

Where is Joy Found?

I Thessalonians 5:16

Introduction

In the pharmaceutical industry – antidepressants are a cash cow – raking in over \$17B / year - - - this indicates amongst other things - - - that we are a society with a number of people who feel the need to boost their mood

12.7 % of Americans [1 out of 8] are on some kind of antidepressant medication [Prozac / Zoloft] – and the numbers are growing

There is an ongoing controversy in the field over the use of anti-depressants

Irving Kirsch is a professor at Harvard Medical School – wrote a provocative book titled *the Emperor's New Drugs – exploding the antidepressant myth*

He refers to some research trials conducted to secure FDA approval of a new drug

Kirsch: 'We found that although the people given antidepressants showed considerable improvement in the clinical trials submitted to the FDA by the manufacturers, so did the people given placebo, and the difference in outcome between drug and placebo was below the criterion for clinical meaningfulness used by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), the organization that sets treatment guidelines.'

Kirsch: 'The difference in improvement between drug and placebo is not clinically meaningful.'

i.e. – we have no scientific proof that the drugs are actually responsible for any improvement – this is an ongoing debate in the field

The booming antidepressant industry is one of several signs pointing to a growing need in our society

We need to know where to find joy

Most people in this world desire to be happy or joyful

Blaise Pascal [17th cent.]: 'All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end.'

This morning – in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians – he simply tells Christians to 'rejoice always'

Is this practical?

How do we do this? / Do we have any control over the level of our joy?

ESV study Bible: 'Joy in Paul's letters is a basic mark of the Christian and a fruit of the Spirit. It is often associated with the firm hope of the Christian.'

Randy Alcorn: 'By being happy in Christ, we lay claim to the fact that God is bigger than the Fall and affirm that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will reverse the Curse and reign over a new universe.'

There have been a number of books as of late on the topic of happiness – clearly it is a topic people are interested in [Max Lucado / Randy Alcorn]

The Happiness Project – by Gretchen Rubin – spent over 100 weeks on the NY Times Bestseller list

She set out to explore 12 different ways of seeking to increase her own happiness over a 1-year period - - - and to blog about her results

One month was devoted to exercise / dieting – boost energy
One month was – a bigger focus on her marriage / relationships
One month – personal growth / reading
One month – just on having more fun / vacation
One month – spend money on something frivolous

She billed the book as an explanation of, 'why I spent a year trying to Sing in the morning, Clean my closets, Fight right, Read Aristotle, and generally have more fun.'

Why do this?

Rubin: 'Research shows that happy people are more altruistic, more productive, more helpful, more likable, more creative, more resilient, more interested in others, friendlier and healthier. Happy people make better friends, colleagues and citizens. I wanted to be one of those people.'

Happiness is worth pursuing – because it makes one a better person

Striving to be happy is not a selfish act – because happy people lighten the load of others

One of the ways you bless those around you – is thru your own happiness

Of course – there is also a catch - - - because we are sinners - - - we don't always find happiness in the right things – or look for it in the right way

The pursuit of happiness – if misdirected - - - can become an excuse for sinful behavior

I was not happy – therefore I . . . [fill in the blank] – people end up making very poor choices in their pursuit of joy / happiness

We do need to know where to find joy

Paul will take us there this morning in his letter to the Thessalonians

I. Choose Joy - v. 16

We are called here to rejoice always – a choice is to be made to do this – not unrelated to faith and trust in God

This is an exhortation given to Christians – and we find this calling to rejoice sprinkled throughout the Scriptures

Psalm 118:24 - 'This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.'

This is a day God gave you – so rejoice in it

Some people try to make a distinction between joy and happiness - - - but the biblical languages don't really bear that out – there is no need to make a distinction between happiness and joy

If you are happy in the Lord - - - that is joy in the Lord

Where we do make a distinction - - There is a kind of happiness / joy - - - that is completely dependent upon worldly circumstances – that is not what Paul is calling for here

We are called to rejoice in the Lord

Philippians 4:4 - 'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!'

