

How Our Joy May Be Full!

Steps For Increasing Joy In Our Lives

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The only thing people have ever valued as highly as precious metals and gems is their health. Those with poor health would give up all the money they have to be healed of terminal sickness. At that point, they realize that the material possessions that they have are worthless.

There was a time when essential oils were considered more valuable than gold, thousands of years ago, because they were effective against disease. Through the ages, people knew from experience, that the essential oils were more powerful than the dried or fresh herbs. People came to realize how important these essential oils were to them and how effective they were in helping the healing of individuals. We know, today, that many of us have used oil of clove, which has long been used for toothaches and such things.

This brings to mind the woman and her husband who interrupted their vacation to go to the dentist. This is somewhat light hearted, but I think we could use that at this point.

"I want a tooth pulled, and I do not want Novocain because I am in a big hurry," the woman said.

"Just extract the tooth as quickly as possible, and we will be on our way."

The dentist was quite impressed. "You are certainly a courageous woman," he said. "Which tooth is it?" The woman turned to her husband and said, "Show him your tooth, dear."

Science is now beginning to acknowledge the value of the healing substances found in essential oils. Clinical research has shown that all essential oils are highly anti-viral and anti-infectious.

I want to give you a little background on essential oils as we move into the sermon. A recent study, done at Weber State University, has proven that four essential oils will kill 100% of the bacteria and viruses in any room where these oils are being diffused.

Essential oils are the subtle, aromatic and volatile liquids extracted from the flowers, seeds, leaves, stems, bark and roots of herbs, bushes, shrubs and trees, through distillation. They are natural, God has created them, and placed them in these plants.

According to ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics and Chinese manuscripts, priests and physicians used essential oils, thousands of years before Christ, to aid in healing the sick. They are the oldest form of medicine and cosmetic known to man. There are close to 200 references to oils in the Bible.

The Wise Men brought the Christ child gold, frankincense and myrrh. (Clinical research now

shows that frankincense oil contains very high immune stimulating properties.)

In Exodus, God gave Moses the formula for "an anointing oil".

Exodus 30:22-30 Moreover the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Also take for yourself quality spices—five hundred shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much sweet-smelling cinnamon (two hundred and fifty shekels), two hundred and fifty shekels of sweet-smelling cane, "five hundred shekels of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive oil. "And you shall make from these a holy anointing oil, an ointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer. It shall be a holy anointing oil. "With it you shall anoint the tabernacle of meeting and the ark of the Testimony; "the table and all its utensils, the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense; "the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base. "You shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them must be holy. "And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister to Me as priests.

We see there, a very high importance placed on that oil that was used for this purification process.

The use of oil symbolized gladness and joy, while its absence indicated sorrow or humiliation. Similarly, oil was used as an image of comfort, spiritual nourishment, and also prosperity. Overwhelmingly, the oil most referred to in scripture, is olive oil.

Some of the more precious oils that have been used since antiquity for anointing and healing the sick, are frankincense, myrrh, galbanum, hyssop, cassia, cinnamon, and spikenard.

I would like to add a caution here, at this time, about modern oils. Today, not all essential oils are created equal. In fact, many, if not most of the essential oils on the market, are what are called "perfume quality" or "4th and 5th quality oils". These inferior quality oils are usually found at Health Food stores, or through discount mail-order suppliers. These are over-processed, chemical-laden, highly adulterated products. I want you to know that this is not a plug for you to go out to the Health Food store and buy essential oil, but as you see it will tie nicely into the rest of the sermon. Those oils that we buy today, are basically cheap perfumes made from various odorous plants. They contain little, or none, of the beneficial therapeutic qualities of pure essential oils.

I have tried several of these essential oils, and mixtures of them, over the last five years or so, and have found that they work in varying degrees, for the specific purpose for which they were designed. Sometimes, the oil will work for its purpose and sometimes it will not. I remember Mike Ford telling me one time, that his grandson got into one of their essential oil mixtures of "Peace and Calming," and it was all over the bed, and they could not stay awake, because it was so calming and it had that effect on them.

There is one essential oil blend, in particular, that I would like to mention today. Not to

convince you that you should try them, but for the purpose of introducing the sermon topic for today. It is the "Oil of Joy"! Believe it or not the "Oil of Joy" is mentioned in scripture.

