness?

- Life - as in more than breathing; exhilaration; fulfillment
- Joy - that elated feeling when things go right for you! First date butterflies.
- Pleasure - able to swim in fun; always something exciting to see and do and experience

I love history. I have for as long as I can remember. As much as I try to deny that I was a nerd as a child, I was. I wasn't nerdy about other things that kids my age geeked out over. When I was growing up, kids my age loved Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, or Harry Potter. Kids my age loved playing Call of Duty and Halo. I wasn't interested in those things. I was nerdy about two things: sports and history.

One thing that has always fascinated me about history is that life for the whole world can be impacted, changed forever in one single moment that occurs on one singular day. Even right now as we think back over our corporate and personal histories, there are days that have significantly shifted our world and your life. There've been days where wars have been started, days where great inventions were discovered or created, days when wars have ceased, birthdays, and even death days that impacted the world. Yes, history is filled with days of hysteria, sadness, hope, peace, and **days of joy**.

Think back to some of the most joyful days in your life-the day you got your first car, your first paycheck, your first big promotion, the day all your kids finally moved out (looking at you mom and dad). For me, some of the most joy-filled days in my life are: my wedding day(!), the day my daughter was born, the day my son was born... and the night 9 months prior to that, because it was on that day that the Cubs won their first world series in 108 years (there may or may not have been a correlation to those events)!

That's right, on November 2, 2016, the Chicago Cubs won the World Series. You have no idea how amazing that felt! I've been a Cubs fan my whole life, and I've seen us lose. A lot. But it finally happened. Songs were written about it. Videos from that night in Chicago are amazing because you can see an entire city rejoicing. 5 million people showed up to the victory parade - that's 2x the population of Chicago, and the 7th largest gathering of people in human history! And I was overjoyed. I was the guy that wrote Facebook tribute posts to people I'd never met before and cried myself to sleep that night from pure joy. I could have sworn that my life was complete, that I'd never want anything again. **But you know what?** The enjoyment from that World Series has faded over time. It was amazing, but it didn't truly satisfy. Now, 3 years and 1 month removed from it, I go full days without even thinking about it. Ultimately, that victory didn't provide lasting joy or satisfaction. It's frustrating.

And that's the problem with all the joy-filled days that we discussed earlier, right? The joy from all of it-the wedding days, graduation days, championship celebrations-at some point, it always fades. It doesn't fulfill. And it's so frustrating. Did you know there's an entire book of the Bible that talks about this issue? It's an entire book chronicling the author's (who I think is King Solomon in his old age) attempt to find real joy-lasting satisfaction-happiness in life. The term Solomon uses to talk about this life is "**under the sun**." It means life as it presents itself. Life as you see it. Life apart from God. And what he's looking for is "**gain**," which is profit, meaning, satisfaction, lasting joy.

And why listen to him? Because he has unparalleled resources at his disposal. He was a pretty important guy. The first two chapters of Ecclesiastes chronicle what's known as his "Grand Experiment," where he

spares no resource in his quest to find joy under the sun. If there's an avenue you'd like to try to see if you can find joy, Solomon tried it. His resumé reads like this:

- Wealthiest person in the world.
- Most powerful person in the world.
- Wisest person in the world.
- Sexiest man in the world.

To put it into perspective... Some of you like to party, and sometimes splurge on a case of Bud Light. Solomon owned entire vineyards. Some of you dream of starting a successful business. Solomon ran a little start-up called the nation of Israel that was kind of unparalleled at the time. Some of you think you're pretty smart. Solomon was given unmatched wisdom directly from God, and if you don't buy into that, you can at least buy into the innumerable scholars (Christian and non-Christian) who have dedicated their lives to studying his words.

Do you know what he found through his experiment? He found out that...

Ecclesiastes 1:8 - "All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing."

Ecclesiastes 2:9-11 - "So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem... whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun."

Ultimately, his quest to find lasting joy led him to frustration...