This reminds us:

- 1) The believer is called upon daily to choose joy - as part of their walk of faith
- 2) The believer has an inexhaustible supply of joy in the Lord

3) We do need reminders at times to rejoice in God

There is never a reason to be a sour Christian

Gloomy Gus / Sour Sally - - - they don't have to stay that way

What they do need - - - to sink their bucket into the deep well of the Holy Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit is joy

Gal. 5:22 - 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace . . .'

Negativity and sourness come easily to the flesh – [no Holy Spirit required for it!]

Gretchen Rubin: 'Because of a dark element in human nature, we're sometimes provoked to try to shake the enthusiastic, cheery folk out of their fog of illusion - to make them see that the play was stupid, the money was wasted, the meeting was pointless. Instead of shielding their joy, we blast it. Why is this? I have no idea. But that impulse is there.'

Negativity / sourness is always as near as the flesh / old nature

Biblical rejoicing is about having joy in the Lord - - - not in earthly circumstances

People sometimes make the mistake of thinking that joy is all about having the right things – or having circumstances fall into place

I'll have joy when I finish school - - get this job – or when I get a boyfriend / girlfriend / when I get married – or when we have kids – or when the kids leave home / etc.

There is a kind of happiness – that does not require the Holy Spirit at all – it's temporal / grounded in earthly circumstances

Worldly joy is happiness when the sun is shining / the economy is booming / you just won the lottery!

Oh, what a beautiful morning

Oh, what a beautiful day

I've got a beautiful feeling

Everything's going my way

But – that's not the way life always goes – and that is not joy in the Lord

J.C. Ryle: 'To be truly happy a man must have sources of gladness which are not dependent on anything in this world . . . The man whose happiness depends entirely on things here below, is like him who builds his house on sand, or leans his weight on a reed.'

If we look to circumstances to make us happy - - - we will be disappointed – because we are not always guaranteed pleasant circumstances

John 16:33 - 'In the world you have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world.'

Spurgeon: 'If the Lord be your joy, your joy will never dry up. All other things are but for a season; but God is forever and ever.'

How important is joy to your Christianity? [1-10]

*** Learning to rejoice in the Lord is not peripheral to Christian living - - - it is essential

We are creatures who seek joy or happiness - - - and if we do not find it in the Lord - - - we will look for it elsewhere – or do foolish things in the pursuit

*** People often use a lack of happiness as an excuse for sinful behavior – [Why did you do that?] - - - 'I was not happy - therefore I turned to the bottle – or had an affair with the pool boy – or quit school / quit job / quit going to church / or abandoned my spouse and 10 kids' - - - they can fend for themselves – I need to be happy!

In fact – I had a childhood friend – whose parents got divorced when he was around 12 - - - and this was a piece of advice his dad gave him - - - he said: 'never stay where you're not happy'

Larry has never been in a long-term committed relationship in his life

The problem with that is legion

Every marriage / every relationship / every societal arrangement [job / school / church / etc.] - - has challenges - - elements of unpleasantness baked in – due to the fact that we are sinners

If we use the 'happiness factor' as an isolated barometer in all such things - - - we will never commit to anything or anyone [except maybe Disney World] – and we'll get tired of that after a while too!

Such an approach short circuits growth and maturity - - - and ultimately runs counter to true joy

Randy Alcorn: 'By being happy in Christ, we lay claim to the fact that God is bigger than the Fall and affirm that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will reverse the Curse and reign over a new universe.' [Happiness]

*** Christian joy in the Lord is something that transcends and rises above earthly circumstances – it is a position we lay hold of thru faith

Habakkuk 3:17-18 - 'Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food. Though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the stalls, Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.'

What is Habakkuk saying? He is choosing something [joy]

Life throws curve balls at us – sometimes we get hit by them!

Wind storms that blow down corn / viruses that hurt your business / diseases attack your body

Piper: 'When all the supports of human life and earthly happiness are taken away, God will be our delight, our joy.'

II. The Joy of Worship - Acts 16:22-25

Here is one example of Paul doing just what he is telling the Thessalonians to do

Paul was in Philippi – cast a demon out of a slave girl – created trouble

Acts 16:22-25

Paul and Silas thrown into a 1st century prison in Philippi - - - How do they respond? [doom and gloom?]