The purpose of this blend of oils called "Joy" is to relax the body and mind, and bring about an enhanced sense of well being and security. "Joy" is a blend of these ten oils: 'Bergamot', 'Ylang ylang', 'Geranium', 'Rosewood', 'Lemon', 'Mandarin', 'Jasmine', 'Roman chamomile', 'Palma Rosa', and 'Rose'. I have been putting it on my feet for the last few days to see how well it would work, because somebody gave us a packet as a gift. I can admit I have been more cheerful and I do not know if I can credit it to the oil. But, there is a problem with men putting that oil on and it comes in the word "rose". When you first put it on you smell like a lace hanky. I would like to ask Mike, Geoff, Ted, and some of you other men not to call me a lace hanky after this sermon. It does dissipate very quickly, and also that is why I put it on my feet, and not on my cheeks. The point is, that there are many different essential oils that can be used for various purposes and they do work. It is something that God has put in the plant that affects the body in a good way.

The effect that this blend of oils is supposed to have on the body, is that it opens the adenoids and the adrenals that may have shut down due to grief, anxiety, or stress. It does have an actual mechanical, so to speak, effect on the body. It encourages a feeling of well being and happiness from which it gets its name—JOY! I am talking here about the modern product that is called "Joy" that is an essential oil.

Interestingly, God does something similar to us, because He enjoys showing His kindness to those who love righteousness. He distinguishes the righteous person above his peers by anointing them with a precious "oil of joy". In the context of the glories of the Messiah and His bride the psalmist writes,

Psalm 45:6-8 Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions. All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia, Out of the ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad.

In a physical sense, this "oil of gladness" mentioned in verse 7 may have had a similar effect to the 'essential oil" mixture called "Joy" we have today (that is purely speculation, but I am sure it had a similar effect in that way.)

Ancient, kings, priests, and prophets, were consecrated to their offices by anointing; this signified the gifts and influences of God. Christ, signifies The anointed One, and here He is said to be anointed with the oil of gladness above his companions. So, the oil of gladness, or the "Oil of Joy" or joy itself, as a fruit of the Holy Spirit, is a gift of God.

None of His companions are ever represented as prophet, priest, and king, as He is. Some were kings only, prophets only, and priests only. Others were kings and priests, or priests and prophets, or kings and prophets. But none ever had the three offices himself, except Jesus

Christ.

And none, except Christ, can be a King over the universe, a Prophet to all intelligent beings, and a Priest to the whole human race. This shows that He is infinitely exalted beyond His companions.

'Gladness,' or, 'joy' is used to express the mood of the festivities that took place at the inauguration of kings. There we have the reason that the oil was called the "Oil of Joy", because of the gladness and the wonderful attitude that was represented at those inaugurations of kings.

With nearly four hundred instances of the specific vocabulary of joy and rejoicing, joy is a major theme in the Bible. While there is joy at a victory or a harvest, its overwhelming context is spiritual. And so, we read such statements as "the joy of the Lord is your strength", as I mentioned in my sermon earlier in the Feast, and "restore me the joy of your salvation".

Paul uses the Greek term '*chara*', meaning intense joy, in three ways in Scripture:

The first way Paul uses it, is progress in the faith on the part of the members of the body of Christ. This is cause for joy.

The second way that Paul uses it, is that Christian joy may paradoxically be the outcome of suffering and even sorrow for Christ's sake, since it is produced by Him and not by us.

The third way that Paul uses it, as joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Those are the three main ways that Paul uses joy in rejoicing in scripture.

In addition, it derives from love—God's and ours—and is therefore closely associated with love in Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5: 21-22.

But, since it is a gift that can be interrupted by sin, everyone who is faithful is called upon to share in the joy of Christ by living His way of life everyday with Him. We have to apply and practice Christian living everyday while rejoicing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His salvation.

Love is the relationship that unites us to Christ, as branches are united to a vine. Two main results stem from this relationship, and they are obedience and joy. Obedience marks the cause of our fruitfulness; joy is its result. Through active obedience we produce fruit. For example we keep the Commandments of God (this includes the right application of those commandments) producing good character and good works, and the result is a joyful life now and in the future.

