

Life Group Notes 12/15/2024

Pastor Mark Warren 3rd Advent: The Greatest Gift and Joy

[No doctrine is a given unless it has been found in the Word given by the Holy Spirit and received by you. If you have observations or questions, feel free to send me an email with your comment or observations at tbeachhead@comcast.net. Thank you for taking the time—Pete Mehegan, the Scribe.]

Remember: Be good to one another. Be sensitive and kind. Let God heal our hearts...and guide our discussions. **PLEASE PRE-READ THESE NOTES AND CHOOSE THE DIRECTION THAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR GROUP.** BE COGNIZANT OF YOUR GROUP'S TIME AND BE SENSITIVE! **Some groups would like to dwell on a single idea. Let the Spirit be your guide. Never feel obligated to complete this study.**

Note: I have highlighted suggested discussion questions that Pastor Mark has raised this week, 12/15. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to guide all our discussions, using the highlights as trail blazes. **The purpose is to minister to one another.** I include each of the passages mentioned in full, to facilitate the enjoyment of these notes. Footnotes are not meant to distract. This week's footnotes include:

1. [On joy.](#)

*****Important:** At the very [end of these notes](#), I've included passages that were mentioned in this week's message for deeper study using SOAP journaling to help further your study during the week. ***

Pastor opened talking about the Christmas festival. Did you participate? What were your thoughts? Did you look at the GCCNH magazine?

Pastor spoke of the trials of his Black Beauty.

1. Did you relate?
2. Have you ever been surprised by joy in the midst of a trial?
3. Do you have a testimony?
4. Billy Graham once said, "You can't unscramble eggs," and another added, "But you can make an excellent omelet." Explain.
5. Pastor says, "Joy differs from happiness." How does joy differ from happiness?
6. What makes you happy?

Look up Hebrews 12: [1](#)Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off every encumbrance and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with endurance the race set out for us. [2](#)Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. [3](#)Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

1. Thinking of the previous chapter, Hebrews 11, what did that "cloud of witnesses" endure?
2. What is the race set before us? What does it include?
3. What encumbrances do you have to throw off, to run this race?
4. What does an author do? What does a perfecter do?
5. How does the example Jesus set help us understand this concept?

6. Where did the hostility that Jesus faced come from?
7. What did Jesus endure for your sake? Why?
8. Look up Isaiah 53: [10](#)*Yet it was the LORD's will to crush Him and to cause Him to suffer; and when His soul is made a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.* [11](#)*After the anguish of His soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities.* [12](#)*Therefore I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the spoils with the strong, because He has poured out His life unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors. Yet He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.* Describe in detail, what exactly was the "joy that was set before him?"
9. Whom does that include? Who are "his offspring?"
10. How was Jesus made aware of that joy? (When was Isaiah written?)
11. Are you facing hostility?
12. Is it time to take a moment to pray?
13. What has been set before you to make this race endurable? What does your "win" look like when this race is over? Whom does your joy include?

Pastor points out that the same Spirit that resided in Jesus, to help Him through the hostilities, now resides in us, and there is joy that is set before us.

1. What do you see?
2. Who are your offspring?
3. Look up John 16: [32](#)*"Look, an hour is coming and has already come when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and you will leave Me all alone. Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. [33](#)[I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take courage; I have overcome the world!](#)*" Describe the trials Jesus is facing? What does He do to strengthen Himself before the trials even begin?
4. Look up Luke 21: [16](#)*You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you will be put to death. [17](#)And you will be hated by everyone because of My name. [18](#)Yet not even a hair of your head will perish. [19](#)By your patient endurance you will gain your souls.* Do you have a testimony?
5. What is the promise that accompanies the warning here? Could this knowledge, taken seriously as a real promise, help us endure like He endured?
6. Look at what Paul tells the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 4: [16](#)*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, yet our inner self is being renewed day by day. [17](#)[For our light and momentary affliction is producing for us an eternal glory that is far beyond comparison.](#) [18](#)So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* What do you think Jesus fixed His eyes on?
7. What do you usually fix your eyes on?
8. Pastor quoted C.S. Lewis, saying, "Joy is the serious business of heaven." What does this mean?
9. Where does this joy come from? What is its root?

Look up Psalm 16: [10](#)*For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, nor will You let Your Holy One see decay. [11](#)You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

1. What do you see?
2. David first sang this song. What do you think Jesus remembered, when He sang it?
3. Where did they find their joy?
4. How do you find His presence?
5. Pastor says, "How do we find it? We get real close to Jesus." How does that work?
6. Look at psalm 119 and read it until you get an answer to that last question. What are the benefits of being in the Word?
7. Is there any other way?
8. (What does Jesus mean when He says, "I am the way?" How does the Word become the way for you?)
9. Mark points out that Psalm 16 is offering you pleasures and joy forevermore. Then he asks, "Do you want that?" What is your response?
10. What steps will you take?
11. He says, "Joy isn't about escaping hardship. It's about finding the presence of God in the midst of hardship." Explain. Do you have a testimony?
12. When is it easier for you to remember God? In the midst of abundance? Or in the midst of hardship and insurmountable difficulty? Explain.

