

When in Rome: Secrets to a Joyful Life

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 September 2026

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0:00] Lord, you know how important relationships are. You know how much we need each other. Thank you for the healthy relationships in our lives! and the energy and joy that they bring us.

Give us strength and patience and wisdom in the more challenging relationships in our lives. Help us to be kind and model Jesus' love, even when things are challenging and difficult for us.

Thank you for past relationships that may no longer be a factor in our lives due to death or other circumstances. Thank you for how you have used those people as well to shape who we are today. Help us to be the types of people others will be drawn to for the sake of your kingdom and that they will come to see your love for all people.

Father, help us to love others as ourselves. Help us to see others as you see them. And we pray all these things in Jesus' precious and powerful name.

[1:10] Amen. So welcome here for this Sunday, September 6th. My name is Kent Dixon and it is my joy to be the pastor here. This morning we are continuing in our sermon series, When in Rome, as we make our way through the book of Romans.

And our passage this morning is found in Romans 12, verse 12. So again, as I mentioned last week or the week before, maybe both, that now that we're in Romans 12, it is a very powerful section and a collection of shorter but extremely powerful messages.

So we're taking some time, slowing down a little bit and highlighting some of these. Romans 12, verse 12. The Apostle Paul says, Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Our sermon this morning is titled Secrets to a Joyful Life. And so you're going to get an insight, hopefully some solid takeaways that you can apply to your life.

And we're going to spend a little bit more time, as I said this morning, taking a closer look at this idea together. A joyful life. It's probably a realistic goal that all of us aspire to, isn't it?

[2:31] But as much as that may be a goal for us, we've probably known, all known people who would identify as Christians, but somehow they seem to have started their day off with a vinegar smoothie.

Their demeanor, their perspectives, their perceptions of life seem to be more worst case scenario than anything. And so maybe this was formed over time.

Maybe difficult experiences came to them, disappointments happened in their lives, and that became their reality. But we all have likely known, I hope we know, or have known or know Christians right now who are joyful and generally positive, no matter what life may have thrown at them.

So why can there be such a difference in this? When both types of Christians have the same Jesus in common. The hope that that joy, that relationship can bring to their lives.

Well, here's where the secret comes in. I'm already giving it away right at the beginning, but stick around. So it's thankfully a poorly kept secret.

[3:48] That's what I've come to recognize. And there's one place where we find a key to a joyful, hopeful life in our passage for today. Paul encourages his listeners and us here today to be joyful in hope.

Some translations say rejoicing in hope. Paul talks about being patient in tribulation or difficult times. And perhaps most of all, he encourages us to always be in communication with God through prayer.

So that's really a brief, but powerful message and reminder he gives us in Romans 12, 12. So as I say, let's take a closer look at our passage for this morning and see what else we can recognize. Well, first, a joyful life is based on hope. I think many people have an incomplete understanding of the concept of joy.

Let's start there. And I've suggested this to you in the past where I believe we've gotten a kind of a vanilla understanding of some words or concepts that are actually much bigger.

[5:03] Friends, joy is more than just a feeling. It's more than just, oh, I woke up, I had a decent sleep. I feel okay. That's joy. Because feelings are temporary.

They're subject to our whims and our attitudes towards something at any given moment. You might feel like having pizza for lunch, or maybe I just planted that idea in your head now.

Or you might be feeling sad or feeling frustrated about something. But simply feeling joy or feeling joyful doesn't really do it justice.

I think many people have the wrong concept related to joy. Because true joy is about far more than our mood or our temperament.

And it must be about more than our current circumstances. But how can we experience joy, the kind of joy that I'm talking about, in this seemingly free and all-encompassing way, when Paul is essentially, let's be honest, directing us to be joyful, right?

[6:16] He's not saying, in Romans 12, 12, yeah, if you get around to it, feel decent about things. He is essentially giving us a directive to be joyful people.

Paul says it again in 1 Thessalonians 5, 16. He says two words, be joyful. Active language, right? And again in Philippians 4, verse 4, with emphasis this time.

Paul says, rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. What does he say? Rejoice. That was very quiet. Quiet rejoicing.

Paul's suggesting to us that being joyful is, in fact, a command. It's a duty for us. A duty for followers of Christ. And it doesn't just apply to good times, but to harder times as well.