Jesus intended that our lives should be both spontaneous and happy, rather than burdensome and boring. Obedience in carrying out His purpose is a guarantee of success. Jesus never planned failure for us, although He knew that we would experience it. He is there to help us through that and help us to reach that success that He has in store for us. In fact, He trained apostles and ministers to teach us that our joy may be full. We read earlier in the Feast that the apostle John expressed that several times in his writings.

The apostle John had the spiritual fruit of love for the brethren and it thrilled Him to see them do well!

III John 1, 3, 4 "The Elder, To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

Not only John and the rest of the apostles, but all true ministers of God have a great joy from seeing members of God's church witness and live the truth of God.

The truth was important to John, because it was important to Jesus Christ. Both of them loved the brethren, and loved the truth, and the result was deep joy! All truth has the effect of unifying people, because it is a reliable standard by which to live.

We see there that it is very important to have a good relationship with the brethren, with one another, and to have that love for one another that John so often expresses in order that we may have that fullness of joy. Joy logically follows, when we realize that the life of Christ in us is bringing forth fruit. We cannot produce spiritual fruit by our own strength. In John 15, we will see there how love and joy are perfected

John 15:9-17 As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. "These things I command you, that you love one another.

We see there, Christ equating joy with that love for the brethren, for one another. Jesus repeated His command to love one another partly because He knew that, in one sense, the future of the work of the church depended on our attitude toward one another. We see that in the breakdown of love for each other in our previous affiliation where once that love waned, and people became so self centered and so worldly oriented. The doctrines watered down and people were moved into apostasy.

In the loving relationship that unites us with Christ we live by unity instead of contention, trust instead of suspicion, and obedience instead of self-assertion.

The measure of our love for one another is that of Christ's love for us, which He demonstrated by His sacrifice. John realized the meaning of Jesus' statement and repeated it in his first epistle where he wrote:

I John 3:16 "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren"

Joy is the result of love!

Jesus used the word 'friends' to express His relationship with us! He defined friendship in terms of obedience. Christian friendship is more than a casual acquaintance; it is a partnership of mutual esteem and affection for each other.

Let me break into this and give you a light-hearted example of what can happen in a marriage without this mutual esteem and affection:

A husband and wife drove for miles in silence after a terrible argument in which neither would budge. The husband pointed to a mule in a pasture.

"Relative of yours?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. "by marriage."

Back to seriousness here. Jesus elevates us above mere tools and makes us partners in His work. The man and woman in this light-hearted example were not working together at that time and were not partners, and any work that they were doing was contrary to what they should have been doing. A slave is never given a reason for the work assigned to him; he must perform it because he has no other choice.

But, the friend, on the other hand, is a confidant who shares the knowledge of his superior's purpose and voluntarily adopts it as his own.

Jesus declared to us, that He has revealed all that the Father had given Him. By disclosing the mind of God concerning His purpose and plan, Jesus has given us assurance that we are engaged in the right work, and that God will ultimately bring that work to a successful conclusion.

The apostle John wrote his letter of I John in order to tell us how this joy, that is in us, may remain full in spite of what may happen to us.

The first thing we notice in I John 1, is the absolute centrality of Jesus Christ. John starts with Him; the first three verses are devoted to a description of Him.

I John 1:1-4 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that

your joy may be full.

You see there what John is equating to joy, and that is that fellowship among brethren. It is an absolute necessity that we have that fellowship with God the Father and Jesus Christ, and then in turn, we will have it with the brethren and vice-versa.

In the Greek, this word "full" means 'filled full', and our joy in this world is to be full in that sense.

We may live in a world that is under the influence of Satan, and we may have many bothersome things happening to us, even still, our joy is to be filled to the brim, true fullness without limit. That is because that joy is on a spiritual level, and we are able to rise above the sorrow of the world.

'These things we write to you,' John says, 'that your joy may remain full', not only that it may be, or become, but that it may remain full. Meaning that it is in existence in us and it continues.

Let us look at this idea of 'fullness' for a moment. When something is full, it has in it all there is space for, there is no more room for more. It holds or contains as much as possible. To be full is to have reached the greatest development, size, extent, and intensity. In a physical sense, we see this in the full moon. When the moon gets larger and larger—as the earth stops blocking the sun from shining off it—eventually it is as full as it can get and the only way it can go from there is to dissipate.

