

Joy

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[0 : 00] Welcome everyone. It's nice to be here with you. Just as I get my stuff sorted here. I think we can have favorite people.

I haven't researched it thoroughly, but I know that biblically speaking, we are to show favor to each other as people of God. And so my favorite person in the room is celebrating birthday today. So just so you know, she's finally made it to 25. So that's something worth celebrating. And then the other thing to get out of my way quickly is a number of you have expressed concern about the marks on my neck.

I've heard paintball. I've heard all sorts of theories about what those might be. They are tattoos and they were supposed to be temporary. And they came as part of a package of babysitting Abby DeMarco.

So if you do that, if you choose to take that on, you can expect a similar result, I think. So on to the topic of joy.

[1 : 02] And the beautiful thing about studying a biblical truth is that you as the studier get the most benefit. But then you embark on this very tricky exercise of how much do you share and how much don't you.

And that is tricky. And when I ran my sermon by Dave Corrente, he assessed an hour and 45 minutes. So I hope you're comfortable. Joy is a tricky topic.

That's what I discovered. I think we either tend to cheapen joy and what it is, truly, or we struggle to access it, one or the other.

Nehemiah 8, verse 10, from what Pastor Dave Corrente read, says, Then he said to them, Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready.

For this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. And that one really got me. How is the joy of the Lord your strength exactly?

[2 : 10] Like even if I can wrap my head around what joy is, which I found tricky enough, especially being a guy who doesn't naturally smile, how is it then your strength?

And I kind of think, you know, easily go to, Isn't joy just a perk, you know, of being a believer? Certainly. And that's just not the case.

The joy of the Lord is indeed your strength or your stronghold. And in fact, translations, more translations describe it as stronghold than they do strength, which is an interesting factor.

So as you, whether you consider it in terms of exactly strength as you understand it, or a stronghold, I think if you blend those two together, you have a fairly accurate meaning of what's meant here.

And so what do we make of that? What does it mean? What really is joy anyway? And as I say, I think we all understand it within our given context, but it's a tough one to get your head around in terms of how the Bible describes it, is what I've found.

[3 : 14] And ultimately the truth is that we access joy through God's either common grace or his gifting through salvation. And by common grace, it's kind of the whole world gets joy to some degree when life is less hard or when there's sweet moments in life.

Even, you know, admiring something that's beautiful, right? You could be in a really tough situation. You could look at a green tree and go, wow, that's really beautiful. Anyone can get an equivalent of that type of joy or enjoyment.

And that's just called common grace. You know, we have a creator, whether anyone knows that or believes that or not, and he has created this world. And any enjoyment within that world is a form of joy.

And it's just found under common grace, whether you're a believer or not. But those who are saved have a special sort of joy. And that is the joy that you access through salvation, which I'll get into more.

John Piper says, The fear of God without joy in God is no refuge from the wrath of God. The mercy of God is found in the stronghold of reverential delight.

[4 : 29] So just turn, there's a very small side tangent here to add to our hour and 45 minutes. Turn with me to Jeremiah 25. And I just want to give you a quick glimpse into the fear of God and what that looks like.

And bearing in mind, I'm starting in the Old Testament, and the God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament, which is today. I think sometimes we tend to differentiate and we go, oh, wow, he was harsh back then and now he's easier and nicer.

No, no, no. God was the same from the very beginning and he continues to be the same. Much the embarrassment of my children, I'm going to for the first time put on my glasses up here.

Jeremiah 25. So this is the fear of God and then I'm going to restate what John Piper says here.

The fear of God. Jeremiah 25. The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

For 23 years, from the 13th year of Josiah, the son of Ammon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the Lord has come to me. This is Jeremiah. He's about to prophesy here. And I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened.

[5 : 51] So the people have not listened to the warnings that God has given them through the prophet Jeremiah. You have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although the Lord persistently sent to you all his servants, the prophet, saying, turn now every one of you from his evil way and evil deeds and dwell upon the land that the Lord has given to you and your fathers from of old and forever.

Do not go after other gods to serve and worship them or provoke me to anger with the work of your land. So this is a warning given to them. Then I will do you no harm, yet you have not listened to me, declares the Lord, that you might provoke me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm.

Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts. This is our God of today saying this back then. And I want to emphasize what fear of the Lord is because it gives you a very strong contrast or perhaps comparison, depending on how you look at it, to the significance of joy.