Pastor quoted Charles Spurgeon, the nineteenth century pastor, saying, "There is a marvelous medicinal power in joy. Most medicines are distasteful; but this, which is the best of all medicines, is sweet to the taste, and comforting to the heart. This blessed joy is very contagious."

1. How does the joy in others strike you?
2. How contagious is it?
3. Can real, lasting joy be found outside of Jesus? Explain.
4. Look up John 16:[23](#)*In that day you will no longer ask Me anything. Truly, truly, I tell you, whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you. [24](#)Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.* What do you see?
5. Have you ever played "Go Fish," the card game? What happens when you get what you asked for? What is your immediate response?
6. What is Jesus promising here? What is God's purpose in keeping this promise for you? What happens to Pastor Mark's "joy tank," when you receive according to your request?
7. Have you ever asked and not received? Did you then stop asking? Explain.
8. Paul says this to the Colossians: 1:[25](#) *became its servant by the commission God gave me to fully proclaim to you the word of God, [26](#)the mystery that was hidden for ages and generations but is now revealed to His saints. [27](#)To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.* If Christ is in us, how is this mystery revealed to others?
9. How sure is the promise he made above, in John 16?
10. Review the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5: [22](#)*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23](#)gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* What do each of these qualities have in common?

11. What is the root of each? How is each acquired? (How does one acquire patience, for example? Or goodness?)
12. Have you ever asked the Spirit for His joy?
13. Look up Luke 11:12 *Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?* [13 So if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!](#) Answer the question. Just how much **more** will the Father give you the Holy Spirit when you ask?
14. Have you ever given a scorpion when you were asked for an egg?
15. Have you asked for the Holy Spirit? Have you asked for much more, according to this promise? Do you have a testimony?

Pastor says, "I think the opposite of joy is a crushed spirit." Remember last week's message on hope, "A hope deferred makes the heart sick."

1. Explain how a spirit gets crushed.
2. Explain how patience is essential to sustaining joy.
3. Look up Proverbs 17: [22 A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.](#) Explain. Do you have an answer to a crushed spirit? ...to dry bones?
4. Take a minute to recall Ezekiel's valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37, when God asks if these dry bones can come to life. Do they come to life?
5. What brings them to life? What do dry bones need to come to life?
6. How does the Word get involved? How does the Spirit get involved? What joy does Ezekiel's word set before His people?
7. How does God's promise sustain our joy in trials? What revives a crushed spirit?

Review Nehemiah 8, where the scribe Ezra reads the Law to the people, and they all, with one voice, mourn and wail for their past transgressions. Now review the response of the elders to the people's mourning: Nehemiah 8:10 *"Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."*

1. What comes after heartfelt repentance?
2. Is there really a time in today's modern world to enjoy rich desserts and sweet wine?
3. What is the strength of the people? Whose joy is it?

Pastor Mark took a moment to prophesy, saying, "You say, 'I don't have any joy,' but the Lord says His joy will be your strength. He wants to give you good medicine today. He wants to give you some joy. He wants to address the dry bones. He wants you to feel that you do not have a crushed spirit. He wants to breathe life into you today. Joy in trials. There is something in God's design that says, 'Trials can be your friend.'"

1. What is your response?
2. How do you know this is true?
3. What happens when you finally hear again a promise that you had forgotten?

Review James 1: [2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you encounter trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops patience. 4 Allow patience to finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.](#)

1. Look closely at the process that James outlines.
2. Put that process in your own words. What comes first?
3. Are we looking at a single trial? Explain.
4. What is happening at the moment of testing? What is being tested?
5. What does faith KNOW? What does the trial attempt to contradict?
6. Which wins in your case?

7. What develops when you win?
8. Why is patience essential to faith? To winning?
9. Look at verse four. Describe the outcome in your own words.
10. Looking at verse four, why is it not insanity to consider your trials “all joy?”
11. When this joy is set before you, is it easier to endure the trial? Explain.
12. Do you remember what Paul called [this, above](#): *“¹⁷For our light and momentary affliction is producing for us an eternal glory that is far beyond comparison. ¹⁸So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”* Are your trials “light” and “momentary?”
13. What is Paul setting before himself, so that endurance is assured?
14. How do you think Paul learned this attitude?
15. What is his attitude toward his own afflictions?

