

Restoring Joy

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[0 : 0 0] of studies in the songs of ascent, and we're up to Psalm 1 to 6. The psalmist is looking back, and he's desiring revival. He's desiring the Lord that restores the fortunes of his people that they once enjoyed. We don't know who wrote this. It just says a song of ascents. We don't know if it's of David or whoever, probably not. But let's read together from verse 1. When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them. We'll end our reading at this portion of God's Word. I don't know how familiar that is to you. I'm sure you've heard sermons on that before. Singers to the musicians as have led us in worship this evening. Turn with me back to Psalm 126. One, two, six.

This evening we are continuing a series of studies in these 15 songs that were sung three times on an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem by God's people at the various festivals. And in singing these songs, they're reminding themselves not only of who God is, but also expressing their own life experiences, whether it's out of the depths or whether we were glad when they said, let us go to the house of the Lord. Whatever that experience is. And my desire, and as we look at these together, is there may be one or two of these Psalms that really put its finger on your pulse, where you are in life's walk. And it's great that the Psalms do this. Everything. All life is in the Psalms. Warts and all, isn't it? It's great. The joyous times and the honest times when life is hard. Life is a struggle. And some of them, some of the Psalms even just finish in almost a note of despair. Lord, you see, you know what's happening. And that's what we're looking at this evening. One of the things that should mark out our pilgrimage with the Lord as we walk through this life is one of joy. Joy is something we looked at not that long ago. There's a wee image come up. I don't know if it's there. Anyway, the word joy. And the Christian life begins with joy, doesn't it? Perhaps you can remember the day in which you were saved. I can. My conversion was very dramatic. It was an evening, a Monday evening on May the 12th, 1980, in the Kelvin Hall, which I think I've mentioned to you. At that meeting, I repented of my sins. It took me a long time to realize that's what I needed to do. I put God in the dock. And then that night, we swapped places. I put myself in the dock, put him on the throne, and I had to bow the knee to him. And the Lord converted me then. And I knew such joy. That night, when I went to bed, I had this fear that I would wake up and the joy wouldn't be there. And it was because I'd been seeking for a year and a half.

And suddenly, I felt I'd found it. And I was almost frightened to go to sleep in case I woke up and the joy wasn't there. And it was there. I remembered, wow, I became a Christian last night. I'd hardly had a Bible. I didn't know much at all. And went to work that Tuesday morning and met my mates and just delighted to tell them I was a Christian. And nothing would have stopped me. The joy of telling other people that Jesus is real and he was my Savior and he's given me eternal life and that they too needed him. It was quite something. Joy marks the Christian life. And it should continue in some ways to a certain extent. We can't always live at that joyous time because life is a life of struggles and a life of difficulties and so forth. There's an American novelist called Ellen Glasgow. That's a great name. I wish that was my surname. There's a name and a half, isn't it? She was born in the 1800s, Ellen Glasgow. She writes in her autobiography. I don't know if she was a Christian or not. In her autobiography, she tells of her father who was a Presbyterian elder, full of correctness and rigid with duty. He was entirely unselfish and in his long life, he never committed a pleasure.

[4 : 54] I thought that was so funny. It was so rigid, he never committed a pleasure his whole life. And some Christians live their whole life that way, don't they? They can become a Christian and it's hard and we just have to grin and bear it. And yet the joy of the Lord is our strength. And it's that joy that really should attract others to us. Why are you so cheerful in the midst of difficulties? But the thing is, exceptional joy, this deep joy, this laughing type of joy doesn't always last because life is a combination of ups and downs. I think I've mentioned this wee graph to you, the graph of Jacob's life. This wasn't the one that was in Thompson Chain. I don't think it was anyway. I don't think it was quite as elaborate. But you probably won't be able to see that. But just look at the graph. That's the high points and low points of his life. Times when he was so close to God, God was blessing him. And then times when he was struggling. His life was one of struggle. It's typical of you and I. Our graph would be like that as well. Here is Joseph. His life as well. It's a life of ups and downs as well. In prison and then one in any second in command in Egypt. And his life, you could chart his life as well in a similar way. And I'm sure every single one of our lives can be like that. A time where you've known great joy and great answers to prayer. And the Lord's blessed you in an unusual way. And other times, perhaps the death of a loved one or a disaster, something unexpected has come. And you've really just been hanging on. And some of your graphs,

