

Consider it Joy

We are in a series on the Book of James. James was Jesus' half-brother. Last week we talked about one word....Consider....this week we are going to move ahead two more words. Consider it Joy. Many believers don't understand the concept of Joy. Maybe because it is so hard to be happy these days when we look out at our world.

We all have to admit that this has been a challenging few years. Future years look like they will be challenging too. So, we turn our thoughts to God. Some looking for answers, some demanding an explanation and others not even sure of what to ask.

I think most of us are just tired of it all. We have had so many areas of our lives changed. The circumstances seem to keep changing. Recently, someone told me that I didn't seem very happy. The reason is simple....I am not. I don't like my circumstances. I don't like what has happened to America. I don't like what has happened to our national leadership.

I don't like what has happened to our schools...I don't like what has happened to churches...I don't like racist organizations trying to force me into their definition of truth..... I don't like how Covid has impacted our culture and our lives. I don't like it.....I don't like it...I do NOT like it Sam I Am.....And speaking of Dr Seuss...well...that brings up a whole nuther thing.

I am one very unhappy person right now. The world I dreamed of is gone....A world that shoots the finger at God is here. People are telling me what I am allowed to think....what I am allowed to remember about history and even how I am supposed to address males and females. God said He made them male and female. That is enough for me. They try to tell me that parenting is no longer the job of parent but rather the government.

Our schools no longer educate they indoctrinate. People who are confused about their sexuality want to disseminate that confusion to children. No one is responsible for their actions because they are all victims. People claim to be triggered by every thought, action or emotion. Laziness and irresponsibility are now a disorder rather than a sin.

Disney is no longer a safe place for children, or adults for that matter, and no where near the happiest place on earth. Every moral failure is now a genetic disorder or disease....Calling a sin a sin is now a hate crime. Acknowledging any differences among us is now racism. Crime is apparently no longer a crime and criminals are now victims. Judges seem to no longer judge and prosecutors no longer prosecute. Police are now handcuffed and criminals are ruling the streets.

There are 340 Million Americans today and we can't find two reasonable candidates to run against each other for President. Our children, if they survive the libraries, social media, schools and Disney are being destroyed by drugs and their future ruined by alcohol. I literally cringe when I think about the world that we have left for my grandchildren

So.....No I am not happy. Not happy at all. Welcome to my 2023 Rant. But let me tell you something.....I have never in my life been more full of Joy. My joy is overflowing. I don't know what to do with all of it. In fact, in my life happiness and Joy seem to always be at opposite ends of the spectrum.

I would go farther and say that my joy seems to be dependent upon being unhappy. It is through the difficult circumstances of this last year that I have drawn closer to God. Since my world makes no sense...I have sought God's perspective and plan....and in that my faith is off the charts....my understanding of what God is doing is becoming cemented....and my joy is blowing up. I see the big picture....and I like it. I am pumped about what God is doing in our world.....I just struggle living in it.

We come here every week to celebrate Jesus. We celebrate a moment in History that has not yet been erased.....when the most horrible event ever to occur....revealed the glory of God....and flooded us with Joy. No one who followed Jesus was happy with the circumstances around His death and resurrection.....but they would lone day understand the Joy that it would bring.

So you may have realized by now that Happiness and Joy are not the same thing. In many ways they are opposite. They come from different places....they produce different responses...and we will see that people pursue one or the other but not both.

If you pursue the happiness of the world....you will never find true joy. If you pursue true joy you will never find happiness in this world.

I think that is why James started his letter with the following words.

James 1:2 (ESV) 2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

We spoke last week about our choice. We get to decide how to perceive the trials that we face on this earth. We can either see them as burdened curses or spiritual opportunities for God to shine through us.

James says, consider it or count it as joy....If Joy is not happiness...then what is it?

Notice that James says my brothers....the joy He is talking about comes only from God. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Those who have not surrendered to Jesus can't experience it. It is one of the gifts that flows straight from God to us.

If you are new, let me tell you about Spiritual Fruit Jesus promised those who trust in Him... That they would receive the Holy Spirit... And the Holy Spirit would manifest in their lives.....certain changes That Paul called Spiritual Fruit The Evidence of a life transformed by Jesus Is that His followers would produce in their lives.... Supernatural changes....

