

Lesson #2 – Joy and Faithfulness: *Our Strength*

Part I – Joy!

¹⁰ Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” Nehemiah 8:10

In this lesson we learn...

- What is joy – as opposed to “happiness”
- The danger of being a “grouchy servant”
- How joy gives us stamina in affliction
- How to cultivate joy in spite of the difficulties of ministry



What is joy?

- A happy feeling inside?
- The satisfaction of pleasant circumstances?
- The thrill that makes us “jump for joy” and beam with smiles?

;Not quite!

Definition: Joy is a positive attitude and hope-filled, optimistic disposition based in the goodness and faithfulness of God.

How is joy different from happiness?

- An attitude we can choose, more than a feeling we experience
- Based in a faith-filled and hopeful perspective
- Depends on God more than circumstances
- Springs from *the security of knowing that God is in control* and can bring good even from evil
- Accompanied by *praise and thanksgiving* for God, regardless of the situation
- *Hopes in the promises of God* rather than visible evidence
- Knows that our *efforts in ministry are never in vain*
- A type of *spiritual discipline*, and can be cultivated as such

Don't be a grumpy servant!

When we serve out of obligation, it feels like a "forced kiss."

Ever had the following experience? You greet a little, three-year old child, and the parents command the child to greet you with a kiss.

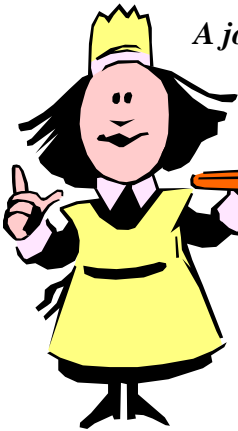
"No. I don't wanna kiss her!" Protests the child.

The parent gives the child a little whack and speaks with a stern tone: *"Kiss her!"*

The child, flowing with alligator tears, presses his quivering lips to your cheek.

Now how does that feel?

A joyless minister is like a grouchy waiter.



Have you ever had a waiter who hates his job? He wears a permanent scowl and grumbles under his breath with an aggravated sigh when you ask for a re-fill to your coffee cup. You feel that you have inconvenienced him tremendously by your very presence in the restaurant. How does the food taste in that kind of atmosphere?

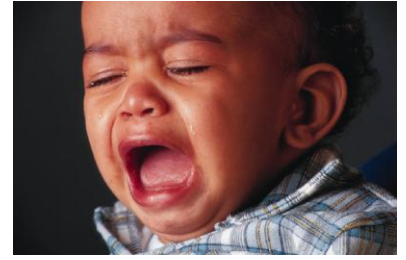


Now imagine a very different waitress, who enjoys her job thoroughly and approaches every situation with playful humor. She smiles naturally, makes jokes, and seems genuinely to enjoy making you happy. She seems to feel privileged to serve you, as if you were doing her a favor by allowing her to do so! Her cheerful demeanor is contagious! *Now how does the food taste?*

Joy sets the tone of our ministry – adding a "bounce" to all we do!

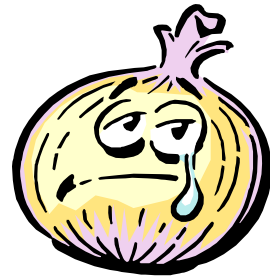
Heart Check: Does your ministry reflect joy?

- Do you often find yourself serving reluctantly – dragging yourself along?
- Do you have a grateful spirit, thanking God for the opportunity to serve?
- Do you tend to see the cup half empty or half full?
- Do you often serve without praying, using your own efforts?
- Do you sometimes feel like a victim – that others take advantage of your kindness and burden you unfairly?
- Do you serve more from obligation than enthusiasm?
- Do you sometimes feel that you are spinning your wheels, serving constantly without accomplishing anything?
- Do you find yourself complaining more often than not?



