

This morning, we're going to just talk a little bit about something that I think we all long for and sometimes struggle with, we hope for, and sometimes it's hard to hang on to.

but it's this idea of how do we live with a sustainable joy.

I don't know anybody that doesn't want to live with joy in their life.

And I also don't know anyone that doesn't struggle with keeping joy going in their life.

And Jesus wants us to an experience of full joy, a complete, an unrestrained joy.

And so many Christians today live without joy.

So many people in the world live without joy.

And if anyone should be able to live with a sustainable joy and demonstrate this kind of life, it should be us as followers of Jesus.

We have something that no one else has.

And he brings joy into our lives.

Nehemiah, verse 8.

or chapter 8, verse 10 says, for the joy of the Lord is my strength.

But how many of us would say that joy comes from the Lord, the kind of joy that comes from the Lord is the backbone of our lives.

It's what holds us together and holds us upright every day of our lives.

It's this joy that is walking with us through the days of our life.

Galatians 5, 22, it says that the joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

And we've all been around people who can fake joy.

Sometimes we fake joy.

And you can tell when it's that kind of plastic joy, can't we?

And no one wants to live in that kind of an experience.

Joy is the surest sign of the presence of God, is what Pierre Chardin had said.

No one should have more joy in their lives than us as followers of Jesus.

We have every reason to live in joy and to express a joy that can actually change the world.

We have no joy in our lives and we've missed the message of God.

Jesus came to bring joy into our lives and He doesn't want us to miss living with joy.

The passage we're going to look at this morning comes from John 15.

I don't know about you, but I'm getting a really weird ring up here.

But this is John 15, starting at verse 9 through verse 12.

It says, As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Abide in my love.

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 complete.

My command is this.

Love each other as I have loved you.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your word and the hope that it brings into our lives, the truth that it is,

and the ways that it can change our thinking, change our hearts, change the way we see the world and the way we see ourselves.

Father, Your Word helps us to see You more clearly.

And in that, discover the us that You are causing us to become, the ways that You want to change us, that we may live as Your children in today's world.

So Father,

I ask that You would be with us by Your Holy Spirit in these few minutes, guide this time, draw out from Your Word what You would want us to hear and to respond to You with.

And so, Father, we pray that everything that I would say here would be exactly what You once said in a way that You would want it said so that we can hear Your voice and respond to You.

And so, Father, we commit this time to You.

In the name of your son Jesus, amen.

So here's how this verse kind of comes together.

Joy is at the center and is in the context of love.

It wraps joy up with love.

It says, as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.

Love each other as I have loved you.

And in the middle of that, we find joy.

Love surrounds it.

Joy is not found where love is absent.

If you have a loveless family or a loveless marriage or church, you will not be experiencing joy in that relationship.

But where love flourishes, joy will be bubbling all over the place.

Joy is like the evidence of love.

Because joy is showing up, we know that we are in a loving place, in a loving relationship, in a loving marriage, friendship, whatever that relationship is, and in the same way, our relationship with God.

It begins to bubble up joy within our hearts and in our minds and in our lives.

We are very interested these days in a quality of life issues.

And Jesus is as well.

Quality of life to Him looks like a life lived in joy that only Christ can bring into your life.

That's how He wants us to walk through every day of our life.

We may not feel good, our bodies may hurt, but we can still have joy in the midst of it because of what Christ is bringing into our lives.

Living in the love that Jesus has for us will fill our hearts with joy.

Peter says it this way in his first letter.

says, Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

Even though you and I don't see the physical Jesus, we know He exists.

because he exists in our hearts, right?

Because he exists in our lives.

And as a result of that, we, according to Peter, can experience this inexpressible, glorious joy, regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in.

Also, in this passage in John, it says obedience is the evidence of love.

He says, now remain in my love.

If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love.

Obedience is the evidence of a couple of things.

One, you're listening to Him.

You can't obey what you don't hear, right?

If you don't know what He said, you can't obey that.

So obedience is the evidence that you've heard Him, that you're listening to Him.

And secondly, that you're trusting Him.

We have to trust Him in order to do what He tells us to do.

To obey His commands means that you have to listen to Him.

The ear of your soul must be postured to Him, and when it is, you find His commands are enveloped by His love for you.

He is a good God who loves you.

And He wants nothing more than His very best for you.

And that is why He gives you His commands, so that you can experience His ways, which will be your best for you, which will be a demonstration of your love for Him.

