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Recap: Temptation, Sin, and Obedience.

- God is perfect in His character, and He calls us to imitate Him and be holy also.
- God in His grace has made a way for us unholy people to be reunited to Him through Jesus Christ. God makes a way of escape for us when we are tempted.
- The Bible speaks of our new life in Christ as: walking in the works that God has prepared for us; walking in newness of life; and walking in the Spirit instead of walking in the flesh.

Walking in Gratitude

As Christians, it's our birthright to experience gratitude, joy, and contentment in Christ. However, these are things which won't necessarily come to us automatically. Gratitude, joy, and contentment seem to reinforce each other.

1. We ought to realize that God commands gratitude.

"Praise the LORD! Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever" (106:1). This is a suggestion, an encouragement, and a command all at once.

"Praise the Lord" is the word "Hallelujah!", which means *give praise to Yah*. *Yah* is a shortened form of God's Divine Name (His covenant name) *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*.

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It's right and proper for us to praise Him and thank Him. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

2. Gratitude should be our natural response to receiving God's blessings and mercies.

Jesus expressed surprise when someone was **not** grateful:

> Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" (Luke 17:11-18)

Jesus was surprised for several reasons, each of which should cause us to reflect.

- the high ratio of ungrateful people to grateful people.
- the size of the miracle compared to the thanks He got for it.
- the man who returned was a Samaritan and might have been far from God.

We should imitate the Samaritan in how he thanked Jesus!

3. Thankfulness is also the proper response in view of our salvation.

How much more should Christians give thanks to the Author of their salvation!

> We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven… For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding… giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. (Colossians 1:3-5, 9, 12)

Observe: like Paul, we should be giving thanks for our own salvation and also when we hear of others who are saved.

Realizing that we can look forward to an eternal future with God should also cause us to offer thanksgiving and praise. “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Hebrews 13:14-15).

4. Thanksgiving is a necessary discipline for believers.

Staying grateful and giving thanks will help us avoid dissatisfaction. We need to choose thanksgiving over complaining.

Choosing thanksgiving will help us to avoid worldliness and improper speech.

“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks” (Ephesians 5:3-4).

5. Thanksgiving enables us to enter into God’s Presence, and go deeper in our enjoyment of Him.

> Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.
> Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good;
> His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.
>
> (Ps. 100:4-5)

David shows us the *progression of worship*. The way we begin to approach the Almighty is with thanksgiving. Thanksgiving demonstrates humility, because it means I am acknowledging Him as my source. “…I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit…” (Isaiah 57:15).

Thanking God helps us to look beyond what He’s done for us, and we then begin to praise Him for who He is. Then He then begins to manifest His presence to us.

6. Putting it all together: thanksgiving is for every day.

In 1 Chronicles 23, David commanded the Levites to stand giving thanks and praying, every morning and every evening.

Bracketing your day, its beginning and its end, with reminders of how good He's been to you is something that can revolutionize your life!

Growing in Joy

1. What is joy?

Christians should be people of joy! The Hebrew word for joy is *simcha*. It means joy, gladness, and rejoicing. Joy feels like a celebration in your heart. In the Greek of the New Testament, the word for joy is *xará*, and it means the same thing.

Happiness depends on our circumstances, but joy is always available to believers. "Happiness happens, but joy abides." Matthew Henry defined joy as "cheerfulness in conversation with our friends, or rather a constant delight in God."

2. Where does joy come from, and how do we maintain it?

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). This is also a suggestion, an encouragement, and a command! This rejoicing is a choice. We have joy and contentment because we possess Christ, and He possesses us.

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the

> last time. **In this you rejoice**, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and **rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory**, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.
>
> (1 Peter 1:3-9, ESV, emphasis added.)

We are called to "rejoice as a choice," and yet joy is also the fruit of the Spirit. The life and work of the Spirit within us causes certain fruit to grow and be seen in us.

> Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.
>
> (Galatians 5:19-23)

Only love is ahead of joy as a characteristic of someone who is walking in the Spirit.

If we're lacking joy, something may be obscuring it. Check yourself:

- Understand that joy is a fruit of the Spirit.
- Understand that joy comes from Jesus. "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" (John 15:10-11).
- Paul said that the Kingdom of God is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). If joy is missing, something is obscuring it.
    - See if there is some unconfessed sin or unforgiveness.
    - See if your heart has been focusing on the troubles and the circumstances of your life instead of casting your cares upon Jesus.
    - Our rejoicing is in Him, and if we look at Him, we will have a reason to rejoice, just as it was in the case of our thanksgiving.

<u>3. You NEED the joy of the Lord!</u>

Joy sustains us in the trials of life. "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" (Romans 15:13). Joy, together with peace, keeps us afloat!

Joy helps us look ahead to our ultimate reward from God. "Jesus… who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

Always remember that “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Nehemiah 9:10).

Remember: we must choose to be thankful!

Remember: we must choose to rejoice in Jesus!

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials…” (James 1:2).

Let’s allow Jesus’ own joy to remain in us. He wants your joy to be full.

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