

December 14, 2025

God's Good News Story: The Church Alive & Growing
Advent Sunday 3
Grace-Fueled Joy

Advent is a season we combine Looking Back and Looking Forward and let that reflection guide us in our Living in the Present. We join in recounting of history past where true followers of God waited in anticipation and arrival of Christ's 1st Coming or Advent. We share in their feelings of hope, peace, joy and love, while at the same time we look forward to Christ's 2nd Coming/Advent with the same Hope . Peace , Joy and Love.

The last two Sundays we focused on the hope and Peace of this season. Today we add to the mix JOY. Joy is often misunderstood as mere happiness, dependent on circumstances. But biblical joy is deeper: it is rooted in God's grace.

Today we explore how **grace fuels joy** — joy that sustains us in waiting, suffering, and celebration.

Joy is not found in human achievement—it is a divine gift. Grace is the foundation: God gives salvation freely, not because of merit. Joy is rooted in Grace. Grace reminds us we don't earn God's favor; it is freely given. Because grace is secure, joy is unshakable. Advent joy is not fragile happiness, but resilient gladness rooted in God's grace.

Paul echoes this in **Romans 5:2**: "*We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*"

Advent joy flows from knowing we are loved, forgiven, and redeemed.

Let's look at a few Bible verses that tell us more about this Grace-Fueled Joy.

Luke 2: 8-13...⁸ *And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.* ⁹ *And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.* ¹⁰ *And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.* ¹¹ *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.*

James 1:2-4...² *Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials,* ³ *knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.* ⁴ *But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.*

(Some of the following is adapted from R. Warren. Saddleback Ministries)

What we all need this Christmas Season is not simply happiness; what we need is Grace-Fueled Real JOY!

"JOY" is the positive confidence I feel from KNOWING and TRUSTING God, regardless of circumstances.

Biblical joy is not mere happiness—it is a deep, abiding gladness rooted in God's presence, promises, and salvation, independent of circumstances. It flows from relationship with Christ and is sustained by the Holy Spirit.

Old Testament (Hebrew “simchah”) Joy is often expressed as *delight or gladness in God’s favor*. It appears in worship, festivals, and moments of God’s deliverance. For example, **Nehemiah 8:10** declares, *“The joy of the Lord is your strength.”* This joy is communal and celebratory, but always tied to God’s covenant faithfulness.

New Testament (Greek “chara”) Joy is described as *rejoicing that springs from spiritual realities rather than external conditions*. Jesus tells His disciples, *“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full”* (**John 15:11**). Paul echoes this in Philippians, urging believers to rejoice even while imprisoned.

Fruit of the Spirit **Galatians 5:22** lists joy as a fruit of the Spirit, meaning it is *produced by God’s work in us, not manufactured by human effort*. It is a divine gift that reflects God’s presence.

Sadly, we as humans are our own worst enemies when it comes to living in Grace-Fueled Joy. Let’s take a look at

Three Joy-Killing Attributes

1. **SELFISHNESS** - Selfishness is not just a moral flaw but a **spiritual barrier**. It reflects the fallen human nature and resists God’s call to love. It pursues personal gain at others expense. It is in essence saying NO to God as your authority and placing yourself in 1st Place. Selfishness is in direct opposition with God’s Character:

God’s nature is self-giving love, so selfishness stands in direct opposition to His will.

JAMES 4:1,2 ...*“Where do all the fights and quarrels among you come from? They come from your desires... which are constantly fighting with your bodies... you strongly desire things but you cannot get them, so you quarrel and fight.”*

The root problem many relationships is because of a power struggle-where this is heard often... *“I have my rights”*. Instead of *complimenting one another* we wind up competing. This is often because of **Self-centered insecurity**

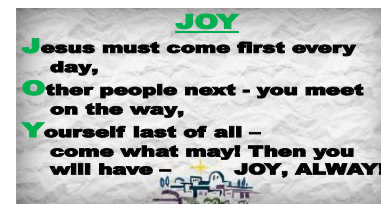
JAMES 3:16... *For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.* (NLT)

It is very hard to be joyful and jealous at the same time. Selfishness undermines relationships. Want to put Joy back in relationships Get the focus off yourself!