I like this, this, this, because it's not uniform. You can have a big part in the mountain. And that's great. Oh, that we would have that. And, but sometimes you can be in the valley for a long time. Sometimes it can be a short time. Sometimes it can be very deep. Sometimes it can be fairly shallow. And it would be interesting to see whether yours is like that and going up here and then. It's, it changes. All our peaks and troughs are different. Perhaps you can look back to a time. Perhaps it's been a long time since the Lord answered a prayer. Or the Lord worked in your life in a particular way where you were just blown away. You were just amazed. You knew it was God. God had done this thing. And God had blessed you beyond that which you knew you deserved. But that which beyond more than you expected. I wonder when the last time you had that. I remember as a young Christian knowing that joy. I can't remember. It was a long time ago how long it lasted before it began to wane.

It probably lasted a few months, I would say. I just felt as a young Christian, I got almost everything I prayed for. In the early days, Lord, do this, do that. And it was just great. And I think as a child, as we do everything for babies, they don't feed themselves. They don't go into the cupboard and open a tin of macaroni cheese. You have to do everything for them. You are their source of joy or misery, depending on how you, depending on how you look after them. And I think it's the same when we become a Christian. The Lord gives you everything on a plate. You get so much. But after a period of time, and I was almost aware of this, I was conscious of this, the Lord is stepping back. And he's wanting me to walk. He's wanting me to walk by faith. And the answers to prayers might not come as readily.

And he's telling me to trust. Trust in me. And that's what you want from your own children. To trust you. You're not always there. And when you leave them in the playground in primary school for the first time, and they're screaming the place down, you want them to know that everyone's okay.

[8 : 33] That mum's just, she'll be back at three o'clock to pick you up and everything's okay. And the Lord wants to do that with us. And this is a psalm about that. It's a psalm that perhaps you're going through a hard time and you're looking back to a time, perhaps in church life or your own personal life, when you thought, it's been a long time since I've felt like that. And that's what this psalm is all about. Those times when perhaps you've been in the trough and you're in there for a while, and you think, I wish I was back up here. I remember what it was like when I was at the top of the curve. But I've been in this bottom of the curve for such a long time. Lord, don't you see? Don't you know? Don't you care? And that's what I want us to look at this evening.

I want us, I've called this Restore Our Fortunes, O Lord. I'll try and get the heading for each of these sermons from the passage itself. And that's found in the first verse. And I have, the passage divides nicely into two. And that's what I want us to do in the moments that remain to us. I want to look at joy relived, where the psalmist relives the joy, and then a joy reclaimed, where he almost wrestles with God and says, Lord, I'm reclaiming this joy once again. So first of all, then, joy relived. The psalmist is in Jerusalem. He arrived there, Psalm 122. And he's going through a difficult period, perhaps personally or perhaps the nation, more likely to be the nation. And he says, Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev. We don't know what the difficult times, what he's actually going through, or what the nation's going through at this time, because we don't know

exactly when this was written. It doesn't say whether it's written by David, in which case we can pinpoint it more. It might well be that this was a psalm that was written when the Jews come back from exile and from Babylon or whatever. And we know in the Bible, from the book of Ezra and Nehemiah and Haggai and Zechariah, those four prophets preached at the same time to encourage God's people as they come back to rebuild the temple, to establish the word of God. And that was a very, very difficult time for them. They had come from being in bondage for 70 years, and now they were coming back. And you remember that the work on the temple began. They were zealous, and then it stopped for a period. And then the prophets come and they say, should you live in pined-ceiling houses here?

This is quite appropriate, isn't it? Pined-ceiling houses, while my house lies in ruins. And he challenges them with this, and the work recommences. And you remember the temple is laid, and I quoted to you from Ezra chapter 3. You have this scene where people are rejoicing when they see the foundation stone being delayed. They give thanks. They sing to the Lord. He is good. His love endures forever, and so forth. And then that confusing scene where those who were older thought, it's not that great.