Galatians 5:22–24 (ESV) 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

We have said that we want more of these things in our lives Jesus taught us that He grows fruit in us if we abide in Him... But abide is not just spending time with Him It is surrendering your

plans for His Desiring what He wants more than what you want. Getting His perspective....and then surrendering to it.

A critical point that I want to make sure we all remember... You can't grow Spiritual fruit on your own.... You can will yourself to be more loving...joyful...peaceful You can make some effort but it will always fall short... That is why you have not been able to do it yet. These are Spiritual Fruit They are grown only by the Holy Spirit of God

Our lives, if surrendered, become the garden....the soil.... That God can use to manifest himself through us. The only way we can produce true...

Love...joy...peace...patience...kindness..etc Is to walk in step with Holy Spirit To live in the Spirit...moment to moment. Some of those moments are trials...and James tells us in those moments focus on joy.

I watch odd TV shows.... And I must admit....Locked Up Abroad.. I find Locked up Abroad fascinating...and I have no idea why.

It is the exact same story every time... Different person...different country...same story. If you have seen one...you have seen them all. Yet I keep watching. They get arrested trying to smuggle in or out contraband. It never seems to go well for them.. They are thousands of miles away from home... Locked up...chained....desperate....fearful...

I find myself wondering about their first phone call maybe it is a letter.... How do you find the words?... To express the feelings that you have.... When your life has been turned upside down... Your worst fear has come true.... And you don't know if you will ever be going home again? What would you say?

Locked up Abroad You may not know this but the first episode occurred in 62 AD

A Man named Paul had gone abroad... Leaving behind friends in Phillipi, Galatia, and Jerusalem He was carrying what many considered to be contraband. The Gospel Message of a martyr named Jesus Those caught distributing this message were put to death...

He was imprisoned in Rome In just 2 years Rome would burn and Nero would see to it.... That Christians did too. Paul likely knew that He would never leave Rome alive. He was Locked Up Abroad...in a place... Where some Christians burned on stakes to light the streets. And others were fed to lions to entertain the masses. Turns out he would never leave Rome.... Being beheaded just 3 years later.

So I wonder...what were his words to those he loved? Fortunately we have the prison letters of Paul Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon

Picture Paul in his cell.... Dark....empty...full of people in despair... Like the prisons we see in Locked Up Abroad... He is chained to a prison guard.... No freedom....bad food... Failing health....few visitors... God could have prevented his arrest...but didn't His circumstances likely could not get much worse... From his perspective it would be easy to think God had abandoned him He needs to let those he loves know what has happened to Him.

Paul asks to write something and they allow it.. Imagine the guard looking over Paul's shoulder as he writes to people in Philippi. You know they must have screened letters going out. Imagine the prison guards pouring over Paul's letter.

Can you imagine what you would write? Imagine what would be on your heart? Think about the uncertainty...the fear...the anxiety... Paul was going to be a martyr. He knew it. Unless a miracle happened....He was in a Roman Prison.....look at how He pours out all the emotions that are flowing through His heart.....

Philippians 4:4 (ESV) 4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

Where does that come from? If you were locked up abroad....are those the words that flow from your heart? Can you rejoice always? The guards must have thought he was crazy. They had never seen these words from any other prisoner. This one was obviously planning on pleading insanity.

Could you have joy and contentment... In the midst of such a setting? If we were honest...most of us would say no... We couldn't be happy in those circumstances...

In fact some of us...aren't happy at church today... Are already upset....maybe about the parking... Perhaps you didn't like breakfast... Frustrated with the person.... Volunteering....to serve you in our kitchen ministry Maybe the worship set was not what you wanted... Perhaps too soft....or too loud..

Maybe you were hoping for a younger or older pastor... Perhaps hoping for a break...from me. Maybe it is too cold...or too hot....the chair is too firm or too soft. Maybe somebody got here first and sat in your seat. Maybe you have just finally had your fill of orange carpet and it happened today. Joy might not be at the top of your list today.

So how did Paul do it? His circumstances were much worse than ours... Yet we complain....and Paul rejoices...