In a spiritual sense, fullness is the sum total of all that is in God.

John 1:16-18 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

The Greek word translated 'fullness' here in verse 16, is the noun form of the same word used in I John 1:4, in the phrase "*that your joy may be full.*" Fullness, here means completion. We see that once we have that full joy then we will be complete.

It is a word that Paul uses quite a bit. In Colossians 1:19 he says, '*that all fullness dwells in Christ*'. In Colossians 2:9, he says, '*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*;

He meant that there is, in Jesus, the totality of the wisdom, the power, the love of God. Jesus is therefore, inexhaustible. We can go to Jesus with any need and find that need satisfied. If you will remember from the first sermon, one of the conditions for having true joy is to have satisfaction. In Jesus, the fullness of God, all that is in God becomes available to us.

We will never know any joy until we know Christ. He is the source of joy; He is the fountain of blessings; everything comes through Him from the Father. So before John begins to discuss anything else, he talks about Jesus Christ.

It is Jesus Himself who communicates this joy, and it is the result of a deep fellowship between

the church and Christ Himself that develops this fullness of joy.

Christ is central, He is essential, He is the beginning and the end, and John has nothing to say to the world to encourage them unless they are absolutely clear about Jesus. It is through Christ that we have access to God the Father; and it is through Him that we have fellowship with the Father.

There is no joy and consolation without Christ. John says, if we believe on Him, the next thing (in order that we may always have fullness of joy in this world) is that we have mindful fellowship with God—abiding in Him and He in us.

We will never know this joy, and it certainly will not remain full, unless we have this fellowship. There are certain obstacles that tend to work against that fellowship and to rob us of it, of which we should be aware, because we are constantly bombarded by them.

The apostle John elaborates on four obstacles against fellowship, and its impact on fullness of joy.

The first obstacle that he mentions is sin—unrighteousness. Our refusal to acknowledge or confess our sin will interfere with our fellowship with God, because we know that sin separates us from God and it also separates us from the brethren. John tells us about this great joy; then he sobers us by showing us that this fellowship with God seems hopeless if we walk in darkness, or if we lie!

I John 1:5-6 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

Then, John tells us how it can be dealt with. If we do recognize and confess sin, then there is the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from sin when we repent. God is faithful and just to forgive our sins unless we continue to walk in darkness, for example we continuing to live the way of the world.

I John 1:7-9 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Obedience perfects the love of God in us!

I John 2:3-5 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever

keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

On an individual level, the repentant sinner, in Psalm 51:8, after experiencing the judgment of God, petitions God, "*let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.*" Joy can be the voice of recovery from a rebellious path of guiltiness, but there is repentance that is involved. Converting from rebelliousness to obedience always produces joy, especially if the Holy Spirit is involved. The presence of the Holy Spirit raises joy to a spiritual level.

The second obstacle against fellowship, that John talks about repeatedly in chapters 2, 3 and 4, is the lack of love for the brethren. If there is anything wrong in our relationship with God, we lose the fellowship and we lose the joy with both God and the brethren.

I John 2:9-11 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

And, if there is anything wrong in our relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we also lose the joy, and the apostle John works it out in a very subtle way. We lose contact with the brethren and we lose contact with God; we lose our love of God in the same way.

The apostle Paul worked to help others experience joy. He preached often about the importance of fellowship and he emphasized that we stand by faith. Joy is produced with the other fruit of the Spirit, such as love, peace and faith.

II Corinthians 1:24 *Not* that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.

We see the apostle Paul relating joy and faith as both being necessary. Joy is a by-product of life with God. It is a by-product of faith. It is not found by seeking it as an end in itself. But, God must be the one to give joy. Therefore, it is received by faith with the gift of salvation. This salvation aspect of joy can be seen when Jesus referred to a heavenly scene of angels rejoicing at the repentance of even one sinner.

When we live by faith, we not only know joy, but can live a holy life and be assured of salvation—even though we are still far from perfect. This assurance comes especially as we find ourselves learning to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

We have to control our thinking and develop positive, uplifting attitudes. Paul says to meditate on praise-worthy types of things. This positive, loving, gentle and kind relationship with each other produces joy. So if we have something against a brother, it is why we have to go to them and get it out in the open so to speak, and find out what is wrong, and work together to have that loving, kind relationship with one another. If you will notice when brethren are not happy,

quite often the reason is, because they are having a problem in a relationship with another brother or family member. They do not have that joy.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy— meditate on these things.