We remember the other temple that was better than this temple. And there is weeping, and it's so much so there's loud joys and singing, loud weeping, and you can't distinguish who is who in amongst all of us. It's quite something. And that's a fact of life, isn't it? That our lives, whether privately or corporately, as a church, are filled with times of joy, times of sorrow. Wonder what the graph would look like for this church here? In your own, in my own personal life, as I says, I've known times of great joy, times of difficulty as well. As a young Christian, you often get many times of joy. Wonder when the last time was that you knew the real joy of the Lord, a real heart-busting joy. Derek Thomas, in his excellent commentary on these series of Psalms, mentions four joys that are commonly lost by Christians. Four joys that can disappear. First of all, there is the joy of your salvation. Sometimes that can wax and wane. It's there at the beginning for us all when we become Christians, this joy, and it's thrilling. We received a message by the Holy Spirit, like the church in Thessalonians, they received a message with joy, despite much persecution. And we talk about this and so forth.

[13:18] But sometimes we can take that for granted. Romans don't excite us as much as they used to do, and we're justified by faith. And we've heard it all before. We have itching ears. We want to hear something else, and the joy can sometimes go. And that's something we need to keep fanning into flame. That's why there are so many aspects to the gospel, so many facets to the gospel.

And that's why I like, especially with men, but not just the men, to look at systematic theology, and the doctrines of the Bible, and how they all come together. Reconciliation, redemption. And I remember in my last church, the men were looking at doctrines, systematic theology, and the women were looking at something that was more touchy-feely. And they really didn't like this. And they said, what's up with us? Can we not get the doctrine? And it never happened. It happened just before I left. We were looking at the doctrine of God. That was the doctrine we were looking at, the eternity of God, all these great attributes of God. And it was just for the men.

So anyway, that's a battle worth fighting, women, men. Just, Lord, give us more meat from the word, so that we will have the joy of the Lord. So we realize it's more than just John 3, 16.

There's Romans, there's Ephesians, there's Philippians, there's Colossians. What are they all doing? What's Hebrews doing? What's the book of Revelation all about? If you figure out that last one, let me know what the book of Revelation's all about. But to get into the meat of the word, it's a great thing. We are responsible for the joy of our salvation in many ways. And we can lose that because we don't study the word of God. And that's really the job of the pastor and elders, to teach the flock and to study the word of God at the right level for different people.

Second joy that can go is not just the joy of our salvation, but the joy of spiritual victory, where, a bit like playing golf, you start off and you think this game's quite easy. And then you think when you've mastered it, it bites you and you realize you're rubbish at it. And the Christian life can be like that. You think, yeah, we're doing okay here. And then after a period of time, some sin can beset you. A brother or sister can upset you. It doesn't take much. For some, it may be one thing. For some, it's another. But the joy of spiritual victory is robbed.

[15:42] And you find yourself not walking with the Lord as well as you once did. The reason for that is because you have quenched the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us to walk in the Spirit. Walk in the

power of the Spirit. To keep in step with the Spirit. And not to quench the Spirit. And that's sad to say that's what we can do as Christians. That's worse than picking the wings off a butterfly, isn't it?

To quench the Holy. I emphasize the word Holy. The Holy Spirit who resides within us. That will rob us of our joy every time. Every time. Until we come to communion or we go on our knees in our bed and say, Lord, forgive me. And we're brave enough to say like David, Lord, to test us, to try us, to see if there'd be any wicked way in us and lead us in the way everlasting. Psalm 51.

David. David. Even David who had the heart, the heart for God, sinned against Lord. And the sin that easily besets us is ever so real. William Cooper wrote a song. I love this song. I'm sure you know it. Oh, for a closer walk with God. A calm and heavenly frame. A light to shine upon the road that leads me to the Lamb. And then it says, where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?

Where is that so refreshing view of Jesus and his word? What peaceful hours I once enjoyed. How sweet their memories still. But they have left an aching void the world can never fill. Return, O holy dove.