Have you ever thought that maybe Paul was a psycho with a pen? He did seem to have a masochism side of him He seemed to relish opportunities to suffer I always picture him with weird wide eyes... Hair all frizzed out.... Always had something bandaged.... Or broken Eyes darting all around.... Pressured speech.... Amped up on Macedonian Red Bull He was always writing kind of crazy stuff. Maybe he was just a nut....

Paul was either crazy or he knew something worth discovering. Interesting that they said the same thing about Jesus... Either lunatic or Lord. He was either crazy or knew something the rest of us should pay attention to.

Paul wrote to his friends in Philippi The book cleverly called Philippians. It only has 4 chapters.... Yet in those 4 chapters....written from Prison.... He uses the word Joy 11 times.

Most of us would understand if Paul was not joyful.... His life was full of pain, suffering and agony. Let me remind you of Paul's "How I spent my summer...Story"

2 Corinthians 11:23–27 (ESV) 23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Where in this list would your joy have checked out? My ability to find joy...likely would have checked out on the first lash... Of the very first beating...
Stoned....shipwrecked...adrift at sea...danger..danger danger... hunger..thirst...not food...cold... And now he can add to that.... Locked up in a Roman prison....under Nero.... the real lunatic. Not exactly building blocks for how we would build a life full of joy

But what is joy exactly? We tend to confuse joy with happiness. But Joy and Happiness are two totally different concepts

They come from 2 completely different sources... Happiness, a human emotion, comes from the world around me... Joy, a supernatural fruit, comes from the Spirit of God.

Happiness should be called Happenness because it comes from what is "Happening" to me. If things are going well for me...good things happening to me... Then I am happy. Anyone can find happiness for a while... It all depends upon what is happening to you... If things aren't going well for me....then I am unhappy.

Joy on the other hand... Is represented throughout Scripture... As a profound...compelling...quality of life That seems to transcend our circumstances... It is a divine dimension of living....given to us... Because He who is divine is living in us..

The Hebrew word means to.... Leap or spin around with pleasure. Implying gladness....bliss...and celebration. Joy is different; joy goes deeper. Joy is when your whole being sings because you have caught a glimpse of God at work. Joy can creep up on you and surprise you in unexpected places. This might be a news flash to you.... God never promised to make you happy...

Happiness was kicked out of the garden with Adam and Eve. Despite what some slick preachers teach.... Your happiness is not on God's radar screen. God is not here to make you happy He never once promises you happiness. In fact...if you are happy all the time....something is wrong.

Jesus said " in this world you will have troubles" He even says that each day of your life...you will have trouble. Every day has enough trouble of its own...

If your outlook depends upon your circumstances.... you are going to wear yourself out...trying to find what is the illusion Of continual happiness. Because happiness

depends upon your circumstances... And we live in a world that is fallen....and full of trouble.

God did however....promise Joy. And Joy has nothing to do with your circumstances and everything to do with your Savior. Joy is not a feeling it is a state of being. Joy is not a feeling...it is a state of being.

The Spiritual fruit of Joy comes only from the Holy Spirit... It is only available to those who have surrendered to Jesus. Like all the Spiritual fruits...you can't decide to make it happen. You can't make yourself joyful....not the kind of joy God promises... In our flesh...you and I...can't experience... God's kind of Joy.... Without some supernatural intervention. The power to have a heart of Joy is made possible only through the Holy Spirit.

The Power source for Joy in your life is there.... But you have to decide to flip the switch.... To surrender to Jesus...develop deep roots. Allow Him to point out the weeds.... To show you what is choking your joy... To agree with Him on removing those things...and prioritizing Him. So His joy can flow through you to others.

A lot of people experienced happiness that First Easter Sunday. Their circumstances suddenly changed. Jesus was alive! They didn't understand it, they didn't recognize what was happening, they didn't connect the dots of what God was doing Supernaturally....

All that they knew in that moment was that Jesus who had been crucified miraculously was alive. They were extremely over the top happy. But what they did not have was Joy. Joy would come later as they connected the dots....after they permanently received the Holy Spirit....Only with the guidance and understanding that the Holy Spirit would bring to them would they be able to rise above the horror of the last few days and find Joy in it.