SELFISHNESS is a self-centeredness that leads to a lack of confidence in the PROVISION of GOD.

Remember the acronym

J – Jesus O – Others Y – Yourself



2. **RESENTMENT** -

HEB 12:15...*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness or resentment springs up and causes trouble, and thus defiling many others. (DSV)*

“We hurt each other in relationships, sometimes intentionally, sometime unintentionally. Because you deal with human beings, we misunderstand each other, we have conflict. You're going to be hurt in relationships -- it's a fact of life. What you do with that hurt makes a difference whether you're joyful or you're miserable.

Nothing destroys a relationship faster than resentment. Nothing robs your joy faster”. (Warren)

RESENTMENT is a self-centeredness that leads to a lack of understanding of the **PARDON** of GOD

3. **FEAR** When fear builds up in your life, the joy goes out of our relationships.

Prov. 12:25... *Anxiety, fear and worry in one's heart weighs it down, but a good word cheers it up.*

Fear causes us to build walls instead of bridges. We cover up and won't let people get close to us.

1 JOHN 4:18... *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with*

punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Fearful people cannot give/receive love. They often are afraid they will be hurt again, and it diminishes their Joy!

FEAR MAKES YOU

Defensive	wont admit faults
Distant	wont share feelings
Demanding	must be in control, get your way

FEAR is a self-centeredness that leads to a lack of trust in the **POWER** of GOD

Three Joy Building Attributes

1. **FOCUS ON GIVING RATHER THAN RECEIVING** = The Antidote to Selfishness

ACTS 20:35... *In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*

The Bible clearly tells us that “God is Love”. And He is the Giver "every good gift"

You are most like God when you give in Love out of a heart of grace-fueled JOY. You can give without loving, but it is not as effective and does not bring Glory to God and is really not respectful to the person you are giving to. It becomes more of a patronizing handout than a grace-fueled gift from the heart.

Wonder why there's so little joy? Maybe because we have shifted our focus from 'Let me serve you in love' to "let's serve me and meet my needs!!

Joy: comes from a Heart of Grace-Fueled Thanks, Hope and Peace which naturally leads us to a desire to serve others in Love by Grace.

The Antidote to Selfishness is grace-fueled generosity.

2. FOCUS ON HEALING RATHER THAN HURTING – The Antidote to Resentment

It is a fact of life that you and I WILL be hurt by relationships. Misunderstanding, conflict, jealousy, inconsiderateness, this is part of human nature and we have a tendency to...HOLD ON to hurt- rather than releasing it! Example: Someone slanders you- you repeat it in mind!

COL 3:13... *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

There's no value in rehearsing pain over & over.

For your own sake- quit reliving it! Choose to release it! Let Love guide your response not the hurt.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7... ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind, it is not jealous; love does not brag, it is not arrogant. ⁵ It does not act disgracefully, it does not seek its own benefit; it is not provoked, does not keep an account of a wrong suffered, ⁶ it does not rejoice in

unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷ it keeps every confidence, it believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

It is also important to choose to handle a hurt by focusing on God's purpose and plan for your lives. God can use your hurt and pain in your life for His Glory and for your Faith development.

The Antidote to Resentment – Grace-Fueled Healing in Christ.

3. FOCUS ON GOD'S POWER, RATHER THAN MY PROBLEM – The Antidote to Fear

Psalms 62:8 *"Trust in God at all times; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge."*

"God is in control. He can repair the unrepairable. He can control the uncontrollable. He can help you where it doesn't look like there's any hope in the situation. He'll help you if you trust Him. If you let Him into your life, focus on His power rather than your problem, you will have joy. If you focus on your problem, you're going to be miserable. If God can raise Jesus Christ from the dead, He can raise a dead relationship. He can give you the power to start over. God is the God of the second chance. He can rebuild trust where there's only been fear". (Warren, Rick)

Psalm 56:3... *"When I am afraid, I will trust in You."*

The Antidote to Fear is to Focus on God's Power, Presence and Provision.