Mark says, “When you have a trial, if you turn the right direction, to the Father and to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit, it’s OK that you’re being tested. It’s producing something in you. It perfects you and allows you to be more effective in the way God has designed you and equipped you for His plans and purposes. It’s as when gold is refined; it goes through a fiery process and all the dross and imperfections are burned out. This is what trials do to us.”

1. What do you think?
2. When you “turn in the right direction,” what are you fixing your eyes on? ...what is temporary? ...or what is eternal?

Pastor asks, “How do we know if we’re making progress? How do we know if we’re maturing as James describes maturing? One way you can tell is that, when you pass through a really difficult time, you have joy. Because, it’s not natural to have joy in the face of trials.”

1. Again, have you ever been surprised by joy?
2. Do you have a testimony?
3. Do trials trigger more frustration for you? Or more anticipation?
4. Twelve-step programs teach you to say, “This too shall pass.” What do James and Paul teach us to remember?
5. Contrast the two strategies.
6. Which strategy is more aggressive and more rife with promise?

Mark’s practical steps for finding joy in the holiday season:

- ◆ **Spend time in God’s presence**—Think again what this means. Spend time allowing the Word of God to speak to you. Take the time. Read Psalm 16. Let Psalm 119 read itself to you over and over. Remember that this is where the fullness of joy is actually found. Mark says, “If you’re lacking in the ‘Joy Department,’ get in God’s word. If you’re lacking in the ‘Joy Department,’ put the worship music on. If you’re lacking in the ‘Joy Department,’ spend time praying.” An hour in His presence refreshes you. It changes you. Pastor invited us to the Granite Room on Tuesdays at 12 noon, because prayer happens.
- ◆ **Ask the Holy Spirit for help, as Jesus instructed you. Ask for that “how much more” that He speaks of.**
- ◆ **Practice gratitude**—This is the fourth week this principle has been reviewed.
- ◆ **Lean on community**—Pastor emphasizes that this is that time where we need to get the encouragement that we need from one another. When life groups kick off again, make it a point to be a part of one. Joy comes when you share your troubles with trusted friends. Joy comes when you bear each other’s burdens.

- ◆ **Reflect on eternal hope**—Review these notes. Remember, as Jesus Himself did, the eternal promise of reward, not just “heaven,” but the indescribable joy of reunion with those whose lives were saved by your own testimony and the love you showed them. Fixing your eyes on Jesus, who endured for that joy.
- ◆ **Choose worship over worry**—When troubles arise choose to worship, for there our Father’s power and His promised faithfulness are in review. His strength and His joy have been imparted to us and have equipped us against the days ahead. Redirect. Come before the Lord and worship Him. Let joy erupt. Embrace the process as James clarified and presented it.

Look at Psalm 30: ⁴Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. ⁵For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

1. How does Pastor’s message echo David’s song.
2. Why would God be angry? Is it justified? Have we sinned?
3. Can we expect to live a life without weeping? How long does the weeping last?
4. What comes with the joy?

The Follow-up Application

1. Use the [SOAP journal studies](#) below throughout the week.
2. Make more entries in your “grateful journal.” Be specific. What are you grateful for today?
3. Plan a trip into God’s presence. What is your first step. Where does your passport come from?
4. As He has instructed you, ask for joy and write down His response this week.

Take the time to pray.

Scribe’s Notes:

1. **On joy**—The Bible has much to say on this word, but most significantly, the word joy, χαρά (*chara*) is etymologically connected inexorably to the word grace, χάρις, (*charis*). They come from the same root, χαίρω (*chairō*), the Greek verb meaning “to rejoice” or “to be glad”. No footnote I could create would explain better than BibleHub’s own study on this word. Enjoy: <https://biblehub.com/greek/5479.htm> If you geek out with me on this word this week, you will begin to understand the intentionally linked purpose of the gifts of the Spirit (called *charisma*, gifts of grace) and the root of that joy that always accompanies His gifts.
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For further study:

Take a moment each day this week to apply the **SOAP**... (**S**cripture—Copy the scripture. / **O**bservation—Write what you see. / **A**pplication—What is God saying? / **P**ray—What is your response?) ...method to some of the scripture we looked at this week:

Monday: Hebrews 12:1-3
Tuesday: Isaiah 53:10-12
Wednesday: John 16:32-33
Thursday: Luke 21:16-19
Friday: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
Saturday: Colossians 1:9-14
Sunday: Luke 11:12-13

Once again, some passages suggested here have more than the usual number of verses. This is not to increase the burden but to provide clarity of context. Pick the verses that speak to you most clearly, and run these through the SOAP steps.