The last few days for the disciples of Jesus had been a roller coaster of....don't miss this.....emotion. They were riding their emotions. Going from the lowest lows to the highest highs in 3 days. Their mood and emotion driven to and for based on what happens to them. That is all they could do. But supernatural gifts of the Spirit are not driven by emotions. In fact, and this is a key point, finding joy...the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit...has nothing to do with whether you are sad, happy or anywhere in between.

Circumstances in your life could completely change and joy is not impacted at all. This is true for all of the Spiritual Fruits. They are expressed regardless of what happens to us in this world because they don't come from this world.

The love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and all the rest are all manifested in us almost in spite of our circumstances. We express love when the world says we should hate. We express kindness when the world says they don't deserve it. We experience God's peace when the world says we should be despondent.

If Spiritual fruit from the throne of God could be limited by the events here on earth, then they would not be from God.

In fact, it is our circumstances that set the stage for the Spiritual fruits. Supernatural Joy is hard to see when everything is going well....The joy is there all the time, but difficult circumstances seem to

highlight the undercurrent of Spiritual fruits. Joy is a deep current that flows in a river and may not be seen on the surface. It is the deep consistent steady flow that is independent of things affecting the waves and the surface. Joy is a state of being not an emotion.

I said at the beginning that for me this year has brought a lot of unhappiness....but an incredible amount of Joy. When all of my circumstances align and I am happy.....I don't really connect with God in the same way as when they don't. It is the frustration, anger and sadness that comes from the circumstances of my life that draw me into the intimate moments with the Spirit. They move me to discover what God is doing.

Understanding how works helps us during difficult times. Every time someone comes to me to pray for them about a situation in their life....I always pray that God allow us, in the midst of these terrible events, to rise above them and allow God to be glorified through their response.

Let me share with you an example of how horrible circumstances when placed in the life of a Spirit led believer brings glory to God.

When I think of a modern day Paul.... Someone who has suffered so much.... And yet keeps pointing to and worshipping Jesus. Who from the prison that is here life...writes of Joy.. I think of Joni Eereckson Tada

In 1967 as a 17 year old teenager...she dove into shallow water in the Chesapeake Bay
She immediately became a quadriplegic... Paralyzed from the neck down.... Completely dependent upon others. She spent several years...wrestling with
God....severely...suicidally depressed

One of her 48 best selling books... Was her autobiography...."Joni...An unforgettable story of a young woman's struggle against quadriplegia and depression:" Has been distributed world wide...and in 1979 she starred in a feature film..simply called Joni.

Joni learned to paint with a paint brush between her teeth.. She has inspired many with physical disabilities and told them of God's great love Through her foundation Joni and Friends...PHOTO 1

At the age of 60....some 43 years after her diving accident.... Joni was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Listen to these words... "I can't believe that after all I have been through...after all the struggles...43 years in this wheelchair...completely dependent....can't feed myself...can't do anything without some else's help....I can't believe that God would give me breast cancer. What have I done that has made Him so mad? What kind of God picks on those who are weak and paralyzed? How in the world can I serve a God that is so cruel...so mean...? My life was already bad...now...I will never know joy again."

Those might be words...but they are NOT Joni's words...

Let me read to you what she actually said....Photo 2 "I want to assure you that I am genuinely content to receive from God whatever He deems fit for me even if it is from His left hand because better something from His left hand than no hand at all, right?"

Where does that come from? Not from us....not from Joni... Those words come from the Spirit of God living through Joni

Steve Bundy is a close friend and Leader at Joni and Friends... Listen to what he said about Joni...

"It's who God has molded her to be after 43 years of suffering and 43 years of her surrendering to the will and call of God," he continued. "You're seeing a woman surrendered to God, saying 'Lord, here's my life, take it and use it. I trust in You and if that's quadriplegia and it's a wheelchair, I surrender to that. If it's cancer and whatever the outcome might be, I surrender to that."

He continues... "It is an attitude of surrender," Bundy explained. "It is also an attitude of trust in the character of God and the goodness of God."

Joni may struggle with happiness but she is full of God's Joy. It is her state of being....she is a joyous person who is often unhappy. In fact, the circumstances that seem so stacked against her are the very ones that highlight, define and grow her joy.

Like every other Spiritual fruit, supernatural joy begins when our circumstances overwhelm happiness. It is when we get to the end of our flesh....our ability to respond...that we see God's supernatural....Super...Natural...beyond us.....gift kick in.