Luke 15 – God invites us to share His joy in ministry

The syndrome of the “older brother”



The heart of God delights in the salvation of sinners. He invites us to share this heavenly joy!! In the parable of the prodigal son we meet a character who served diligently and faithfully, but without joy. This older brother was a hard worker, but lacked a true understanding of his father's heart and motivations.

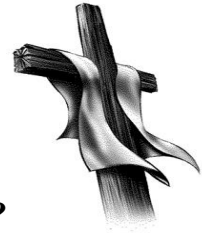
Read Luke 15 – *The joy of salvation*

How do we observe joy in the three parables? In each case, what provokes this joyful reaction?

Describe the attitude of the older brother while serving in his father's household. Luke 15:25-30

Have you felt like this older brother at times, ill-used, working hard without appropriate reward? Mention a situation in ministry when you have struggled with these kinds of feelings.

Joy gives us strength and stamina in affliction



1. How did Jesus bring himself to suffer the agony of crucifixion?

“...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

According to this verse, how was Jesus able to face the torture of the cross?

How can this same attitude help you to “push through” hard times in your ministry?

2. Example of Paul – Joy in prison!

a. *“If life gives you lemons – make lemonade!”* Read Philippians 1:12-26

Joy sees through spiritual eyes --



What do you do when things go wrong? The Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians while rotting in a Roman jail – all because of his faithfulness in ministry. Some spiteful and envious “brothers” were preaching the gospel in the streets with the express purpose of aggravating his maltreatment in prison. He lived under the imminent threat of execution for treason. (Preaching Jesus as “Lord” rather than Caesar). In spite of all this, he chose to rejoice and teaches us how to choose joy in the midst of tribulation.

According to these verses, how does Paul manage to rejoice in the midst of suffering?

b. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!” Read Philippians 4:10-13

It is possible to cultivate joy in all circumstances

According to these verses, what is Paul’s “secret” to joy and contentment in life?



c. We can en-joy our ministry! Delight in your spiritual “kids.”

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. 3 Juan 4

“For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? ²⁰ Indeed, you are our glory and joy. 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

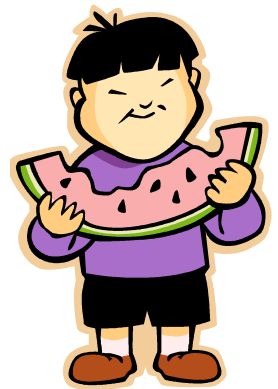
³ I thank my God every time I remember you. Philippians 1:3,4,6

Describe a specific joy-filled moment in your own ministry.

How to cultivate Joy in Ministry

Joy is an attitude – a discipline, and as such, can be cultivated.

- 1. Pray - Do not even try to serve God in your own strength!***
- 2. Love - It’s not about you!***
- 3. Remember Grace – It’s not about “earning points” with God!***
- 4. Thanksgiving - Resist the temptation to complain.***
- 5. Play and Rest - Honor the Sabbath!***
- 6. Establish appropriate boundaries - It’s ok to say “no” sometimes!***





1. Pray – Ministry without prayer is like rowing a boat against the tide!

When we stop praying...

- We forget to depend on God's power
- We minister out of our own strength and exhaust ourselves
- We lose intimacy with God in our ministry

When we pray

- We draw supernatural energy from Jesus, the Vine (John 15)
- We feel a new power as we serve
- We enjoy God's company as we go about our service

2. Remember to love – And forget about yourself!

When we are wrapped up in ourselves....

- Our problems are magnified

When we take time to think about others...

- We "lose ourselves" in service
- We regain a positive perspective
- We align ourselves with God's motivation in our service
- The "good vibes" come back to us



3. Remember God's Grace - We are sons, not slaves; daughters, not do-gooders!

When we minister under the law...

- We serve out of obligation rather than love
- We think we need to earn God's approval
- We see ourselves as employees and God as a tough boss
- We view ourselves as superior to others because of what we do
- We feel that we have never done enough to please God

When we minister in God's grace...