Okay, so he says, therefore, says the Lord of hosts, because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the Lord, and for Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all these surrounding nations.

I will devote them to destruction and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp.

[7 : 14] The whole land shall become a ruin and a waste and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon 70 years. Then after 70 years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste.

I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings shall make slaves even of them and I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their lands.

Thus the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me, take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. They shall drink it and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them.

So that's the fear of the Lord. That's an example of it and there's many of course in the Bible. So John Piper says, the fear of God without joy in God is no refuge from the wrath of God.

So we saw fear, a perspective we should all have. We saw some indications of wrath there and yet without joy in God it is no refuge at all.

[8 : 22] The mercy of God is found in the stronghold of reverential delight or joy. Within the sermon I'm trying to establish three main truths about biblical joy.

In the background I'm going to describe who our God is just as I sought to do there in efforts to explain joy better. Compare godly love with godly joy. Number one, true joy belongs to believers. Number two, joy is both a gift and a command from the Lord. Number three, joy is our strength or stronghold. And I'll tell you the two that I've had the hardest time with is joy being a command from the Lord.

How does that play out? And joy being our strength or stronghold. And also, this is not a message about not being sad. There's quite a number of you who are facing very significant trials right now and trials are hard.

And as much as we say, hey, God uses them and he does and thank God for them to grow us, it's not an easy truth. And so some of you are sad and that's okay. But this message is not saying is, hey, go away and be happy and pretend like you don't have a trial.

[9 : 35] If you're going through a really tough trial right now, go see one of our pastors. They'll be happy to walk you through the tensions associated with something like sadness and the godly joy that we are to have and they'll also care for you well.

So it's what they're here to do. I'll go through a few key tenets now of joy. One is, joy belongs to the believer as I said. Unbelievers have some satisfaction through common grace.

Just a reminder of that. Trees are still beautiful to unbelievers. True joy is from God and as a result, it is accessible to you after you are saved. True abiding joy is a feeling within believers of inner gladness, delight, or rejoicing despite circumstances.

As fallen creatures, we do not naturally conjure up joy. It naturally follows that apart from Christ, sinners have no capacity for real joy.

In Galatians 5.22, joy is listed as the second fruit of the Spirit following love. Guess who gets the fruit of the Spirit? And that's believers. Number two, joy is both a gift and a command.

[10 : 45] This is where it starts getting tricky for me. Joy is a gift to believers by God. Joy is produced through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It's where it comes from. That's how it manifests itself as a gift.

As a believer, it's increasingly conformed to the image of Christ and that's what God does through us over the course of our lives. That's the role trials play. This often means that joy is realized through trials and suffering because we know that's how God uses trials and suffering to conform us to be more like Christ.

Here's a good example of joy being a gift. And this will resonate with a huge majority of us.

Childbirth. John 16, 21 to 22 says, When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come.

But when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you.

Joy is commanded per Nehemiah 8.10. So Nehemiah 8.10 directs joy. He doesn't say, hey, be reminded it's a gift from the Lord, which he could have said.

[12 : 02] He actually commands joy. Go be joyful. Joy is a virtue to be pursued and cultivated in the Christian life. It is commanded to pursue. That's backed up by many New Testament references.

One of my favorites is James 1.2-4. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. Why? Because you can rejoice in who God is and how he uses trials to his glory and our great benefit with eternal implications.

For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. So we're to count it all joy when we're faced with trials.

That's another directive. Go be joyful. Have the right perspective around who God is, what he's doing in our lives, and go be joyful accordingly.

John Piper says, who is an expert on joy, by the way, expert on a few things, grief is good, fear is good, penitence is good, tears are good, but not if that's all you feel.

[13 : 10] God's holiness is the purity and perfection not only of his justice, but also of his mercy and grace. And here's the clincher.

And cowering people do not magnify the glory of grace. Number three, joy, because it is from the Lord, is our strength. Nehemiah 8.10, I would reference once again.

Because we are commanded, we know we have a choice. Joy or cynicism? Joy or despair? Joy or worry? Joy or complaining?

The Lord gives us the strength to make the right choice. What keeps our lives from being consumed by sorrow, despair, or cynicism? The joy of the Lord is our strength.

Romans 8.35-39 says, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

[14:08] As it is written, for your sake, we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am sure that neither death nor life nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. If God the Father has not always delighted in God the Son, here's a very interesting perspective.