1 Peter 4, 13 says, rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

[7:26] Is that a challenging concept for you? True joy is about being able to rise above the circumstances of life. Christians who came before us, many who are alive today, have literally suffered for their faith.

But they're still called to see joy in their circumstances as we are. That should give us all great pause, I think, when we find it challenging to be joyful in our Christian walk, despite having a generally far more pleasant set of circumstances for us than so many of our brothers and sisters around the world.

Hope is the key to joy. So we've already considered that our directive to be joyful should not be based on feelings, not be based on moods.

Well, I feel like being joyful. I don't feel like, I'm not feeling it today. Folks, it's grounded in something far more reliable and concrete and consistent than that.

Notice our text says that we are to be joyful or rejoicing in hope. So there's a connection there. It should be easy for us to see how hope is the source of joy in our lives.

[8:53] Let me give you some examples. A student should be able to experience some hope as they return to their studies. You can hear any scoffs there from the front row.

They've completed another level. They'll be learning new things. They'll have breaks to look forward during the year. Maybe they don't have to pay rent.

But at least hopefully they can think that way. They can find joy in that. As Christians, we have the hope and reassurance that this world is not all there is.

That's an amen. I gotta get you guys back into that. That God will keep his promises in meeting our needs. His promises to protect us.

Or his promises to give us opportunities to share his love with others. And ultimately, that Christ will return someday.

[10:01] Do all of those things fill your life with hope. To be joyful in life, we simply must have hope. A hopeless life is probably not a joyful one.

And the stark reality is that if Christians aren't joyful, it's because they're not probably full of hope. And that's usually due to the fact that their minds are preoccupied with the things of this life. And I mean, remember, it's not all that long since I was just a person in the pew like everyone else.

I remember the days of thinking, yeah, I know God's in control. Yeah, I know God will show up.

Yeah, I know he'll provide. But the mortgages do. And I have to figure it out.

Hard to find joy in those moments. Another thought is that sometimes people are just religious enough to make themselves miserable.

[11:09] Seeing puzzled looks, that's good. And those miserable people who have just enough religion probably make others miserable as well.

If people spend more time contemplating the hope that we have as Christians, joy should naturally and automatically follow.

How can it not? We all likely know that real hope is based on faith. Faith only comes from God's word and in understanding his promises to us.

But if people don't read God's word, I can say this for myself, maybe you can say it for yourself as well, throughout my life, I've recognized that when I'm not in the word, when I'm not reading my Bible, when I'm not consuming the truth of God, a cascade tends to happen.

When you're not reading God's word, your faith tends to become weaker. Then your hope becomes shallow and fickle.

[12:17] Then your joy then becomes more and more fleeting and ultimately based on feelings and circumstances alone. Do you see that slippery slope that comes?

So if we let God's word produce the faith necessary for strong hope, then we can also have the joy that will help us no matter what our circumstances might be.

So I think this leads us back to the text. I want to make another observation here. A life of joyful hope will be patient in tribulations.

So let's define a few terms here. Patient. Who's patient? Hurry up. I need an answer. I'm not that patient. Are you patient?

Does it depend on the circumstances and situation? Are you patient with others but not yourself? Or the other way around?

[13:23] Patient means something more than simply enduring or making it through. It implies maintaining activity, commitment, and focus despite our current circumstances.

I've shared this before. Boy, oh boy, when I am standing in a line waiting for something, I have to, Michelle tends to sing the words to jingle bells.

That's how she grounds herself. I count. Not like one to ten and I'm going to blow my top, but I have to count. So my ADHD wants an answer, wants response, whatever, and so I need to try and ground myself.

But I also need to come to recognize that my circumstances should not diminish my joy, should not affect how joyful I am. So what Paul means there is continuing to do good regardless of the trials, not just sitting there, not doing anything at all for fear that it won't work out.

You're paralyzed with indecision and inaction because you're afraid of what could go wrong. Tribulations.

[14:48] Is that a word you use often? send a greeting card to somebody, happy birthday, my deepest regrets for your tribulations at this advancing age.

Tribulations could be trials or persecution. They could be heavy and serious. They could be things where someone is literally suffering for the cause of Christ.

Or they could also be things that are all too common for all of us in this broken world. sickness, injury, loss of a job, or even death.

Those are tribulations, as I'm sure we all know all too well. So Paul is talking about continuing to do good regardless of our circumstances or our challenges.