The Spiritual Fruit of Joy... God's joy....becomes evident to others.... When He empowers us to genuinely celebrate.... Circumstances we could never celebrate on our own. That is why it is supernatural.

Joni said this about her relationship with God. "I have learned that the weaker we are, the more we need to lean on God; and the more we lean on God, the stronger we discover him to be."

It is evident that Joni spent a lot of time... In the Sanctuary...in the quiet place with God... Developing roots...surrendering to Gods' plan...God's perspective. Allowing Him to pull what must have been huge weeds.... Of disappointment, doubt, distrust, anger...and others.

Joni positioned herself...she died to herself daily...to allow God to flow through her. During the last year. Joni had and survived Covid 19....incredible.

So what is really going on here? What did Paul and Joni know that so many of us have not embraced? Where did they learn to find joy in horrible circumstances?

Well...they saw it in Jesus. They saw the Spirit of God....God Himself....rise above human circumstances all the time. Jesus never let His Circumstances impact His joy.

Jesus modeled what it meant to live in a fallen sinful world without being influenced or defined by it. He walked through a sinful fallen world full of the Spirit. Jesus lived a Spiritual life in the world...He connected with others in the world...but He was never of the world. The things of this world could not really change the deep undercurrents of His Spirit.

It was as if the events He faced weren't good or bad, He seemed for the most part to have no anxiety about anything, He had emotions and expressed them (sorrow, grief, anger, happiness) but the events of this world never seemed to shape who He is or what He is doing. The events of earth seemed to be the backdrop of a much bigger picture in His life.

Jesus saw the ups and downs of human life through only one lens. How do these events give me an opportunity to glorify the Father and reveal Him to those watching?

Jesus didn't ride the roller coaster of human highs and lows....He just noted them and used them for a higher purpose. Sometimes it seemed that He lived above human tragedies...and He did....that is point of being Spirit led.

People who have learned to live in the Spirit, who are deeply connected to Jesus, are more focused on using their circumstances to reveal and glorify God then they are on getting out of their circumstances. It is an attitude of...."God, if it is your will that I go through this, then lets do it well. Use me in whatever circumstance you desire to bring glory to You and draw those around me to the truth. I will go through anything, anywhere, at any time....If that can be accomplished." We see God in Joni's life because of her circumstances....We see God in Paul's life because of his circumstances....People will see God in your life because of the circumstances God allows in your life.

People who are not led by the Spirit of God pray "God get me out of this!" People who are Spirit led pray "God please don't waste this" I saw it all time, when it comes to His children, God never wastes pain."

On that First Easter Sunday, Jesus was full of Joy. Everyone else was riding the emotional roller coaster of the events that were unfolding. It is all that they could do. They did not yet have the full understanding that would come from the Holy Spirit.

So when we look at the Death and Resurrection of Christ we find Joy in Him.....Happiness at times in others.....but the Spiritual fruit of Joy will be seen in Christ.

Have you ever thought about your last meal? The last meal you will eat here on earth. Years ago someone decided that people on death row....get to choose their last meal. Do you know what meal you would choose? Do you think you would be too anxious, nauseous, or fearful to eat it? What if your last meal was the absolute very best of the very best...with your favorite people....a banquet...a celebration....would you look forward to that meal?

You think about that meal and you think, "Yeah it could be a great meal, but it is a LAST meal. Eat this and then you die." No one on earth it would seem would look forward to that meal like a Child looks forward to Christmas Eve dinner.

Have you ever heard anyone longing to get to their last meal quickly? They would have to be nuts right?

The night before Jesus was crucified....just hours before his execution began. Immediately before the lashings, the beatings, the mocking, spitting, cursing, salt water on wounds, crown of thorns, rejection by the people, abandonment, separation from the Father.....Immediately before Jesus was

to face the worst circumstances every endured by any human....He strolls into a celebration banquet.....Looks at his disciples and tells them....

Luke 22:14–15 (ESV) 14 And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. 15 And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

I have earnestly desired.....Earnestly desired....The original word in Greek...the one used here....By Jesus....is a deep longing, a burning desire, a healthy but lustfull desire.