Return, sweet messenger of rest. I hate the sins that made thee mourn and drove thee from my breast. The dearest idol I have known. Whatever that idol be. Help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee. So shall my walk be close with God. Calm and serene my frame. So pure light shall mark the road that leads me to the Lamb. That's a great psalm. That's one of my favorite songs, sorry. One of my favorite. I wonder if you memorize songs. I've memorized quite a few. Mostly the older ones, I must confess. They are such great songs. Here is William Cooper, who was known to suffer from depression, saying, being honest to say, Lord, I knew that at a better time than this, I would want that back, Lord. Give me that back. When I used to really rejoice, when I found witnessing so, so easy, and we can be spiritually dry. That's what the psalmist does here. Verse 4. Restore our fortunes like streams in the Negev. Have any of you read any of Mrs. Cowman's wee books? I'm showing my age. Well done. Very good. Mrs. Cowman, I'm sure it's, it's, she's probably dead long ago. I don't know. But I remember, I used to have quiet times, but I remember making a point. Coming across, I had, she did two or three, and I remember using one of them. It's called Streams in the Desert, and it's literally that. See, when your spiritual life's as dry as a stick, get one of Mrs. Cowman's books, and just, and it's literally that, a stream in the desert. When you're struggling to find the words, and you're just reading the scriptures, but it's not doing it. Sometimes you need a help. You need somebody else who, who can just help you bring that joy back to you. I commend Mrs. Cowman's books to you, Streams in the Desert.

[19:12] I don't think I've got them. I think I've lent them out that many times. I just, I tried to find them tonight, and I don't have any. So I must have given them out to folk, because I had three or four of them. So I commend that to you. We can lose this joy. Joy of our salvation, joy of walking with the Lord. Third joy is we can lose this Christian fellowship. Christian fellowship's a great thing.

It's a great thing when you first become a Christian. Suddenly, these folk you thought were all wacky, are your brothers and sisters in the Lord. And that's a real thing. That's always something you hear. They really are your brother and sister in the Lord. And it's quite something. But nothing will rob you of joy when you fall out with a brother or sister in the Lord. You know this in your own family. But if there's somebody in the church that just winds you up and drives you nutty and causes you sleepless nights, don't expect to know joy. We need to keep short accounts, not only with God, but with one another. And disharmony amongst God's people, even just amongst two people, will rob you of joy. Maybe if it's been a long time since you've known the joy, maybe that's something that we need to address. And the fourth joy that can leave us is serving the Lord. We begin well, and we're excited to serve. And I remember as a young Christian being asked—I was only a Christian for a few weeks and I was asked to lead the youth work. That's because there was nobody else could do it.

That wasn't because I was suddenly some super saint after a few weeks. I had a pulse. I was a guy. You get to do the youth work. But I remember at the time thinking, wow, I'm a youth leader. Woo-hoo!

And I just thought I had arrived. And after a couple of months of this, I thought, I'll tell you, the joy soon disappeared when you were chasing folk out the toilets and locking the doors and all sorts of hassle. And serving can be like that. Pastor, you want me to do this? I would be so honored. Only for a few months, you'd rather somebody else did it and you wish you'd never volunteered. The joy of serving, that is a joy that can go as well. And we need to perhaps say, Lord, I'm struggling in this.

It's duty. It's not delight. And it shouldn't be that way. Yes, it can be hard. But to serve the Lord is quite something. So what does the psalmist do in this situation? I'm looking at these points.

[21 : 31] I meant to say to Phil, oh, by the way, the first point comes later on. Remember. That's what he does. Joy relived. This is, it can be hard. These four joys can go. What does he do? He remembers.

He looks back. We don't know what he's referring to when he talks about restore our fortunes like those, we were like those who dreamed our mouths were filled with laughter and joy. He wants them restored.

He's looking back to a time when it was better. There are many times in Israel's history where the Lord won battles, especially coming out of Egypt, and the Egyptians are chariots, and the waves came over them, and they're writing songs afterwards, whether it's Moses or whoever.