And as a result, you'll experience what?

Joy.

Joy grows.

from an obedient life that's surrounded by love, living in obedience to God will lead you to this life of joy.

In verse 11 it says, I have told you this so that your joy may, my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.

Obedience and love go hand in hand to lead us through a life filled with joy.

says in John 14, 15, if you love me, you will obey what I've commanded.

Psalms 19, verse 8 says, the precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

Now the precepts here that the psalmist, that David's talking about, it's the mandate.

It's the intentional way of living.

It's the properly appointed way to care for, to manage, to look after.

These are the precepts that we're to walk through our lives with.

And the precepts of the Lord are right.

His ways, His appointed ways are right and true.

I'm intentionally going through my life with a desire to fulfill God's mandate of what is right and good and true.

And when I do this, it brings me into a life that is full of joy.

God's ways are enlightening, it says.

It says they are radiant.

They're giving light to the eyes.

They're enlightening.

And as I do them, they start making more and more sense in my life.

Now, for some people,

The ways of the Lord just don't make sense to them.

You can pick up any number of commands.

Forgive, to love, to care for, to do this or that, and it doesn't make sense to them.

But the Lord's ways always make sense, and as I begin to follow Him, they begin to come in line.

I begin to see how they do make sense, because in a way it's helping me live my life more fully.

If I want to be in a better relationship with my wife or a husband,

And by treating them in godly ways, the ways that God would want me to treat them, it will increase my satisfaction and their satisfaction and God's satisfaction, and I will begin to experience more joy in my marriage or my friendship or the people that I work with in the places that I go.

To obey God requires a choice

on my part, on your part.

Joy is discovered through our choices.

I can't just choose joy and say, Well, I'm going to be a joyful person today.

Yesterday was lousy, but today I'm going to be a joyful person.

You don't flip that switch on and off.

But what we do is when...

I choose to see myself as God sees me and to respond to Him accordingly in my days as I walk through this day.

When I choose to receive God's love for me and I choose to obey Him and trust that His ways are good, I am putting myself in a position that sets me apart from the rest of the world and I begin to live in a joy that floods my soul.

And we live differently from the worst of the world.

People should notice the joy that is in your life.

And they should realize that it is an authentic joy.

It's not this plastic-coated stuff that people try to put on a veneer.

But when we encounter people along our ways in the days of our lives, they see us as people that are full of joy.

that is rich and deep and sustainable.

It's not that I choose to be a joyful life, but I choose God, and I will trust Him, and I will obey Him, and I will love others around me, and I will find joy bubbling in my heart.

Joy is a condition.

It's a quality of the heart.

Joy is expressed by what is going on the inside of our souls, and it flows out through our faces, through our hands, through our words, through the attitudes of our heart, through our actions.

Joy is expressed in many different ways, but real joy is unmistakable.

And it's probably best tested in trials.

That's when you find out how real joy is.

Matthew 5 said it this way in verses 11 and 12.

It says, Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

What did Jesus say?

Rejoice and be glad.

because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecute the prophets who went before you.

Joy is the blessing that God's Spirit brings into your life, even when others slander you, even when others lie about you.

They discredit you.

A Christian heart can still draw from the well of joy and keep their hearts clean and pure in the midst of the situation.

Just like Stephen's heart.

You remember Stephen?

His heart was full of joy while they were pelting him with rocks to kill him.

Now, I've never been in that situation, and I trust that none of us have ever been in that situation.

So everything that we've experienced is probably better than that day for Stephen.

Because I would say that was probably a pretty bad day.

But you see, we can find joy in the midst of even the most difficult trials we find ourselves walking through.

Joy that comes from God's Spirit continues to flow in and through our lives in the midst of financial crises, in the midst of deteriorating health, in the midst of a betrayal of a friend.

We can still find joy in those situations.

2 Corinthians 7.4 says, in all our troubles, my joy knows no bounds.

Is that your testimony?

Is that the kind of joy that you and I are living in?

In all my troubles, my joy knows no bounds.

If joy was dependent upon the circumstances of our life, just being right,

then there would be no strength to joy, and it would be synonymous with the world's view or version of joy, which is called happiness.

Happiness.

We just want everybody to be happy.

Happy is a cheap substitute for joy.

They are not the same.

I can be unhappy,

and still have joy.

But just because I'm unhappy doesn't mean I have joy.

God has a joy for us that is rich and full and present, regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in.

Now, I want to quickly share just a few, what I call joy suckers.