God is joy. Just as we saw the fear of the Lord and we saw another characteristic of him, God is also joy. If God the Father has not always delighted in God the Son, if God has not always been a joyful God, then there is no Christian God.

I'll read that again. If God the Father has not always delighted in God the Son, if God has not always been a joyful God, then there is no Christian God. Joy in the fellowship of the Trinity is part of what it means to be God.

Therefore, we say, joy is serious because it is central to the very being of God. I want to tell you a story and it's a biblical story.

[15:19] It's a fascinating story. Whether you look at it through secular sources or whether you look at it through the Bible, this is a fascinating story. And what it does is it tells you a lot about our God. And my goodness, you could do a whole year's worth of sermons around this story.

And so part of my trick is to extract the meaning relevant to joy for you and tell you what is just a very interesting story that glorifies our God. At a high level, it shows the trajectory of how God brings about joy to the believer and how it then becomes our strength.

God disciplines those he loves. He restores his chosen to himself. And he both gives and commands a joy that flows from him and strengthens the believer. So, as I tell you the story, I want you to think about your own life and how this story might parallel your own life and where you might be in this story and as a result, where your joy might be either as a gift, a command, and whether you are receiving any strength from it.

So the place I'm starting is around 600 BC. God is disciplining his people, the Israelites, for walking away from him, which is not an uncommon story in the Old Testament.

God makes clear his laws and the people follow for a time, being blessed as they do and God's people eventually rebel against the laws and God faithfully changes hearts and disciplines to bring and restore people to himself.

[16:46] And this is where I could lead into a whole sermon on discipline, which I'm not going to. Quickly on discipline, though, this is where the story starts. God's disciplining his people. We see the effects of discipline, the goodness of people, of discipline playing out in our own families.

When we discipline our children and properly employed, it restores a broken relationship. And we've seen this when our child, who has been softened by discipline, simply clings to us and seeks after restoration, which means they want to be back on track with the laws they're beholden to.

In Proverbs 3, the Lord reproves him whom he loves as a father of the son in whom he delights. And so we know this cycle from our own Christian lives, but we can't be reminded of it enough.

So God's people are being disciplined through the Babylonian Empire in about 600 BC. And Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon. And you'll remember, you may remember, Nebuchadnezzar was the one that wiped, virtually wiped out the people, everything they stood for, destroyed the temple, looted the temple, took all the treasures from the temple and exiled the Jews. So they're away from home with nothing that they hold valuable to them. And this goes on for just, for 70 years as Jeremiah prophesies. And so, they're coming to, they're in that.

[18:05] And in Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar, his pride is just too much. And it's prophesied that, hey, Nebuchadnezzar, God's gonna make you into a wild animal for seven years, which is wild.

And a year later, so it happens and he becomes like a wild animal for seven years. And then at the end, he comes out humbled and publicly praising the one true God, which is, if you read Daniel 4, you'll be amazed by what Nebuchadnezzar actually says.

He says to the whole world, because he's a world ruler at that time, and he basically says, this is the God to believe, be humbled before him as I was, and to clarify, this is the one true God.

It's just a, it's a remarkable story in Daniel 4. So, you know, in this, why am I talking about this quickly? It's just to say, God didn't need to do that. Like, he didn't need to use a king to declare to the whole world at that time, hey, by the way, there's one true God and here's who he is, per the fact that I was just a wild animal for seven years.

So, God's demonstrating his absolute control and purpose and the foreign king is humbled and directed to proclaim God's supremacy in that. So, what is God doing here? So, it starts with discipline.

[19:17] He's disciplining his people in order to later restore them to himself. Have you found much joy in an undisciplined person? I would propose no. I mean, look to your own children. They're at their best when they're disciplined, quite frankly, and that's where you see joy exists.

At the same time, he's establishing himself as supreme among the whole world, as I said. It's a remarkable chapter to read. As a people, the Israelites are not believers at this time. I mean, at best, there may be a few believers among them, but they are wayward, unbelieving people, right? They are far from joy other than the periodic joy they might find under God's common grace, as I said. Joy belongs to the believer. The story continues.

In Daniel 5, so Nebuchadnezzar's son, Belshazzar, a wicked, wicked man, takes the treasures his father looted from the temple and is throwing wild parties with them.