Ecclesiastes 2:17 - "So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind."

Isn't that what happens to us too? We are always looking, searching for lasting joy, and our inability to find it ultimately leads us to frustration. Life under the sun is frustrating-always overpromising and underdelivering. It's that feeling of emptiness in the morning even though you had the time of your life yesterday.

BUT for Christians, there is hope, because this passage, Psalm 16:11 tells us that there is a type of joy that God offers to us that is totally fulfilling! The type of joy that comes from beyond the sun and is given to people who've never known it before.

JOY IN HIS PRESENCE.

Fullness of joy. What does this mean? Well, literally it means that there is no end to the joy. A joy that isn't lacking. But let's take the passage as a whole. Last week, we read that there is a path that God has made known to us that leads to life. A path that leads directly into the presence of God. Taking these passages together, we recognize that the Bible tells us that the path of life leads us to the source of unending joy. The presence of God in our lives is the source of fullness of joy.

How does this play out in our daily lives, though?

According to the Bible, full and complete joy is only truly realized when the sin, trouble, and pain in this life are gone. Ultimately, Christians believe, that those who have trusted in Jesus will experience this type of life when we get to heaven and experience a physical life in the presence of God forever. But the Bible is also clear that we experience the presence of God here and now, and this leads to full joy today. So how does this work?

Think back to that passage: in your presence there is fullness of joy. The first 500 times I read it, I thought of the blessing of joy that I get when I'm in his presence, but let's turn the focus from us for a moment and think about it from the perspective of the giver of joy. The word presence here could be translated face. In your face is fullness of joy. There's a joy that we receive because God delights in us. He's pleased to love us. He's pleased to be with us and walk us through times of trouble, pain, and sin struggles. He's making us more like him so that we can experience fullness of joy. And there's a deep soul satisfaction that we can experience when we are with a God who is happy to walk with us.

I think about it in terms of my relationship with my son, Walker. The other day we were watching Aladdin.

Great movie. He's 3, and there's some scary parts in the movie. At one point, I looked at him and he was staring up at the screen with a nervous kind of look on his face. So I just said to him, "Do you want to come sit with me?" Immediately, he hopped in my lap, started sucking his thumb, and just kind of sank into me. He could breathe easy again because he knew that I was with him, I am for him, and I'm going to make sure he is okay. There was joy that he could experience because I was present with him. And this applies to us today with God.

1. Joy as God comforts us through the pain and sorrow of this life.

All of us have experienced the harmful effects of sin in our lives. We've all been in the position that my son was in when he was watching Aladdin-scared and looking for someone to help him. For us, Scripture speaks of God being the type of Father who cares and comforts his children through the pain in this life. We don't have to look to other places to fix things, we can climb into his lap and experience joy as we breathe with deep soul satisfaction at his presence.

Psalms 34:18 - "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit."

Psalms 94:18-19 - "When I thought, 'My foot slips,' your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up. When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul."

2. Joy as God prunes us of sin in our life.

Scripture is clear that real joy is experienced when we no longer struggle with sin here. Real joy is experienced when there's no break in relationship between me and God due to sin. And just like a good dad is committed to discipline his son so that he can live rightly, so God lovingly addresses sin in our life and helps us grow in our obedience to him.

John 15:1-2; 10-11 - "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser... every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit... 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."

3. Joy when we finally meet Jesus face to face.

One day, we will no longer have to struggle with sin's effects or our personal struggles. One day, this whole life where God is molding and shaping us will come to an end and we will live in perfect harmony with him. What a good day! It'll be then that we can experience fullness of joy!

Romans 8:28-29 - "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son..."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.

1. Have you experienced joy from Jesus that causes the joy from the things of this world to pale?
2. When/How have you experienced the joy of God's comfort through pain or sorrow in your life?
3. What are some things that you are trusting God to prune in you?
4. Who are some Christian friends that you are hoping will walk with you through college?