Times of great joy, writing songs that God has delivered them. David wrote many songs, battles with the Philistines, the Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer. Many psalms that David has written. The Babylonian captivity was a dreadful time. We cannot begin to imagine how that was like. They didn't just come and take them away, and they were handcuffed, and they walked a couple of mile up the road, and were thrown in prison. They walked a 600-mile journey. Their women were raped. Cannibalism, bestiality. It was shocking, absolutely shocking, the Babylonian captivity. And then God breaks in, and in Isaiah 40, he says this, comfort, comfort my people, says God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

They were really punished during that time. And then the Lord, through Isaiah and the other prophets, really comes to encourage his people to bring them back out. When, Isaiah 43, when you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.

[23 : 40] When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned. The flames will not set you ablaze. For I, the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior, since you are precious and honored in my sight, because I love you. When's the last time you heard the Lord say that to you? Talking about Samuel this morning, John, or saying his name Samuel, where you actually just almost heard the words the Lord say to you, John, I love you. I love you. I really love you. And then you think, Lord, how do I know? And you look at the cross. The cross wasn't just God's plan or project or strategy. He died for you. Jesus died for you personally. It is quite something. We need to remember. We need to recall and not just sit back and cry and have pity on ourself. There was a woman in Derbyshire used to always talk about having a pity party. I've never heard that wee expression before. Sometimes we like that, don't we? But we pity party. We quite like actually feeling sorry for ourself. And somehow we get a kick out of this. And woe is me. Everybody hates me. Think I'll go and eat worms type of thing.

And when you develop that as a way of thinking, that will rob you of all joy. Lloyd-Jones's book. How many of you have read Spiritual Depression by Lloyd-Jones? Wow, one. I'll tell you, if I've done nothing during my time here, get a copy of Spiritual Depression by Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones. Honestly, that is the best thing. Read that book and you will come to me and say, Pastor, I hated all your sermons, your singing, your dress sense, everything about you. But see, when you mentioned that book by Lloyd-Jones, there is a set of books that Christians have to read. I would say Pilgrim's Progress is one.

That book by Lloyd-Jones, every Christian needs to read that book. It's such a great book. And don't wait till you're depressed. See, when you're not depressed, read it. It's a great book. And in that book, he talks about, he's preaching on Psalm 42, why are you disquieted within me? Hope thou in God.

And he says, as Christians, we need to speak to ourself, not just listen to ourself. We listen to ourselves too much. We need to speak to ourself. And that's what the psalmist is doing here. Restore us, Lord. I remember, I'm remembering there were better times than this, and I want them back. So the psalmist doesn't just remember what God done, but he remembers how it felt. So secondly, rejoicing. He doesn't just remember. This is what God did. I can look back to a time. That was a great time. He remembers how he felt. Remember the times when you had that joy. Don't just remember it happened. I would circle it in the calendar, 1972. That was a good time. Try and recall what it felt like. Maybe it's been a long time since we've known such joy. He remembers this. And look at verse 1. He remembers this. He says, we were like those who dreamed. It's quite something

we can't, if this is the return from exile, we can't appreciate just the joy that it must have been to return. But it's as if they were dreaming. They couldn't quite believe it. It was just, I can't believe this has happened. One minute my life was like this, and now it's turned around. It's as if I'm dreaming. I wonder if you have had a time like that. Maybe you can come and tell me or share with somebody. There was a time when you were plodding on. You hadn't denied the faith. You were just struggling on. But then God came and perhaps away, they just filled you with joy. And you just couldn't believe it. You were going to, as if you were going to wake up and you think it was a dream. Was I dreaming that? Did it actually happen? And you realize your circumstances have changed. I wonder if you believe God can do that.

Work in such a way you just cannot believe. And look at that. Our mouths were filled with laughter. A picture of unbelievable joy. I like this. It's not just they're dreaming. They're almost, they're just laughing at each other. I mean, you sometimes see folk if they win the lottery, and they just laugh, and they're hugging and kissing. They cannot believe that they've won this money. One of the times I knew such great, great joy, I just, I wasn't a Christian. It's nothing to do with being a Christian. I was only about 12, 11 or 12, and I went to visit a cousin in Glasgow.