So, in one sense, in this scripture we are encouraged to look at others, and their fine examples, and meditate on what they are doing right, and learn from it. That is just one aspect of what this scripture brings out.

Paul shows us where our attention should be. His joy rested partly in his anticipation of the faithful being resurrected to meet Christ at His Second Coming.

I Thessalonians 2:19-20 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.

We see where the apostles received much of their joy. As I mentioned earlier, it was in seeing faithful brethren fellowshiping with them and growing in love with them.

For those of you who may be critical of the ministry at times, it may help you if you realize that God's ministers are always excited to see someone overcome a problem and always excited to come to services and speak with you and fellowship and enjoy what you have to say. We are always excited and pleased to talk with you on the phone. We would like to be able to e-mail you more often, but we are overcome with e-mails. I just want you to know that we do get great joy out of you and talking with you and we very much appreciate you.

The third obstacle, against fellowship, is a love of the world. These obstacles are very clear and they are very obvious, but it is helpful to be reminded of them. A love of the world, a lust for the world, a desire and craving after its pleasures and its whole sinful mentality. This, again is, an interruption of fellowship with God. We cannot mix light and darkness, we cannot mix God and evil. Therefore if we love the world we lose fellowship with God, and again we lose our joy. And we also lose that fellowship and joy with one another.

The apostle Paul warns us of this in military terms in II Timothy:

II Timothy 2:4 "No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier."

We cannot focus our desire on material things or on what the world can provide for us. We cannot allow ourselves to be enticed with the same spirit that society lives by in the world. We cannot make this world the object of our primary attention. We cannot permit ourselves to be

influenced by the catch phrases and emotions that prevail in the world. Christians must avoid pop culture at all cost.

If, in this sense, a person loves the world, it shows that he has no true faith in God; that is, if characteristically he loves the world, and lives for that. If it is the ruling principle of his life to gain and enjoy that, it shows that his heart has never been renewed, and that he has no part with the children of God.

I John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

You could add to that, 'his joy is full forever.' He who does the will of God, his joy will continue forever. Our eyes have not seen what God has in store for us. Our ears have not heard all that God has promised and reserved for us.

The fourth obstacle, to interrupt fellowship with God, is false teaching about Jesus Christ. Obviously, if the only way to God is through Christ, then anyone who has wrong doctrine concerning Christ automatically severs the intimate relationship we are to have with Him, and again we lose our joy.

I John 2:18-19 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

Thankfully, John does not stop at that. He tells us that there is a great source of comfort and strengthening: the Holy Spirit. The mind of God opens our minds and gives us strength and understanding of these things, John goes on to say, when he speaks of our anointing:

I John 2:20, 27 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

Paul emphasized this to the Corinthians.

I Corinthians 2:13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing

spiritual things with spiritual.

The apostle Peter warns us of destructive doctrines, and its effects on such things as we are speaking of this morning.

II Peter 2:1-2, 10-11, 20-21 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.

That is a very serious and sobering condemnation of "*those who walk according to the flesh.*" Do you have the full joy that the apostle John talks about? If not, maybe you are walking a little too much according to the flesh, maybe a little too much according to the lust of the eyes.

The apostle John tells us that the first essential to joy, is an understanding of our fellowship with God, and certainly understanding that love has to be there.

The second great essential to joy, in this life and world, is an understanding of the promise of eternal life. The third essential to joy, is an understanding of the life of God in us. That is the theme from I John 2: 28 to I John 3: 24

Again, in chapter 3, verses 4-9, John tells us that there are certain obstacles to this. Briefly, he tells us something of what this eternal life means, and the obstacles to this are the same things as before, except that John leaves out the obstacle of loving the world.

The first thing is sin— which is a failure to keep the commandments of God. This will always rob us of our potential for eternal life. When we live a godly life, we have this assurance and this happiness; but if we sin, we begin to doubt and to wonder, and Satan encourages us in this. We find that spoken about in I John 3: 4-9. There is nothing that so upsets our assurance and confidence as sin; the same thing that breaks fellowship with God leads to uncertainty about the Spirit within us.