I have waited for this meal...this last meal of mine on earth...I have longed for this moment like spouses long for her wedding night. What is Jesus talking about? It is Passover....This is the Passover Seder....the Passover meal....and He will be the Passover lamb....slaughtered and served up for mankind.

Jesus knows the circumstances that await Him. He knows that the prophecies must be fulfilled. He even says I have longed for this meal before I SUFFER....He is about to experience the worst day any human has had....ever. His human earthly circumstances shout run, fear, panic...But His Spirit....calmly engages the moment with joy. Supernatural...form the throne of God Joy. Jesus is living a Spiritual heavenly life in this fallen world.

When we hear people speak about the Joy of Easter.....we think of that Sunday Morning when they realized that Jesus was alive. But that wasn't joy....that was happiness. Humans responding emotionally to wonderful circumstances.

Joy.....is seen as Jesus rises above the circumstances and truly celebrates Passover all while knowing He is the sacrificial lamb.

Joy is seen as Jesus rises above the circumstances and stoops as a lowly slave to wash the feet of those He loves.

Joy is seen as Jesus rises above the circumstances and prays in the Garden.....begs the Father to find another way....and then submits and surrenders to the Father's Will. That moment does not come from earth...It is the supernatural fruit of Joy.

Joy is seen as Jesus rises above the circumstances and tries to raise Peter above his circumstances. More concerned about Peter and his growth than Himself and Peter's betrayal.

Joy is seen as Jesus rises above the circumstances and rather than focusing on the pain of crucifixion focuses on the eternal salvation of the man next to Him.

Joy is seen as Jesus rises above the circumstances in the midst of torture and pain and cares for His mother.

Joy is seen as Jesus rises above His circumstances while falsely accused....false tortured...and dying....still has compassion on His enemies and prays for their forgiveness because they don't know what they are doing.

Joy is seen as Jesus rises above His circumstances and from the cross loves His enemies so much that he preaches a sermon by quoting Psalm 22.

Joy is seen as Jesus rises above His Circumstances.....tells Satan to go to Hell....and victoriously walks out of the tomb because it never could contain Him.....death never had a hold on Him and would never have a hold on His followers.

In every one of these and so many other incredible moments.....the circumstances predicted one action....and Jesus did the opposite. The circumstances tried to draw him into defining the moment based on His human perspective, but Jesus rose above those limitations and saw the moment from God's perspective. Every event was an opportunity to bring Glory to the Father. Every event was an opportunity to show God's Spirit and reveal His glory.

Jesus showed us over and over....how to live in the Spirit. How the Spirit will lead us to glorify God no matter what circumstances we encounter.

That sounds great....but how do we do that exactly? I am not being crucified or being served my last meal, but things feel just as hopeless...my life is really a mess....I just want it to end. Let me share with you from God's Word....the way out.

In Pauls' prison letter to the Philippians, after telling us to rejoice in all circumstances....God through Paul gives us 4 Keys to Supernatural Joy

1) We must always keep an eternal perspective

When life gets tough.... You feel persecuted for your faith... Your health is not good You hit a huge speed bump in life... You need to remember to keep your attention focused.... On eternity

Philippians 4:4–5 (NIV) 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

The Lord is near....He is in the circumstance with you. You can be calm and gentle in the midst of the storms of life because the Lord is near. You must first remember to have an eternal perspective on what is happening in your life rather than an earthly one.

When you hear yourself telling someone, "Do you know what they did..." stop and refocus....rise above them and ask God what He is doing in that moment.

You need to remember to keep your attention focused.... On eternity Paul says...The Lord is near This world is not our home... Christians should be known for their joy and happiness... We should be having more fun than anyone else...

John 10:10 (NIV) 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Christians should laugh harder... and love stronger than anyone else Our past has been forgiven...our future has been settled. When we surrender to that truth...when we see our lives

from God's perspective. When the Lord is so near...that His spirit is living through us... We can go through life with Joy

The more we become like Christ the more joyful we are.

God has a sense of humor and the Spirit of Joy and so should we. Dallas Willard said this... "You will not understand God until you understand this....God is the happiest and most joyous being in the universe"

People should know us for our joy..... Joyful people know they will not be truly happy until Jesus returns... But they have joy because they know that day is coming. They live with an eternal perspective...

Like Joni they decide each day to surrender... They wake up with the attitude of the Psalmist..