[28 : 14] I'd never met this cousin before. And I went to visit him, and we were playing marbles at the time, as you did. And he says, I'll show you where there's some marbles. And they took me to this disused factory. And we sneaked through the fence. Nobody was there. And we went in, and there was a warehouse about three or four times the size of this building. And it was a bottling factory. And they had these green marbles that they used for making the bottles. And I kid you not, it was bigger than this building. A mountain of marbles. I've got six marbles in my pocket. And I'm looking at this mountain of marbles, thinking, how am I going to get every single one of these marbles back home. It was, I mean, the joy. I can still remember how it felt. Just never seen my eyeballs are popping out. And I'm just thinking all sorts of things. And I'm trying to cram them into my pockets. And I thought, this is useless. So we tucked our trousers into our socks, our T-shirts into our jumpers. We filled our T-shirts, filled our trousers. We were like

Mitchell and men. I'll tell you, if the police came, we had not a hope of escaping with us. And we're walking about 5,000 marbles each with these. And the joy that we experienced with that. Maybe you can look back, maybe he's not a Christian, but go back to where that's, maybe it was something wacky like that, and think, that was a time of great joy. For our 25th wedding anniversary, our honeymoon was spent in Aviemore, to my shame. It was, I had to organize that. Aviemore's a good place. But we couldn't drive. Anyway, I'll not bore you with the details, but for the 25th, I says, has to be somewhere decent. I happened to be reading Paul's stranded in Malta. And I went, I think I'll go to Malta. I never told Lucille that, because she knew we were going to Aviemore.

I thought, I better not burst the bubble again. So anyway, and I phoned up, well, it needs to be a good room. Let's for 25th. Boo-hoo, boo-hoo. Give us a good room. And anyway, so we went in there. It was mobbed. Everybody's getting a room. And I thought, what is this going to look like? You're going along the corridor. You have no idea where you are. You open up. Curtains are over the window. And then we just opened the curtains. And there was the sea. We could have been looking at a slag heap behind us. But there was the sea and the joy that suddenly 25 years worth of marriage was summed up in that one.

Curtain removal. And the joy that was there for that. Maybe you can look back to just a time where you knew joy. And ask yourself, where is that in the Christian life? I don't know the Lord's real blessing in that way. Our mouths were filled with laughter. You just can't believe what the Lord has done. And all that leads to joy. Verse 2, our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Can you recall this? So here is the psalmist. He wants the good old days. He remembers them.

His great joy when the Lord blessed. There was salvation. There was singing. There was laughing and disbelief. Great blessing. God is doing great things for them. And despite all the difficulties, they remember the good times. And he wants this back. So secondly, he doesn't only relive it. He wants it restored. Verses 4 to 6. The psalmist's memory of the past is not just nostalgia, singing, remembering those good times. He wants them back. He wants to know something of that joy that he used to have. And that's what he's looking at here. And it should be something that you and I desire. As I said recently, it's very easy to look back. But we need to hear Ecclesiastes, isn't it? Why were the old days better than these days? We can remember those days. We want those days. But we can't live there because it paralyzes you for the here and now. But while you're in the here and

now, yes, you can still desire those days. And that's what the psalmist wants. And what does he do? Three things. He asks. He prays. Restore our fortunes, O Lord. It's easy to miss that in verse 4. He's praying.

[32 : 23] He's not just talking with each other saying, boy, remember those days? Those days were great. He's talking to God. Whatever problem you have, it's good to share with other people. But share it with God. Bring it to Him. Lord, I don't know this joy that I used to have. Restore our fortunes.