The second thing that John mentions here, is lack of love for the brethren. He tells us once more what this means and he works it out in detail. A lack of love for the brethren robs us of joy,

because it creates doubts within us. We find John emphasizing that in I John 3:10-18.

Then, the third thing that John emphasizes again, is false teaching about Jesus Christ. If we become frustrated with His teaching, or confused in our understanding of Him, or we listen to human reasoning based on non-biblical statements about Him, we cannot have that assurance of salvation that brings joy, because "*every spirit that does not confess that Jesus has come in the flesh is not of God*" (I John 4:1-3).

So, in a sense, we see the same three obstacles as mentioned in the first part of John's letter. But, then again, he reminds us of the power of the Holy Spirit.

I John 3:24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit [that] He has given us.

John follows up these three obstacles with the encouragement that we have the mind of Christ in us, the Holy Spirit.

John exhorted us, and appealed to us, to practice these things in an active manner. From the beginning of chapter 4 to chapter 5:9, John tells us how to apply his earlier instructions, that we are to be sure that the spirit within us is the Holy Spirit of God and a false spirit is not fooling us. It seems like every year we see a false spirit fooling someone.

I John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

We are fully warned over and over again that we must have discernment, we must have the Holy Spirit that gives us that discernment, so that we are not fooled by any false spirits.

Since everything we have, has come to us because of the love of God, we have to make sure we are abiding in and practicing that love.

We have to make sure we are actively keeping His commandments, and that we are overcoming the world that is against us. John writes about this in the beginning of verse 5 of I John 5.

I John 5:5-9, John admonishes us to make sure we hold a true understanding of Jesus Christ and that we are in the right relationship to Him. Without a right relationship with Jesus Christ, and the brethren, we cannot have a true understanding of God's way of life and of how to apply the commandments of God

I John 5:10-21, John assures us that if we do all this, the result will be that we will have assurance that we are children of God.

I John 5:10 He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he

has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.

If we do these things we will have the witness in ourselves. Then, we will have confidence in prayer. So we see how all of these things are tied together. Without a proper love of God and of the brethren, and that proper joy in us, that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, we cannot raise up a proper prayer to our Father in heaven through Jesus Christ.

I John 5:14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

How encouraging a statement that is. If we do these things we will overcome sin and the world. The final result of it all is that we will know that we are children of God. Even though the world may be unstable around us we will still have that inner peace and that joy that no one can take away.

That is John's explanation of how we can have and maintain joy in spite of everything else that goes on around us in this world.

Foundational to John's teaching are the true teachings of Jesus Christ. Holding up his instruction are the doctrines of the church including Jesus' life, death and resurrection: atonement; forgiveness of sin; conversion; sanctification; obedience; faith, and truth. These are all things that John speaks about here in his epistle.

We have these spiritual absolutes to live by from God, even though we live in an unstable and unsure world where there are no fixed moral principles by which to live. At least for the world. So we see the world appearing to have a great time with their way and I know many of the young people are enticed by this, but we have to stay close to God and have a good relationship and stay close to one another. That is why independent Christians refuse to become part of the body and not have the same joy. There is a certain misery that they are experiencing. I am not talking about those who are forced to meet by themselves, who have a relationship with others, but I am talking about those who choose to.

John's message is essentially doctrinal. It emphasizes the importance of love and truth. So John tells us that we will never know this joy unless our beliefs are soundly based upon the foundation of truth rather than the erroneous traditions of men—for example the trinity, Sunday worship, infant baptism and so forth.

Jesus taught His disciples to look through the immediate adverse circumstances so that they could continue to be constructive, positive and uplifting to the brethren and to themselves.

"*Count it all joy,*" the apostle James wrote later in James 1:2, '*When you fall into various trials.*'"

So, we see with this spiritual joy, this gift from God, this fruit of the Spirit, why we can rise above the feeling that we have of misery and suffering and have this joy continuously. We have the hope of the resurrection and eternal life, and knowing that the life that Jesus Christ lived is also available to us with the help of the Holy Spirit.

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

Peter wrote this during some difficult times. Going through these trials we are not just to have a happiness, but we are to have an exceeding joy, because we know when we are going through these trials and sufferings that God is working with us personally and it is an encouraging thing.