These are the things that we encounter as we walk through our days that will suck joy straight out of you.

And you'll recognize some of these, and maybe one or two of these might be a flag for you.

We'll see.

But the first one is a critical attitude.

It's critical thinking of others or myself.

When I have a critical attitude,

It will suck joy straight out.

It's easy to have a critical attitude in today's world.

Turn on the news, watch it for more than 5 minutes, and the likelihood of having a critical attitude goes up.

Does it not?

So refuse to speak a negative word about yourself or others.

Just don't go there.

When someone speaks something negative about you,

Refuse it.

In your head, in your heart, say, that's not me.

You can't control what others say, do, or go about.

You know that.

We know that.

You can't control what they say.

But you can control what goes inside and what you deal with it, how you deal with what goes inside.

And just refuse it.

Care less about what others say about you and care more about what God says about you because what He says about you is true.

What they say about you has no bearing.

People can often steal your joy through criticism.

When we are loving ourselves more than God, then we leap what they say

determine how we think and feel about ourselves.

When we focus on tearing others down, we really take others down as well as ourselves at the same time.

We say things like this.

Well, I know I'm supposed to love this person, but...

At that point, there's no love and no joy happening anywhere else in that conversation.

I know I probably shouldn't say this about this person, but...

Anybody know that conversation?

We all do, because we've all done it.

We've all been there.

There is a place for positive criticism.

But that place should be soaked, dyed, baked, glued, and so thoroughly saturated in love that when positive criticism is given, they're received in the context of love.

But if you can't give positive criticism and the people know that you're loving them in the midst of it, then don't.

Okay?

Just don't.

because you can't give positive criticism at that point.

Someone else may be able to do that, but it's not you in that moment.

We can be so consumed by what others think of us that it will suck joy just straight out of us.

The second joy sucker is focusing on hardships.

Focusing on hardships.

Life is hard.

Is it not?

Life is hard.

We're all going to experience hard things in life.

We're all going to experience things we don't like, we didn't expect, we don't want, but they come up and just plow us.

It happens to everyone.

When my mother was very sick, and she would let her illness consume her thoughts and her attitudes from time to time, her joy,

in her life was wasted away.

But when she did not let her illness and the hardness that she was walking through in her life become the focus of her life, then joy was free to grow inside of her.

And she began to focus on her

her own relationship with God and not the hardness of what she was walking through in her life, she realized that her circumstances weren't changing and they weren't cheating her out of life.

And that every day that she had, she could experience it in joy regardless of the pain that she was walking through in her life.

Life is hard.

But God is good, she would say.

When we say, this is hard and I'm just not happy about it, well, that joy vacuum cleaner that sucks everything up has just entered into your room.

And it's about to suck what little joy you might have out.

Hebrews 12.2 says, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author,

the perfecter of our faith, now that's a pretty strong title, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame.

He wasn't going to let the hardness of the life that He was living in that moment consume Him, control Him, or determine Him.

But for the joy that was set before him, he could walk through everything he had to walk through.

And he sat down at the right hand of the Father.

Focusing on hardship of an unresolved hurt or pain will only lead to bitterness.

This is why resolving relationships is crucial because it's the first step to restoring joy into your life.

When you've been hurt, forgiveness is the first step towards finding joy again.

Another joy sucker is settling for imitations.

Selling short.

Thinking that satisfying my desire will be the evidence of joy in my life.

Almost anything can be an imitation for a source of joy.

Kids, grandkids, friends, relationships, sex, money, career, travel, whatever it is that you like to do can become a joy sucker if it consumes you, if it becomes the sore, the thing you focus on your life.

Because at some point, every single one of those things will let you down.

And when they let you down, if that's your source of joy, your joy has just been sucked up again.

This is the way it typically works.

I pour my life into them.

They promise to provide me some level of satisfaction.

That satisfaction means I feel good about me in some way, and me feeling good about me is the same as joy.

And I have just settled for an imitation of joy at that point.

We all do it.

We think getting married will satisfy my heart.

We think having kids or grandkids will satisfy our hearts.

We think that getting this job or this career or this promotion will satisfy our heart.

We think that getting our financial portfolio to this point will satisfy our heart.

and it's all an imitation.

It will not satisfy.

C.S.

Lewis said it this way, we are half-hearted creatures fooling around with drink and sex and

ambition when infinite joy is offered to us.

Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by an offer of a holiday at the sea.

We lose sight of what God has in store for us.