They turned the dungeon into a sanctuary – By worshipping God – expressing their faith

Circumstances may have been dark and damp in the dungeon - - - but they brought their own sunshine with them

Alcorn: 'an unhappy person finds unhappiness in the best of circumstances, and a happy person finds happiness even when things don't go well. What we take from every experience depends on what we bring to it.'

When you choose to worship / focus upon God - - - you bring your own sunshine with you wherever you go

Earthly trials and experiences are not able to stamp out joy

*** remind yourself of who God is / His power and love

Ed Welch: 'When you spend time in the throne room of God, it puts things in perspective.'

John Stott: 'Paul is issuing not an order to be happy but an invitation to worship.'

The best thing anyone can do to promote joy in their life - - - is to turn their focus to Jesus in worship

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace

In John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress – he portrays this life of faith – as Pilgrim makes his way to the Celestial city

On his journey – he meets all kinds of obstacles and diversions to faith

At one point he encounters the slough of Despond – and Doubting castle – ruled by giant despair / etc.

Once trapped in doubting castle – he languishes there for a time – but then it struck him – 'What a fool he's been!' - - - He has a key called 'promise' – when he takes it out – it opens the door of his dungeon and allows him to resume the journey

We have the promises of God – the promise of forgiveness of sin / promise of the return of Christ – the resurrection – the kingdom of God

We serve a living Savior!

We're fools to allow ourselves to be held in a dungeon – when we have the key to get out and go dancing - - - to rejoice

What is that key? The promises of God / the Scriptures

John 15:11 - 'These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy be made full.'

Psalm 119:162 - 'I rejoice at Thy word as one who finds great spoil.'

If we wish to increase our joy – spend time truly meditating on God's Word – [take a verse with you and return to it all day long]

There are a couple of other joy enhancers – we'll just mention:

- Gratitude is a joy enhancer

I Thess. 5:18

If we focus on what we are thankful for – that leads to joy

Satan was the first ungrateful / unhappy soul - - refused to be happy in God - - - he brought misery to the whole world

He recruited Adam and Eve to join him in his rebellion - - - and left them in their sorrow

When you hear a voice that tells you that you have no reason to rejoice - - - that is not the Holy Spirit

MLJ: 'it is because we listen to the devil instead of listening to God that we go down before him and fall before his attacks.'

Write down things you have to be thankful for – and thank God for those throughout the day

Make a gratitude journal

He who neglects gratitude - - - will find joy elusive

- Another joy enhancer is service

Galatians 5:13 - '... through love serve one another.'

Max Lucado: 'Make your happiness dependent on how others serve you, and you will always be disappointed. Find happiness in serving others, and . . . Well, you can complete the sentence.'

Go serve someone - - - it's good for you / healthy / joy enhancing

Max Lucado: 'Make a big deal out of yourself, and brace yourself for a day of disappointments. Make a big deal out of others, and expect a blue-ribbon day. You will move from joy to joy as you regard other people's success as more important than your own.'

Joy is enhanced by serving others

Conclusion

I remember one year – in 7th or 8th grade English - - - some of the kids pointed out to a teacher in class that she never smiled [they were not nasty about it] – I think they were just trying to tell her to be happier – might make English class a little more bearable!

- - - she seemed to force a smile a few times after that – but it was uphill

Where do you get your joy?

[Good News]] *** When a sinner goes on a quest for happiness - - - he may not be far from the kingdom of God

Rom. 14:17 - 'For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.'

We were made for joy – lost it thru sin

When the sinner turns to His Creator and asks where to find joy - - - the Father doesn't point him to a bottle / a pill or to any earthly circumstances - - - He points him to His Son - - - and says - - - this is the way back to joy little children - - - to the Garden / to the tree of life – to the river of the water of life

Jesus came to save us from sin and make us forever happy in Him

He came to undo the effects of the Fall - - - and all the misery that came with sin

He invites us into the banquet hall of His grace - - - where fellowship with God restored thru the blood of the cross

Randy Alcorn: 'Longing for the happiness humankind once knew, we can be drawn toward true happiness in Christ, which is offered us in the gospel.'

Christ died for sinners – bore their sins on the cross - - - rose again from the dead

When the sinner calls upon Him in faith – 'Jesus – save me from my sin'

God takes away our sin and puts a song of redemption and victory in our hearts thru Jesus