Paul wrote, "*You ? joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.*" The apostles saw through the problem. It was a trial, not a catastrophe. It is very important for us to realize that when things hit us that is exactly what they are. God promises us that He will not put us through anything more than we can handle and whatever He puts us through He will give us the help to go through.

The apostles reminded the early Christians that, in spite of trials and persecution, they still had the Kingdom of God to look forward to. They still had each other, a very important point. The apostle John wrote, "*I have no greater joy, than to hear that my children walk in truth.*"

Joy is not just a fringe benefit of the Holy Spirit, given only so that we can feel better. It must flow through us, so that the joy we feel will also be felt by others. Once we have let God, with His Spirit, cheer us up, make us glad, give us that full joy, we then can help others in the same way. That joy will radiate from us just as that love of God does and should.

II Corinthians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

We see there, the principle that joy flows through us, it originates in God our Father, through Jesus Christ through, the Holy Spirit, to us.

You have probably had the experience to a greater or lesser degree of trying to comfort someone who has been through some terrible trial, only to come away feeling inspired yourself. I am sure everyone in this room can relate to that. Their courage and cheerfulness, which came through because they put things in true perspective, was passed on to you. So you have benefited from that, and in turn, we certainly want the brethren to benefit from the joy and the love that flows through us from our Creator.

The transition from mourning to joy is like turning weeping into dancing, like changing out of sackcloth into wedding garments. The transformation is easily seen to those who watch. And for the righteous there is the assurance that, "*those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy*".

Notice how Isaiah describes the coming wonderful World Tomorrow:

Isaiah 65:17-19 For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;
And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad
and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem as
a rejoicing, And her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, And joy in
My people; The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, Nor
the voice of crying.

So, we have that encouragement, we have that future to look forward to. Look how many times God speaks of joy and rejoicing in these few verses, as He describes the World Tomorrow. I think it is safe to say that the Kingdom of God has joy as one of its greatest attributes. God's people, as we prepare for that Kingdom, should also be developing that joy within us with the help of God the Father, its source.

Remember Christ's parable of talents, in Matthew 25.

The man who traveled to a far country is Christ Himself. He gave his servants, according to their abilities, whatever talents they needed to bring forth fruit.

Notice the way Christ defined the Kingdom of God. Upon his return, he told two of his servants who had multiplied the talents he had given them, that they had done well.

Matthew 25:21-23 His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' "He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

We see a direct equivalent of the Kingdom of God and that wonderful future with the joy of the Lord. That joy of the Lord is given to people who take the talents that God gives to them and who work hard to increase those talents. The talent that every last one of us have, is the talent to be able to talk with someone else. Some have that talent in a greater way than others, but we all have it. It is a talent that we should develop in a very encouraging, uplifting and inspiring way, with one another, so that we can also have that joy that flows from God.

Christ said, "*Enter into the joy of your lord*". This proves that to enter the Kingdom of God is to enter into this joy, in a complete and perfect way for eternity!

If we are baptized members of God's church, God has called us out of this world and has forgiven our sins. He has begotten us with his Spirit, which allows us to bear all the wonderful fruit listed in Galatians 5: 22-23.

If we continue, throughout our lives, to develop God's own character, then we too, will hear him say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant...? enter into the joy of your lord!*"

The gospel of Christ is a message of good news. It is happy, thrilling and joyful news!

Paul wrote in Romans 8:18 "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*"

The whole creation is waiting eagerly for you to become a spiritual child of God.

Most of our happiness or sorrow, as human beings, depends on the quality of our relationships with other people. Sin is the enemy of happy relationships. It causes strife, backbiting, distrust and separation.

But, as Spirit-filled children of God in His Kingdom, we will not be under this curse. With sin eliminated, relationships will flourish. Ideal human relationships will become reality in God's Kingdom.

Notice Jesus' prayer for all His followers:

John 17:20-21 I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

We do have an awesome responsibility to be at one with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and with one another, so that we give that true witness of Jesus Christ. Oneness, not dissension! Unity, not disarray! Truth, not deception! Respect, not ridicule! Concern, not neglect! These should be the banner that flies above God's people's heads.