Psalm 118:24 (ESV) 24 This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

2) Express Thanks and Stop Worrying

Easy for you to say... Not my words...God's through Paul... look at the next verse.

Philippians 4:5–6 (ESV) The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

We are to take our problems to the Quiet Place... We are to take them to Jesus in prayer... It is in that quiet place that we get God's perspective... When we live our lives as if we are the center of the plot We invariable lose our joy Rather than walk in the Spirit.... We live a "woe is me life"

Do you know people like that...their life is only about them? No matter what the situation... It is bad..woe is me... They live their lives...from one disaster to another Always comparing...always seeing only the negative. never content... Woe is me... These people brighten up a room....by leaving it.

People who bear the name and image of Christ.... Should never allow woe is me... To define them. But you may be thinking....Frank you don't know my story.... And you are right....I don't... But if you know Jesus....I know the end of your story. And I know that because of that...woe is NOT you.

What Paul teaches here is humanly impossible. "Don't be anxious about anything..." Have you tried that one? Tried to will yourself to be carefree? Tried not to worry?

Worry is not one of the spiritual fruits... However... Worry though is the warning light that God is not first in your life. Because worry says that God is not big enough to manage my problems

Paul tells us not to worry or be anxious about anything.... You don't have that kind of power in and of yourself. Just like you don't have the power to love everyone... Do you see the word "but" in this verse...

Don't worry about anything...but in everything... Go talk to all of your friends and get their advice.. That is not what it says...

Who do you make your requests to? God How? in prayer..and yes with pleading But do you see the attitude? With thanksgiving.... 2 little words that change everything

Thankfulness is not one of the Spiritual fruits....but I think it is the fertilizer. Develop deep roots...pull weeds....add lots of thankfulness Three key steps toward juicy fruit. Thankfulness helps us gain God's perspective. In our flesh we tend to focus only on what is wrong.... Note that Paul says it is ok to take to Jesus what is wrong.... He says to present your requests to God. But we are only to do that...in the context of remembering what is right.

No matter what is happening to you.... Begin listing what you are thankful for.. Start with... You don't have to spend eternity in Hell You don't have to earn your salvation You don't have to go to the cross for your sins You never have to go through anything alone... Build your list from there.

You see because we know the ending.... We don't have to be too concerned with how the plot unfolds. In the end we win.

Let's look at the promise... Philippians 4:6–7 (ESV) 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Paul tells us that if we go to God with thankfulness.... If we make our requests known... Regardless of what happens to our requests... Regardless of if our circumstances change... The promise is that we can know peace...in the midst of chaos. It is not our peace...it surpasses all understanding.

But look at why God gives us His peace.... To guard our hearts...and our minds... Do you see the word "guard"? You only have to guard what is being attacked. It is during difficult circumstances.... That Satan begins to try to grow weeds of doubt... Doubt in God's protection...sovereignty...love. It is in those moments when he tries to get your focus off on Jesus and on your circumstances.

Satan's battlefield is your mind... It is the only place he has any influence in your life. He tries to entangle you in the weeds of doubt...anxiety and worry... He came to destroy you... He tries to get you to focus on what is wrong...rather than what is right. He wants you to be fearful of your future...rather than trust the One who actually holds it. He wants you to trust in you...rather than Jesus.

He lies to you.... Trying to convince you...that you cannot have joy... Until you have control It is one of his oldest lies.

God may never change your circumstances... In fact they may get a lot worse.... But for those who know Jesus...those with deep roots... Your joy does not ride the roller coaster of your circumstances... Because the joy you have is not yours.... Did you notice who guards your heart and mind? God promises to guard your heart and mind... In Christ Jesus...

3) Dwell on the Positive instead of the Negative

Philippians 4:8–9 (ESV) 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

One of the keys of living a life full of juicy fruit and joy.... Is to pull the weeds of negativity. If you are constantly exposing yourself to negative thoughts Surrounding yourself with critical people It will suck the joy out of your life.

Colossians 3:1–3 (ESV) 1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

You may have to pull weeds.... Perhaps some TV shows need to be turned off Maybe some magazines need to be left behind If you find yourself in a negative situation.... Remember Joni and ask God to use you in that mission field. Ask God to give you His joy for your situation. God give me your smile so they can see you. Somehow through me?