And simply come to Him. Don't just desire it. Pray for it. Maybe, because Jesus says, we do not have, because we do not ask. Ask the Lord that you might receive. Ask, seek, knock. It's intensity. Keep asking like the widow of old. If it's personal, begin with personal prayer. Heartfelt prayer. I remember a time in my life when the joy had gone because I was in a lot of pain and excruciating pain. Tablets never seemed to work. And at that time, not only was I praying that the pain would go and that the doctors would finally get their act together, which never quite happened. It was also a time of self-examination. Lord, why is this taking so long? Is there some sin here that you want me to sit up, a bit like Job or whatever? You want me to sit up and take notice?

And for ages, I examined myself. I prayed like David, Lord, show me if there's any wicked way in me. Sometimes there can be something there. And I believe that's a prayer the Lord will answer.

[33 : 44] If there's one prayer he will answer when you say, Lord, show me. Show me if there's something in my heart, an attitude that's not right, and that's robbing me of my joy, the Lord will answer that prayer. And he's praying, Lord, restore our fortunes. It begins there personally, maybe confession, maybe repentance, but heartfelt prayer. Also as a church, corporate prayer. Revive us, Lord, before you revive Western Hills. Begin in us, begin in the elders, begin in the pastor. Revival starts with the house of God. Before you begin in the community, in the country, in the world, begin in us. That's something we need to do. And if there are better days, then we do have to examine ourselves. Lord, maybe there's a log jam. Maybe there's something that stops you pouring out your Holy Spirit.

Maybe we need to examine ourselves. But prayer. Just simply Monday morning, if you think, yeah, pastor's right, I've been a bit miserable for a long time. I've been faithful, but I've been miserable in my faithfulness. And I remember a time when I wasn't like this, and I want that back. Come to the Lord. Pray. Speak to him before everybody else. Pray for power. Restore our fortunes like streams in the Negev. The Negev, south of Israel, is a vast desert. The way it's all set up with these channels and so forth. It's eroded by the wind. And I mentioned this before. Those kind of places in which they're saying in our country just now, thunderstorms. It's been dry for a long time. You know what's coming next? Flash flooding. If you've had a period of dryness in the ground, it's hard as concrete.

The rain just bounces off it. And that's your next fear. No one's going to rain and heavy. Okay. Chances are you're going to get flooded. I'm trying to get my head around the whole muscle-brah anti-flood scheme that I've discovered since I've come back that seems to be a big thing now. And you've got videos, and we're watching this, and wee drawings, and wee models to stop the flood coming. But when God does this, he can do it suddenly. He can pour out a blessing that will appear like a flood. And that would just overwhelm you and fill you with joy. He can do this. He can change hearts, and only the Lord can really do this. Ezekiel 36. This is what the sovereign Lord says, On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and your ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated. Instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it, they will say, This land that was waste has become like the Garden of Eden.

The cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited. Then the nations around you that remain will know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt what was destroyed, and have replanted what was desolate. I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will do it.

Don't try and bless yourself. You cannot. It's too big. You can't restore your own misery, your own joy. Only the Lord can do it. Come and say, Lord, come and break up my ground.

[36 : 48] Do whatever it takes. Come upon me suddenly. Bless me. Give me this joy. Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, Isaiah 64. For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, when you came down and the mountains trembled before you, I want something that I don't expect from the Lord. The Lord will do this for his glory. Do you want your joy restored?

Ray Ortlund, in his book *Revival Sent from God*, says this, One of the marks of our restoring work of God among his people is this explosion of fresh joy.

Our stiff, stilted worship is swept away as a mighty wave of joy, industrial-strength joy, washes over God's newly liberated church. Our mouths are filled with laughter and our tongues with songs of joy. It's not just about reminiscing. It's about praying and seeking the power of God in our lives personally and our life as a church. The third P is pressing on. You don't just pray and seek the power of God. You press on. And two images are given to us in this psalm. One is rain after drought, which we've already considered. The other one is harvest after sowing. Those who sow in tears, will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy. There's so much in this, isn't there? What does it mean to go out sowing? I remember as a young Christian, I used to witness to anything that had a pulse. And I used to have my pockets packed with tracts, all different tracts. Jehovah Witnesses, this one, that one, maybe somebody that's depressed, maybe somebody that supports Glasgow Celtic. I was like a gunslinger, going armed with all these tracts ready. I've got something for you, mate. And then I'd produce this tract. And I'll tell you, it's been a long time since I've had the joy of doing that. I remember one time, I was reminiscing, you know, look at the time, why was it going? Anyway, I'd sinned against the Lord, and I really felt as if