And God had enough at that time. And it's not like God, you know, in some sort of unpredictable way, oh, I have enough, okay, I'm gonna do this now. No, no, he had the whole thing planned from the beginning, of course. And so, sure enough, Nebuchadnezzar's wicked son is partying with God's treasures and God brings an end to that.

[20:31] And so, all of a sudden, a hand appears, writes a bunch of words on a wall that nobody understands. They bring Daniel in to interpret them and this is what they say. God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end.

You've been weighed in the balances and found wanting. Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians. And that very night, Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed and Darius the Mede received the kingdom.

So the Persians took over. Here God is bringing about a change in the circumstances whereby the restoration that occurs post-discipline can start. Have you ever been disciplined? I have.

And then, have you ever seen the change of circumstance? The circumstances start to change.

And this may be part of your Christian trajectory. This may be the story up to the point at which you got saved.

What offers an added level of fascination here is how God continues to establish himself as supreme among the whole of the known world that time. He's visibly acting, doesn't have to, doesn't always visibly act, directly with the foreign kings and establishing his supremacy among them.

[21:37] True joy belongs to the believer. I'm hoping at this point you can see a parallel trajectory in your Christian life. Discipline and then he changes your circumstances along a given trajectory to ultimately bring you to a point of joy.

At the end of 70 years, this is when Belshazzar, his kingdom was taken as prophesied in Jeremiah, kingdom removed from him just as prophesied, Babylonian empire ends, Persians take over, and exiles are allowed to return to their homes.

So you can see circumstances are changing, right? The discipline has eased. Now they're allowed to return to their homes for the first time. And if you look at historical sources, they'll say, yeah, the Persians, for good strategic advantage, allow people to return to their homes, resume their places of worship, because, hey, that'll bring about good peace, right?

And there's good strategic advantage to that, and I can see how that would be true. But it's exactly as was prophesied in the Bible.

When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. So when you read Ezra 1, 1-4, you'll read a historical source and it'll say, yeah, for all these good strategic reasons, Cyrus, who was king of the Persians at the time, allowed everybody to return home.

[22 : 57] Great. Brought about some peace. Absolutely. I'm not disputing that, but Ezra 1-4 adds a little more detail. It says, In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put in writing.

Thus says the king of Persia. So this is what he says and this is what secular sources, of course, don't include. The Lord, the God of heaven, so this is what Cyrus is saying, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel. He is the God who is in Jerusalem and let each survivor in whatever place he sojourns be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold.

So he's sending them all home and he's giving them back their silver and gold. Remember when he did that on their exodus out of Egypt. It's amazing how God just continues along certain themes. Not only did he let them go home, he gave them back all their treasure and then equipped them to go home per the prophecy.

Having disciplined his people, God is enabling their salvation and restoration to himself. You see him visibly establishing himself as supreme, again, clearly and visibly demonstrating his control over the plan and trajectory for the people.

[24 : 15] Again, that's what he does for us, which ultimately leads to a joy-filled believer. True joy belongs to the believer and joy is now on the horizon for them. So they were disciplined and now God, under a careful tension, under his direction, they're being allowed to return home.

The trajectory is continuing towards joy. following Cyrus' edict, Zerubbabel, who is of the Jewish people, leads the rebuilding of the temple.

God's honored his purpose. So they're heading back home and they're rebuilding. God doesn't simply hand over the temple restoration to them and comfort though. And we know this to be true from our Christian walks.

I mean, who here has been, well, perhaps some of you have, it just hasn't been my journey, where you're disciplined and everything just, you know, following the discipline becomes magic and rosy. Right?

Like to some degree, you know, there is a trajectory to these things where God holds you. He doesn't, you know, he allows you, he facilitates you to learn following the discipline.

[25 : 20] And so this is what he's doing. He's giving them freedom. He's allowing them to rebuild. But then at the same time, now they face persecution. Right? They don't just instantly hit years and years of peace.

They're held through the tension of persecution as they rebuild and do God's work, which God says will happen. Right? We know that's ahead of us. We know that's the lives we live to some extent, but we also know that's ahead of us.

The Christian life is riddled with various forms of hardship and persecution, and God uses that. And I'm going to get to the joy part here shortly. And so the kings continue, more kings.

Xerxes comes in, that's the battle of the 300. Artaxerxes is his son who, a politician kills Xerxes, convinces Artaxerxes to kill his own brother.