4) We need to rely on Christ in spite of our circumstances

Philippians 4:11–13 (ESV) 11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

We need to make sure that we never forget the source of joy There is a huge difference between a joyful person and a joyless person A Joyless person believes that they can only have joy.... When all their circumstances line up perfectly When I get a spouse...when I get that job.... If I can only have kids...if I never get sick...when the tumor is gone....when I am in remission..... When I can take that vacation....buy that house...

Paul says...I know what it is like to have what I need And that is not the secret to joy
Paul says...I have learned the secret to Joy...to contentment...to happiness... It is reliance upon Jesus Christ Paul is trying to tell us that our joy is not dependent upon our circumstances.... But rather who is with us...during our circumstances.

Do you know what an oxymoron is? Two contrasting words.... Jumbo Shrimp....Partially complete..Sure bet....short sermon Let me point you to another oxymoron.... Joyless Christian Is that even possible?

Could there be a Christ follower..... Who doesn't have the joy of Jesus in them? The Christian's joy is based solely on an internal relationship with Jesus. It has nothing to do with our circumstances.

Remember that the Spiritual fruits are guaranteed to those who abide in Christ. Abide in me and you WILL produce much Fruit. It is a promise.

So if you don't have joy....the problem is not because of your circumstances....the problem is because you are not abiding in Christ.

You may be thinking.... I don't have that in me...I mean if I was paralyzed like Joni I couldn't muster up joy....my life would be horrible. I don't think I could do it.... You are right.... Everyone knows you couldn't do it.

That is why Joy is a Spiritual Fruit.... Genuine joy independent of your circumstances... Comes only from the Holy Spirit working through you... No one notices joy or happiness when everything is going well... It is during trials...during horrible times... people expect you to shake your fist at God. And yet you are filled with Joy.....Jesus' Joy... And everyone knows it is not you....but rather something much bigger than you...

The Joy you express is Jesus' And Satan wants to steal your joy...by getting you to focus on your circumstances. If your joy has been stolen....you have allowed it.

I want to close by looking at a promise from Jesus.

John 15:8–11 (ESV) 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Christ followers have the Joy of Jesus flowing through them... The are full of Joy....Joy..FULL And it has nothing to do with their circumstances.

Please process today these words of Billy Graham... "One of the fruits of the Spirit is joy. You might not be able to work up joy yourself, but God the Holy Spirit living inside of you can produce this joy supernaturally, and a Christian is to have joy. That's one of the great characteristics of the Christian is the joy that we have, and if you don't have this joy and if you don't have this peace that Christ gives, you had better search your heart and find out if you really know Christ.

If you are a follower of Christ.... And not experiencing His joy... Something is terribly wrong. The proof that you are trusting and connected to Jesus... Is the juiciness of your spiritual fruit. I don't know what you are struggling with today... I don't know what circumstance threatens to steal your joy But I do know...that there is a God...who created you in His image.. He is with you through every circumstance of your life...

The circumstances of your life...have overwhelmed you..but not God. It is in your weakness that you discover His strength The more you lean on God....the stronger He becomes... And in the midst of horrible circumstances....you discover His joy. The more

you identify with Jesus' suffering....the more you will identify with His Glory. Peter said it this way...

1 Peter 4:12–13 (ESV) 12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

This is the verse that I have gone to many times this year. The world rejected Jesus....they are rejecting us. Worse circumstances are coming....they threaten our happiness....but they will define and reveal our joy.

We may never be asked to face what Joni faces every day... But if you know Jesus...you have the power to do it. That power has allowed millions of followers of Jesus... To face martyrdom ...illness...death... With Jesus' joy flowing through them It allowed Paul...when locked up abroad to write...from a joyful heart 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Philippians 4:4 (NIV)

So today...the circumstances of our world are messed up...I guess we should have expected that the last days would move toward Godlessness....You don't know what the next year looks like....You and I leave this room to face all kinds of circumstances....But circumstances no matter what they are....can't touch your joy....

James begins his message to the dispersed persecuted Christians all over the world with these incredible words.....Consider it Joy, my brothers, when you face trials of various kinds....Don't seek happiness....pursue God's Joy growing in you....Let's Pray.