Happiness and joy will permeate all of our associations and all of our friendships. We will be able to rise above selfishness to express love in all our actions. This is the way God conducts Himself. We certainly want that character and that attribute that God has.

Eternity is a perfect quality of joyful life that lasts forever. God keeps Himself happy. He surrounds Himself with enjoyable activities. King David wrote this:

Psalms 16:11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

We can be fully encouraged by the things that David writes about our future. God's desire is to share this pleasure with us. He enjoys family life and that is why He is expanding His spiritual family. Together, as His family members, we will worship God, rule, talk and enjoy activities together. This will bring ultimate satisfaction. Satisfaction is necessary for joy to be present.

Our work will be exciting, as we help direct the rebuilding of the earth. We will enjoy teaching people God's law, and the words that we offer will bring them real life. Their success will be our success and our joy!

There will be opportunities to learn, create and invent. Recreational activities will not be empty forms of sports, driven by pride. They will be exciting activities resulting in learning and

achievement.

Solomon said about this present world, that all is vanity and grasping for the wind. But, that will not be the case in the Kingdom. There will be great accomplishments, and God's righteous standards will be upheld.

Travel will not be the burden that we experienced on the way to the Feast this year. Whether you flew or drove, it was still a burden. Christ ascended to heaven and returned to the earth on the same day. Imagine being able to travel at the speed of thought. I know it is beyond my imagination, but I certainly look forward to being able to do that.

The emphasis throughout eternity will be on constantly producing greater righteous accomplishments and achievements, with positive achievement being the key to happiness and joy. Those achievements will be on behalf of others. God is successful and He gets things done! He wants us to be successful and He wants us to have that joy.

I Corinthians 2:9 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

The Bible describes the deep power of joy, by demonstrating that it is more powerful, more constant and more enduring than adverse circumstances and situations. In fact, the Bible urges us to be joyful when suffering persecution for the truth, because, in it we identify with our Savior, and we identify with one another.

Every trial is an opportunity for joy, because it furthers our sanctification. It helps set us apart to make us holy.

The Bible not only exhorts us to find joy in suffering, it says that God will give joy at the end of difficulty. Psalm 30 is a song used at the dedication of the house of David, a very joyful time, about the wonderful blessing of answered prayer.

Psalm 30:5, 11-12 For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning. You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever.

Isaiah tells us something similar. He tells us that sorrow and sighing is of the world because of sin, but joy and gladness is of the Kingdom because it is holy and good. The Kingdom of God is joy in the Holy Spirit, producing eternal spiritual fruit. Isaiah says something similar:

Isaiah 35:10 And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

God the Father sent His Son as a ransom. Jesus paid the price to redeem us from spiritual slavery and death. All who are the redeemed of God are gathered under His protection. Because of this redemption, everlasting joy should be obvious in the faces of "the ransomed of the LORD."

True doctrine, with an accurate view of Jesus Christ and His teachings, is essential to a strong spiritual foundation. And, a strong spiritual foundation is vital to knowing and maintaining this full joy. We cannot just cruise, as the Laodiceans try to do, we must work at it.

We must look beyond our circumstances, with a hopeful attitude knowing that we will have the courage we need supplied to us by the Spirit of Christ.

Philippians 1:19-20 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

We see there a very positive and assured attitude that things will all work out for good. Joy does not depend on circumstances that fluctuate from day to day. It is established in the assurance of God's love, His truth and His promises. We cannot let worry and fear rob us of God's full joy. The temporary struggles and pain we experience are only for a while—and then we will be changed into incorruptible spirit beings. We have nothing to worry about, as long as we remain close to God and His brethren.

There will be everlasting joy when God's Kingdom is established on earth. Joy and gladness is not only a deep inner feeling, but also it is expressed in celebration when God's people gather together.

God gives us true spiritual joy—that is, peace of mind, and unity among ourselves and with Him. But we must have faith, not only in the promises that He has given us, but in Jesus Christ, in whom all the promises are fulfilled.

Romans 15:13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul advises the Philippian congregation to "rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice!"

We have certainly had a rejoicing Feast, and so we can continue with this, not just through today and the Last Great Day, but through the remainder of the year and on into the future. We can have this full joy, despite what the world or Satan, throws at us. Rejoice, again, I say, rejoice