Our Take-Away Challenges:

- **Pray for a transformed heart:** Ask God to "*Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain*" (Psalm 119:36).
- **Practice intentional generosity:** Look for opportunities to give your time, resources, and emotional support without expecting anything in return.
- **Develop empathy:** Actively listen to others and seek to understand their needs and emotions.
- **Build strong relationships and community:** Engage with others in a local church or group where mutual support and service are practiced, which helps balance self-focus.
- **Set boundaries when necessary:** While called to love others, it's also wise to set boundaries with manipulative or toxic individuals to protect oneself from harm.

Loving, Wise Boundaries:

- Protect spiritual health – Guarding your heart ensures your walk with God remains strong.
- Preserve relationships – Boundaries prevent resentment and foster respect.
- Reflect Christ's example – Jesus Himself set boundaries with people and situations.
- Balance love and truth – Boundaries are not walls of rejection but frameworks for healthy love.

(adapted from co-pilot)

With that balanced insight and wisdom, let's choose to let Grace Fuel Hope, Peace and Joy in our lives.

- Choose joy daily by focusing on God's promises rather than problems.
- Choose to cultivate gratitude as a pathway to joy (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).
- Choose to anchor joy in hope of eternal life and the Peace of God in our hearts.
- Choose to share joy with others through encouragement and fellowship.

INVITATION

Key Bible Verses on Boundaries

- **Proverbs 4:23** – *“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”*
 - Teaches the importance of protecting our inner life—emotions, thoughts, and spiritual health.
- **1 Corinthians 6:12** – *“I have the right to do anything—but not everything is beneficial... I will not be mastered by anything.”*
 - Encourages discernment and self-control, setting limits on what influences us.
- **1 Corinthians 15:33** – *“Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.”*
 - A reminder to set relational boundaries that preserve godly character.
- **Galatians 6:5** – *“For each one should carry their own load.”*
 - Affirms personal responsibility, showing that boundaries help us manage what God has entrusted to us.
- **Matthew 5:37** – *“Let your ‘Yes’ be yes, and your ‘No,’ no.”*
 - Jesus models clarity and integrity in communication—healthy boundaries often mean saying “no” with love.
- **Mark 1:35–38** – Jesus withdrew to pray and declined demands from the crowds.

- Shows that even Christ set boundaries to prioritize His mission and time with the Father.

Joy-a-Thon Scripture Read (NIV)

1. **Habakkuk 3:17-18**... Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.
2. **1 Peter 1:8-9** ... Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.
3. **Isaiah 61:10** ... I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of His righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns His head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
4. **Philippians 4: 4-7**... ⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
5. **James 1: 2-4**...² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

6. **Psalm 47:1-5...**¹ Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. ² For the LORD Most High is awesome, the great King over all the earth. ³ He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet. ⁴ He chose our inheritance for us, whom he loved. ⁵ God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets. ⁶ Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises.

7. **Romans 15:5-7, 13...**⁵ May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had ⁶ so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. ...¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

8. **1 Thessalonians 5:16-24...**¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹ but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²² reject every kind of evil. ²³ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

God rest ye merry, gentlemen Let nothing you dismay
Remember, Christ, our Savior Was born on Christmas day.
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray
O tidings of comfort and joy, Comfort and joy
O tidings of comfort and joy

From God our Heavenly Father
A blessed Angel came;
And unto certain Shepherds
Brought tidings of the same:
How that in Bethlehem was born
The Son of God by Name.
O tidings of comfort and joy, Comfort and joy
O tidings of comfort and joy

Now to the Lord sing praises,
All you within this place,
And with true love and brotherhood
Each other now embrace;
This holy tide of Christmas
All other doth deface.
O tidings of comfort and joy, Comfort and joy
O tidings of comfort and joy