

Step-By-Step

JOY

- I'm a big fan of marriage...I'm a pro marriage guy. I highly recommend it!
- Few people know the true struggle of being a single person, in a small town, on a church staff, IN THE SOUTH!
- It's not a very fun season of life
- I was on staff at our sending church in Shelby as a single man for about 6 years.
- Now Shelby's a great town, if you're not familiar with Shelby, they have um.....Shelby's a great town. But it's a small town
- And I could not have a 10 second interaction with a female without having people begin to plan our future together
- So I was determined, that I was not going to date anyone who went to our church, anyone

who went to Gardner-Webb (the local university), or anyone under the age of 25.

- But then I met Rachel. And she was all 3 of those things. I saw her walk into our church offices one day, had a mutual friend connect us that next Sunday....I asked her out in the first 45 seconds of talking to her and then we were engaged 7 months later.
- And when we entered the engagement period, it's amazing how the comments of people began to change. At first people are rushing you to get into a relationship, bombarding you with 1000 questions about your dating and love life, wanting to get you married off as quick as possible.
- But then as soon as you're engaged, then people begin to say things like: "Oh you're getting married huh? Ha. Poor sap. Has no idea what he's getting into. Well, say goodbye to your freedom. You know wedding planning is gonna be a night mare.

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- *You guys in love? Still do sweet things for each other? Well, enjoy it while it lasts... Cuz you know marriage isn't all sunshine and rainbows. It's difficult, there's tension, its service, it's giving, it's sacrifice, it's hard work, it's washing each other's feet!"*
 - (I should have you know that in 3 years of marriage Rachel and I have never once washed each other's feet. I don't think we have plans to)
 - Now yes, marriage can be difficult at times, and yes there can be tension, and it does take hard work...but you know what?? I ENJOY BEING MARRIED!
 - I enjoy being a husband and being a father WAY more than I enjoyed being a single man the 29 years prior
 - I believe that God instituted marriage, He blesses marriage, and He designed marriage to be full of Joy
- And there are still some out there that say, "Oh well, you're only 3 1/2 years in you have even begun to realize how hard , difficult.."
 - Just SHUT UP! I don't need that negativity spoken into my marriage!
 - We are not naive enough to think that it's all sun shine and rainbows, or think we have this figured out at all.
 - We know there are going to be ups and downs and we know that we will walk through some difficult seasons together that we can't fully fathom yet...but you know what? I would rather enjoy the process, walking through it with the woman that I love, rather than focusing on anything negative that I can think of
 - It's incredible how many pre-martial counseling sessions that I do, when I'm telling the couple how awesome marriage is, and all the things they have to look forward to in marriage and they say, "Man, you're the first one to say anything like that to us."

- It's sad
- And you know so often it's the same thing whenever some people talk about Christianity.
 - "Oh you wanna be a Christian? You better buckle up buddy! You better walk the straight and narrow. What do you do for fun now? You better stop!"
 - "It's a life of dying to yourself, it's laying all of your wants, dreams, goals, and desires down. It's giving up everything, moving to a foreign country and there you will die!"
 - Now say this prayer and you'll be saved." "... uhhh I'm good!"
- If you've had that type of experience I'm here to tell you this morning that Jesus is better than you've heard.
 - Jesus is incredible, Jesus is amazing.
 - And the more you get to know Jesus the more you understand the parameters that the Father has set up in order for you to live life to the fullest.
- The more you get to know Jesus the more you are willing to give up anything for Him because He's so much better than anything else could offer.
- Jesus is worth celebrating, that's why church is supposed to be a joyous occasion.
 - *You see so many people paint Christianity out to be a life of Do's and Don't Do's but the Bible paints this life out to be one of Joy and Celebration.*
 - **"...the joy of the Lord is your strength." - Nehemiah 8:10 (ESV)**
 - **"You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." -Psalm 16:11 (ESV)**
 - **"For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised...strength and joy are His place." -1 Chronicles 16: 25, 27 (ESV)**
 - *His space, His home, the place He operates in is Joy*

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- *Therefore if we are His temple, and if this is His house, than this should be a place of JOY!*
- *I think too often many Christians mistake Reverence for Reservation*
- *We mistake Holiness for Holding Back*
- *We mistake Devotion for Dullness*
 - But an unmistakable attribute of the Church of Jesus Christ should be Joy
- *This has nothing to do with worship style, some of the most joyous congregations I've ever seen where in some very traditional style churches. But there was so much Joy among that body of believers.*
- When the angels proclaimed the birth of Christ to the Shepherds in Luke 2, they said that this is Good News of GREAT JOY!
 - This might be bold of me to say, but I think it's completely biblical to say that if Joy is not apparent in a worship service than the Spirit is probably being quenched.
- I literally once heard a guy say, "I'm sick of hearing people say they *enjoyed* the service today. You're not there to enjoy it, you're there to worship."
- Ummmmm...I would disagree! I would venture as far as to say that if you're not enjoying it, you're probably not worshipping!
- But he just had to complain about something right??
- When did it become so cool to complain?
 - It's like weird to have a conversation if you're not complaining about something now-a-days.
 - *Guy asking me how I'm doing...*
 - I know the catchy saying now a days is "It's ok to not be ok," and that's is definitely true, but is it also ok to be ok??
 - Is it ok, to rather being caught up on every negative thing, or things not happening the way we expected them to, wouldn't we

rather take the time to celebrate the good things!