And in case you're wondering, gee, Paul, thanks, that's not helpful, my life is hard. if you don't know, Paul knew all about continuing on in spite of things going wrong, didn't he?

[16:00] Prison, personal affliction, he didn't let things stop him because he trusted that God was with him. so the key to that kind of patience in everything is joyful hope.

So here's a few other analogies to hopefully make this clear. why do athletes endure the pain and hardship of training endless days and hours?

Only by training and reaching their best condition can they have the joyful hope of achievement and victory. Excuse me, I'm losing my voice.

Why do immigrants from other countries endure the challenges of paperwork and countless hurdles and expenses to come to Canada and build a new life here?

It's because they have the joyful hope of escaping political or religious oppression in their home country and they can look forward to a brighter future.

[17:10] Why do college and university students endure the hardship of studying and writing papers or dissertations and exams? It's because they hold on to the joyful hope of a successful

career one day.

Why did the early Christians endure persecution and continue to persevere in their faithfulness to Christ? It's because they had and we have joyful hope of inheritance in heaven.

Christians don't remain committed when things get rough.

They may be lacking the deeply anchored joyful hope that they need. Why might that be? Because again, it might be that ultimately their minds are too focused on the things of this world.

world. And when I say that, I don't say, stop paying your bills. Your mortgage is of this world. Let it go. You don't need to get groceries. God will show up.

[18:21] There's stuff that we need to do. And Scripture is clear that we have responsibilities and must be faithful to them. So there's one last observation from our text that I want to make this morning.

only as hopeful, joyful, and patient as we are in prayer. We can only have as much hope, as much joy, as much patience, as we can have when we are connected with God in prayer.

Being faithful in prayer, as Paul states it, is essential. The relationship between prayer and the joyful life is conveyed other places in the Bible.

Not surprisingly, I hope. 1 Thessalonians 5, 16-18. You know this passage, says, Be joyful always. Pray continually.

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Praying and giving thanks to God for all things and in all circumstances opens us to have the kind of joy, continuous joy, that he wants for us, that God wants.

[19:39] When we have a committed prayer life, we're always reminded of the true source of our hope. When I lift someone up in prayer, I recognize that I cannot do what they need.

I cannot remove what they need removed or encourage in the way that their Father in Heaven can. and that's why we pray. So that leads us directly to our sources of joy and patience.

When we recognize that God is our creator and will provide and is always with us, it should easily help us to be joyful and patient.

Because the reason for our hope comes from the forgiveness that we received from the Father that was made possible only through Christ's sacrifice.

So when we have a committed prayer life, we'll always be reminded of the object or objective of our hope, to one day be with God for eternity.

[20:49] Over the years that I've been with you as your pastor, we've considered many different ways, and you can always look at the sermon archive on the website. Search the word prayer for refreshers.

The pastor searched prayer for refreshers, and turns out God inspired me to say some pretty decent things over the years. But there's even recognizing that the conversations and interactions we've had about prayer are just a drop in the bucket.

it. Paul suggests in his passage that I just quoted, pray without ceasing. Does that ever pop into your mind as, well, that's not even possible?

Right? Has that crossed your mind? It certainly has crossed mine over the years. Taking it really literally, that's what happened there. So the suggestion here is not that we lock ourselves away somewhere and literally be on our hands and knees with our heads bowed 24-7.

It's not what you should get from that. And as I've told you before, for me personally, and this is true, prayer doesn't always have to be with formal words.

[22:12] Sometimes I have just a conversation with God when I'm driving, eyes open, remember? that is just, wow, that really stunk and I did that poorly, helped me to not beat myself up, helped me to recognize tomorrow is another day, or, God, thanks for showing up in that moment because I saw you and I needed you, or someone else needed you and you were there.

Prayer can also be a mental attitude of devotion, where you are surrendering things to him, where you are grateful for things he is doing in the moment during your day, or even as an unspoken reference to God in all that we do, because remember, as we talked about last week, all that we do is ultimately for the glory of God.

So in living a life with that in mind, we'll create a natural, humble, and prayerful focus in our lives.

We need to ask ourselves, are our lives as joyful and productive as they could or should be?

If not, then let God's word from Paul sink into our hearts. Be faithful in prayer. By doing this, we'll naturally be more likely to then be joyful in hope and patient in difficult circumstances.

Amen.