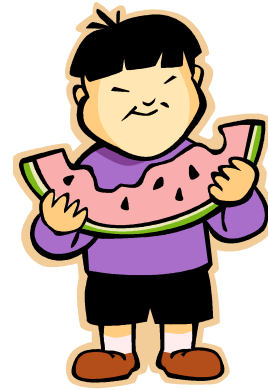
- We know that we are privileged to serve God, not only "duty bound"
- We remember that God is our "Daddy" and we are his "child"
- We remember that God accepts what we do in His name, however insignificant or imperfect it may be

4. Remember to play! - Observe the Sabbath!

Joyful people do not take themselves too seriously.

Take a good “Sabbath” with the Lord to renew your soul...

- Spend time in nature
- Read a good book
- Spend leisurely time with loved ones



5. Thanksgiving – Quit yer complainin’!

Example of Paul and Silas – From prison to praise!



²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. Acts 16:23-26

Complaining...

- Finds the negative in any situation (the cup half empty)
- Sees itself as having a “right” to something better at all times

Thanksgiving and praise

- Finds contentment in what one does have, rather than dissatisfaction with what one does not have
- Recognizes that everything comes from God
- Recognizes that none of us “deserves” anything, and thus appreciates each blessing as a gift of God’s grace

6. Establish Appropriate Boundaries - Remember that you are not the Christ!

When we fail to set appropriate limits...

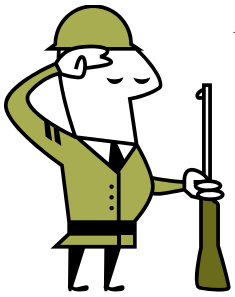
- We fear disappointing others
- We say “yes” to everyone
- We ultimately feel victimized by the excessive demands of others
- We resent the unrealistic expectations that we feel others have of us
- We neglect our emotional, spiritual, physical and family health

When we use appropriate limits...

- We remember that Jesus is the savior, and we are not
- We do not try to have everyone “like” us
- We serve willingly, and not out of obligation, to please others

Think of those times when you lack joy in ministry. Which of these practices, mentioned above, would you like to use more often to cultivate joy in your service? Why?

Part II: Faithfulness – *The reliability of our ministry*



¹⁰ *“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. Luke 16:10*

²⁴ *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace. Acts 20:24^a – Paul*

In this lesson we consider...

- *What it means to be faithful in practical ways*
- *The qualities and practices of a faithful servant*

Definition: *To be faithful is to be reliable, conscientious responsible and trustworthy.*

“Faithful Servant” – *The best title a minister can carry*

Have you heard of the following characters from the New Testament? They all have something in common...

Timothy (1 Cor. 4:17; Eph. 6:21); ***Tichicus*** (Col. 4:7); ***Epaphras*** (Col. 1:7); ***Onesimus*** (Col. 4:9); ***Silvanus*** (1 Pe. 5:12); ***Antipas*** (Apoc. 2:13)

They may not be famous, but each is called a ***“Faithful Servant!”***

A Faithful Servant is...



- *Trustworthy* Keeps a commitment.
- *Tested* Overcomes obstacles without giving up
- *Conscientious* Fulfills responsibilities to the best of his ability.
- *Clear* His “yes” is “yes” and his “no” is “no.”
- *Detail oriented* Considers the various aspects of a project.
- *Punctual* Arrives early!
- *Thorough* Does not leave a job half done
- *Excellent* Does not settle for “good enough.”
- *Dedicated* Throws himself into the work, heart and soul
- *Responsible* No excuses
- *Pro-active* Takes initiative without being told what to do
- *Diligent* Gives 100%