I'd wandered from the Lord, I'd lost my salvation. I'd done something. I'd gone out and got drunk. That's what I'd done. I might as well tell you, when I was a very young Christian. And I thought, I've lost my salvation. And I goes, I better go to the prayer meeting on Wednesday, because they'll be talking about me if I don't go. And I thought, well, I don't know why, because I'm only going, I'm going to jack us in anyway. So I went. The prayer meeting was amazing. And for some reason, I still had the tracts in my pocket. Not only was I restored to the Lord, I was actually walking down the center of the train, handing out tracts to everybody, chatting to everybody. And the joy that I felt coming back to my house in Glasgow, because the prayer meeting was in Blantyre, the joy that I had getting off at Glasgow Central, and just, was just amazing. And that's what the Lord can do. I've wondered, it's been a long time since I've felt that joy, witnessing to others, I know I have to do it. And sometimes, you want to attract me, you want to attract. And I'm as miserable as they are. But just to have that joy is, isn't God great? Here's something for you to read, and I'll pray for you, and whatever. Whatever it takes. You just lose yourself in God, and in the moment. And it's quite something. So I came across that verse when I was handing out tracts, because there were times I felt I was sowing with tears. Lord, this is hard work. And I kept thinking, but I'll weep, and there'll be songs of joy. And that kept me going. Sowing seed, carrying the Word of God. It can be that. It can be just sowing God's Word. It can be gospel ministry, Sunday school, whatever. You're doing it, but you never see any fruit. I used to witness to a bunch of folk in Suckey Hall Street, in a flat in Glasgow, that I used to live in. And they all hated everything that I said. And there was a Muslim girl. She never said anything. She would sit in the communal kitchen, and never listen to a word, as I thought. Years after I left, she bumped into my sister, and said, you are John's sister, aren't you? Can you tell him that I became a Christian? After some of the things that he said, you've not have. I floated for weeks in the end after that. I had no idea. I thought she never heard a word. She was a Muslim. This guy may get saved. She would never get saved.

[41 : 21] She has her own religion. And she was the one that responded. And you never know. You never know when you serve the Lord, how the Lord will bless. It might be even godliness. Just all your obedience, all the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace. Our love is towards God and towards ourselves.

Joy is a thing for yourself. Peace is a thing for yourself. Forbearance, long-suffering towards others. Maybe you think, Lord, I'm finding it hard to love this person. Keep at it. Keep at it.

Faithfulness, keep pressing on. It's quite something. Here speaks of the psalmist. It's hard work, tears, sowing with tears, weeping. Those who do this will one day reap. I'm looking at the clock. I'm finished.

It's seven o'clock. What have we said? Do you want to know times of joy? Relive. Relive your own history, the history of this church. Desire it again. Remember, rejoice. Remember what it felt like. But come to God in prayer. Seek his power and continue to press on. And who knows what the Lord will do for us in our own personal life and the life of the church. I apologize for going over.

[42 : 43] I was not weary at the time. The clock doesn't mean anything, really. It appears. It's just there for decoration. Next time, next time, I'll finish earlier. Let's close by saying, our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for this psalm. Lord, it's a personal psalm. It's a heartfelt psalm. It's a psalm, Lord, where the psalmist is going through a hard time and he looks back, Lord, and he

recalls and he wants that joy restored once again to him and to the nation.

And Father, we pray that we would be honest enough to examine our own hearts. Lord, perhaps it's been a long time since we have known that joy and that peace in believing, that desire to make Jesus known.

Lord, you have our duty, but Lord, you want our delight. And Father, we pray that we might delight in following you even this week. Lord, encourage us in our own quiet times, in our own devotion, in our own walk with you. Be to us what we need, we pray, in the coming week. We thank you that we have a great God and a great gospel and a great Savior. Help us to make him known to the world. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you, folks.