Politician comes at Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes kills the politician. Just chaos, right? Through all the kingship and who's trying to assume power. And yet, all the while, the Jews, after being disciplined, after being released to come home, are on and off again in terms of the rebuild.

[26 : 30] Right? They're facing suffering, persecution, and then moments of freedom as well. And to me, this represents the Christian life. What has all this rulership, kingship, chaos meant for God's people?

They are waiting, and to some extent, suffering, albeit not as much as they were in the hands of the Babylonians, God brings his plans to bear. God's still restoring and holding them until they are ready for repentance.

So, a key point here, you know, God's disciplined them, they're on a trajectory of change. They haven't yet repented, which we all know in the Christian faith is just the most critical point.

Right? Recognizing we're sinners, and then repenting of our sin. They haven't yet done that. And joy will follow. As peace starts to take hold, the Persian policy, otherwise known as that Cyrus Edict, which I read to you from Ezra, this is what allows them to work.

Artaxerxes was all too happy after quelling rebellion after rebellion in his unpeaceful kingdom to enable Nehemiah to go back and lead sort of full rebuild.

[27 : 37] Ezra's in there as well, teaching them. But Artaxerxes brought on Nehemiah as his cupbearer, which many of us would know that's a trusted position.

They drink the cup, make sure there's no poison in it. They also run a bunch of administration for the king. Trusted servant. And God puts on Nehemiah's heart, hey, this is a really sad time.

I need to go back and rebuild. Will you allow me? And that's when the king says, yeah, not only will I give you 12 years, I'll give you everything you need and go back and rebuild.

So this is a critical juncture just because all of a sudden you see, you know, you had discipline, you had easing, you had enablement of progress, and then you have these ongoing tensions, but God always raises leaders as well.

But they still haven't repented. Marvel at the time and detail God has employed in restoring his lost people to himself. Consider what we can see and what we can't see in this story.

[28 : 38] Consider how his nature and attributes are on display through this story and joy is coming. Quickly, in Nehemiah 1, Nehemiah learned of the state of Jerusalem, broken walls and gates, repented and prayed for mercy and success.

God has exposed a need to him at the right time. Nehemiah 2, sad in the presence of the king, Nehemiah appeals to the king that he might return to Jerusalem to rebuild along with governor license and resources.

The king grants his request along with an armed escort and supplies for the rebuild, give him everything he need. God gives Nehemiah more than he asked for and also allows for trials and persecution.

It wasn't an easy rebuild. That doesn't tend to be how the Christian life works out. It wasn't an easy rebuild. There's constant persecution and trouble. Holds Nehemiah where he is, what he's supposed to do and the way he's supposed to do it.

Nehemiah 3, the rebuild finally starts. This represents some of the significance that Jerusalem holds for the people. Again, you really see the joy of the people and they're coming to realize, hey, this is our God.

[29 : 44] This is the history. This is the significance of everything God's built. It references the house of mighty men of David. If you don't know who those guys are, they were kind of like human superheroes that worked for David and they're rebuilding all of these places and they're coming to know their God again.

So that happens in Nehemiah 3 and you see how the people are being reminded of the God who chose them and is now restoring them. In Nehemiah 4, persecution ramps up.

God's holding them through the persecution and they're recognizing their need for him. In Nehemiah 5, just more suffering, quite frankly. They still haven't repented, though.

The fear of the Lord, ongoing work. They're doing good work, but they still haven't repented.

They're starting to see their sin and the desire to turn from what is becoming evident. Their hearts are changing. God's changing their hearts and he is the one that, of course, changes their hearts to be able to become believers.

The wall's finished. Persecutors learn of this. They threaten them with the king. We're going to go tell on you. God is establishing them as his people to those around. So, Nehemiah 7, we're getting close now, gave responsible men charge over Jerusalem.

[30 : 53] God's renewing their identity in him. So, they've been disciplined. They've been created, there has been opportunity created for him. God has changed their hearts now through the persecution.

And in Nehemiah 8, Ezra reads the law, which is what Pastor Dave Corrente read, the book of the law of Moses. Their ears were attentive and they worshiped. And up to this point, they weren't going to do that.

Like, if God had to just set them free from the Babylonians, if God had to just set them free from the Persians, if God had just given them a very easy rebuild, they weren't going to repent.

And we know that from our own lives. Like, we don't just, we're not just good people that decide to repent one day. God, over the course of time, using discipline, using a change of circumstances, showing people who he is, changing our hearts to the point at which we repent, that's all God.