And so we settle for what's right in front of us and think that would be the best joy I can come up with.

And then we keep chasing it and chasing it and fixing it and repainting it.

and putting more money into it, because we need it to give us joy.

The last joy sucker I'm going to share with you is disobedience.

We just stop obeying Him.

When you stop obeying Him, your joy will dry up.

Trust that He is good.

He's not trying to control you.

He's not trying to do something bad to you.

He is not trying to be something other than good to you.

Trust that He's good.

He's not trying to change you.

He's trying to transform you into what He had in mind for you from the very beginning.

Sometimes we stop listening to God so that we don't have to obey Him.

If you can't remember the last time you made a difficult choice to obey God rather than yourself, then perhaps you've stopped listening to Him.

I know plenty of Christians who go to church, they read their Bibles, they even pray their lists about all the concerns of their life.

But they've stopped listening to Him in their hearts.

And so they don't know what he's saying to them that he wants them to obey.

And so they just get up from their quiet time, their prayer time, they walk out to their church

service, maybe feeling good about themselves, or they did a good thing today, and they go on about their lives, but they didn't really hear from him.

And they don't really know what He wants for them.

They've forgotten that He is not their servant, but that we are His, here to do His bidding, the things He wants us to do.

And so we leave His presence unchanged in some way.

And they've convinced themselves that they're good enough before God.

But the truth is, He is always working on us to be more and more conformed into the image of His Son so that we might walk through the days of our lives looking, smelling, acting, speaking more like Him and less like us.

The question is, will we listen to Him and will we trust Him enough to do what He tells us to do?

so that we can experience His joy.

When we are consciously determined not to obey Him, we have just entered into the realm of rebellion.

We are listening to and responding to something or someone else, particularly that someone else might be me and what I want other than Jesus.

God wants to bring us back to the original design of who we were made to be so that we were made to do and act more like Him, more like we're in a relationship with Him, more like we're in a trusted relationship with Him that is full of love, it's surrounded by His love in our lives.

This is going back to formula in a sense.

It requires a transformation on our parts, on our thinking, on our ways of understanding people and listening to people and listening to Him.

And in the course of that, we find joy growing within us and beginning to flow out of our lives again.

Some are not sure they really want to be transformed or that they need to be transformed.

We live in the medicated age.

The age of supplements.

Just add this thing to my life and my life will be better.

If I do this yoga, if I take this herb, if I read this book, it will balance my life and everything will be good.

I'll be happy and joy will be restored.

But that's not the true path to joy.

It's a dead end.

and it ends up in the vacuum cleaner of sucked up joy once again.

When we stop responding to the Lord's precepts, should we be surprised when our joy begins to dry up and disappear?

If our joy is not complete, if it's not full, if we're not living a plethora of joy in our lives, could it be that we've stopped obeying Him?

We stopped experiencing his love for us.

So to discover joy again, just real quickly, I'd say realize that God is good and he really does love you.

He really does.

No one loves you more.

He knows you better than you ever would know yourself.

He loves you more than you could ever love yourself or that anyone else could ever love you as well.

And His love for you is rich and real and true, and it will bring joy into your life.

In the midst of your mess, in the middle of your confusion, at the center of your uncertainties, He really does know you and love you.

He makes that love known.

He meets you wherever you're at, every day.

He knows where you've been.

He knows what you've been.

you've done, He knows where you're at, and He will meet you there.

And He will remind you that He sent His Son for you to love you and to restore you and to show you what life with Him would look like.

And He accepts you on the basis of your faith in His Son.

Listen to Him.

Respond to His love.

Wherever you're at, you can respond to Him.

Turn away from whatever is captivating the focus that you've been looking at.

Acknowledge that you need Him and this other stuff is not going to satisfy you the way it would like to make you think it will.

And begin to obey Him.

Trust Him.

It means forgiving others when they're...

and then forgive all that that means.

The joy He intends for us is full.

It's complete.

It's permanent joy.

It cannot be moved.

It cannot be shaken.

If you're not experiencing that kind of joy in your life, perhaps you should ask if I've stopped responding to Him.

If I've stopped listening to Him.

Am I experiencing His love in my life?

If you're not, if you're not experiencing that kind of joy in your life, you can begin today.

You can.

Just realize that God is good and He loves you.

Respond to Him.

Move.

Let Him move your heart and your mind towards Him.

Turn away from what is captivating you and begin to obey Him and experience a joy that is full and complete.