A church sexton: *Example of a Faithful Servant*

Reliable Rick

Rick maintains the physical plant of his church. Every Saturday evening, without fail, he stretches elastic chords, attached by clamps, across the full length of each row of seats. Not a seat will be out of alignment for the next day’s worship service. He sets up boxes of Kleenex on each side of the sanctuary, vacuums the carpets, sets out the stack of bulletins at the usher stations, and cleans the bathroom. In all of these tasks, he is completely alone in the building, working quietly and methodically. Very few of the hundreds of people who will pass through these spaces the next morning will know who prepared the setting, but this does not matter to Rick. He relishes this time of solitude and the anonymous nature of these tasks. He senses God’s smile and attention to each detail that he prepares, and feels himself to be worshiping in profound silence. Before retiring for the night, he double checks the locked doors, tests the lights to see if any bulbs need replacement, and sets the temperature for the next day. No one has assigned him the specifics of these tasks; no one supervises him; and no one will check up to be sure all is done well. No one needs to.

The next morning he will arise early to sweep the sidewalk, or shovel and sand in the winter. Even when sick or tired, he will be there, preparing God’s house for God’s people. If he is traveling, he takes the initiative to assure that others will fulfill these tasks with the same ethic of excellence and care. No one ever utters the phrase; “Where is Rick when you need him?”

He is a man of his Word. A man of excellence. A faithful man.

Mention some specific examples of faithfulness in Rick’s ministry.

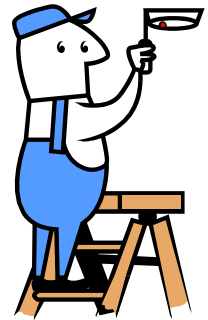
1. _____
2. _____



3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

If you paint a wall....

is it obvious that a Christian painted that wall?



Heart check: *Are you a faithful minister?* – Ask yourself...

- Do you make excuses when you are not able to fulfill a commitment?
- Can people count on you to complete a task or a project?
- What about when you feel tired or unmotivated? Do you tend to give up?
- Do you require excellence of yourself, or do you settle for “good enough.”
- *If you are a children’s Sunday School teacher*, do you always show up when it is your turn to teach? If something unavoidable comes up, do you give advance notice to the Sunday school supervisor? Do you prepare your lessons well or do you improvise?
- *If you are an usher*, when you go on vacation do you contact your team leader to find a replacement?
- *If you are a cell participant*, do you arrive on time to the meetings?
- *If you are a musician in the worship team*, do you rehearse well and pray beforehand?
- *If you are a cell group host*, do you take time to arrange the room comfortably before the participants arrive?
- *If you are a contractor or maintenance worker in the church*, do you take pride in a job well done, or do you settle for shoddy workmanship that people might not notice?

***Our faithfulness is rooted in God's faithfulness!
God is Faithful – worthy of trust!***

..... to help keep us from falling...

¹³ *No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.* 1 Corinthians 10:13

⁹ *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* 1 John 1:9

.. to fulfill His promises

²³ *Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.* Hebrews 10:23

¹¹ *And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise.* Hebrews 11:11

We can count on Him! Mention an example of God's faithfulness in your life.



The practices of a faithful minister

1. The faithful minister pays attention to the “little things.”

²¹ *“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’* Matthew 25:21

In your own ministry, what are some of the details which make a big difference?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

2. The faithful minister speaks with actions, and not only words

Parable of the two sons

²⁸ “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

²⁹ “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰ “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

³¹ “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. Matthew 21:28-31

3. The faithful servant is tested in times of struggle and opposition

¹⁰ Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown. Revelation 2:10

Mention a trial or difficulty in your ministry that could tempt you to “give up.”

4. The faithful servant does not seek public recognition

²² Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵ Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism. Colossians 3:22-25

If you serve in a ministry that feels un-noticed, why keep going?

Review Questions

Define “joy” _____

How is joy different from “happiness”

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List some practical ways to cultivate joy in ministry.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____.

Mention some qualities of a faithful minister.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____

In your ministry, what is a specific way in which you desire to be more faithful?