And none of that is us. I think sometimes we think, oh, we're so clever, we figured it out. It's just not the case. And when you look at this story, to me, I see the Christian life. And I see God in control. [31 : 57] They're broken, they're repentant, and God's plan is coming to full fruition. And joy follows the brokenness in him. And this is where the command comes in. And this is where the strength comes in.

So I just wrote the comment, have you ever been there? Have you ever reached that point? It's an important point where you're broken before the Lord and Savior. Joy follows that. Joy follows that. They weren't joyful up to this point. And the reason is because largely they weren't saved and or, depending on how you look at it, they certainly weren't walking in fellowship with him.

So in conclusion, how do we access the strength of the joy that God gives, that God both gifts and commands? We appreciate the magnitude of our sin and mourn it. But we don't stay there.

That's what you see in Nehemiah 8 verse 9, the reaction. The people wept when they heard the law, which is good. That's a broken heart. Again, God didn't break their hearts.

[32 : 56] He didn't release them from the Babylonians and just then they had broken hearts. No, God changed their hearts over a long period of time, over a given trajectory.

And Nehemiah 8, 9, they were broken by that. Just broken. And that's where God brings us. But that's not where he leaves us.

Having recognized our sin, we respond rather than focusing on it and grieving in hopelessness. Satan would love us to be hopeless at that juncture. I mean, Chris, look at everything you have done.

Let me recall, easy to be broken. Easy to be broken beyond repair. That's not where the Lord leaves us. And that's a weakened state. That's not a strong state. Nehemiah 8, 10.

So this is Nehemiah's response and directive. Don't focus on your sin and the grieving. Focus on it and brokenness. Don't stay there. Was the correlation between do not be grieved and this day is holy?

[33 : 52] The correlation between do not be grieved and this day is holy is the fact that we are to have Christ's joy in our hearts following our brokenness. So for me personally, it's easy to stay in a state of brokenness, which leads to discouragement, et cetera.

Brokenness is legitimate. If it's from the Lord, he should have brought, he will, for those who are believers, he will have brought each and every one of us to that state. But the point is he doesn't leave us there.

And an indication of salvation, of your walk with him, et cetera, is that you actually move on to a point of joy in him. So again, reflecting total depravity.

If we have an understanding that apart from Christ, we are dead in our sin, correlatingly, we should start to appreciate the amazing grace we have in the freedom that he provides. We do need to talk about sin.

We do need to expose sin. We do need to repent of sin and turn to Christ. We desperately need all of that. So please, I am not meaning to underestimate the importance of that for one second.

[34 : 57] But a critical part of turning to Christ involves focusing on what Christ has done for us to set us free, focusing on what Christ is doing in us as we follow and serve him.

And that's where the process of sanctification comes in. How we'll know them by their fruit. And the supernatural joy and peace that we receive through the gospel of Jesus Christ gives us the strength to endure and grow through tremendously difficult circumstances, which he uses for good.

So again, in those people, he disciplined them. He then grew them. He then broke them. But then he set them free in joy. And that was a directive. So depending on your age, Rogan and down is locked in and the rest of us are zoom out.

Think about all that God orchestrated. Even from the point of Babylon to the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem to bring a people back to the freedom of salvation offered through their and our God.

The trend was law, rebellion, discipline, restoration, growth, and true joy through trials. The joy of the Lord is your strength.

[36 : 06] And how does this mirror your walk as a Christian? If you're not a believer, the pastors are here to, of course, happily discuss with you how you might access the strength of this amazing joy.

Isaiah 35.10 says, And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing. Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads and they shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and

sighing shall flee away.

Joy is the ultimate goal of God in creation. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this opportunity to come and share learnings from your word, Lord.

And of course, we know as people, we spend our lives getting to know you better and getting to understand the truth of your word, Lord.

It's a joyful, endless pursuit, Lord. Thank you for the help that you provide through your spirit of this, for this, Lord. Lord, for anyone in here today who is just experiencing deeper, profound sadness, Lord, we just, we pray for the freedom through the joy that you provide to them, Lord.

[37 : 22] And at the same time, Lord, we thank you for the trials that you used to grow us. Thank you for not leaving us to our own devices, Lord. I pray your blessings upon everyone in here today, believer and unbeliever, Lord.

In your name, amen. Amen. Amen.