- That's why Paul says in the book of Philippians, "***Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.***"
-Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

- *Some of us need to put this into practice...*

- Now this is not to say that we just put on a face and pretend that the problems of life and this world don't exist
 - This doesn't mean that we all have to turn into annoying youth group camp counselors who are whoo-hoo-ing in your face at 6 o'clock in the morning even when we're having a rough day
- This just means we don't praise our problems

- We don't give the hardships our devoted attention
- This means that even in the midst of trials and storms we still intentionally looking for the things that we can celebrate that God is doing rather than being frustrated with Him for what He isn't doing
- The word Joy, in the New Testament means to be calmly-happy
- This gives the picture of being cool-calm and collected no matter what the difficulty of life there may be
- Here's the definition of Joy that I would like for us to work from: **JOY IS A STATE OF STEADY CONFIDENCE NO MATTER THE CIRCUMSTANCE**
 - You see joy and happiness are not completely separable, but they are not exactly the same either
 - Joy is a state of being, happiness is an emotional reaction

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- Happiness comes from the root word for happenings
- Happiness is a natural emotion that we experience whenever something happens to go well
- But Joy is an intrinsic part of our nature in Christ that remains even when things go wrong
- I heard one pastor say that *“Christians are the only people on the planet that can grieve and have joy at the same time.”*
- How is that possible? Because our joy is not rooted in our happenings
 - Nehemiah said that the Joy OF THE LORD is our strength
 - Paul says, Rejoice IN THE LORD always, again I say rejoice
- He is the source and the root of our joy, and He has to be. Why?
- ***“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind.”***
-Numbers 23:19
- ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”*** ***-Hebrews 13:8***
- ***“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”*** ***-James 1:17***
- Joy is steady confidence, and you can be confident in what is consistent
- Only true Joy can be found in the Lord because He is always good, He is always perfect, and He NEVER changes.
- True joy is steadfast, true joy is not dependent upon emotions and circumstances, true joy never leaves you...because Jesus never leaves you
- So we as Christians can have joy and grieve at the same time because we walk through the trial and storm with the Source of our joy, who

sustains us and gives us everything to look forward to

- He gives us hope, He gives us purpose, He gives us direction, He has a plan even when we don't, and no matter what happens, we can have that steady confidence because we are still apart of His Kindgom
- And Paul says in Romans 14, ***“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”***
-Romans 14:17 (ESV)
- So even in the midst of great sorrow we can still have great Joy because when we're a part of His Kingdom, no matter how messy and messed up this world is we have the Righteousness of God in our lives, which means we have been made Right-With-God and when this temporary life is over we will be welcomed into an eternal life where there will be no more hurt, no more pain, no more sorrow, and no more suffering.

- So we can be confident in our eternal security.
- Also Paul is sayin that no matter where we have come from, where we've been, no matter what we have done, we still have Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ
 - That word Peace means to have harmony. It means to be exempt from rage and havoc of war. Which is to say that we are exempt from the wrath of God now because of what Jesus has done for us.
- And the final matter of His Kingdom is Joy.
- And remember where this Joy is found....IN THE HOLY SPIRIT
- Here is the biggest difference between Joy and Happiness (at least happiness as our current culture would define it)
- Joy cannot be obtained by pursuit
- You cannot go out and pursue and find Joy and get it for yourself....Joy is not found, it's given

- And it is given By the Holy Spirit.
- Remember Joy is a Fruit, it is a work, it is an act of the Holy Spirit
- So if you have the Holy Spirit, you have Joy! It's in you, it's a part of who you are now
- So for the rest of this sermon, I am not going to walk us through ways that we can find Joy in our lives, because it doesn't work that way. But I do want to look at a few different ways that Joy can be lost among us.
- Or at least be quenched. Specifically and especially in our churches.
- And I think Romans chapter 14 gives us some things that we should avoid in order to make sure Joy is open and apparent among us.
- In verse 1 he says, ***“As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions... Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is***

able to make him stand.” -Romans 14:1, 4 (ESV)

- ***“Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” -Romans 14:13-19 (ESV)***

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- Here's what going on here, we have a variety of believers in the Roman Church. You have a lot of people from a lot of different backgrounds that have come to faith.
- Now there are some, that have come to faith, they are saved, they are a part of the family of God. However, they still feel strongly about observing certain aspects of the Jewish tradition.
- Namely, the dietary restrictions. There are some that still felt strongly about abstaining from certain types of meat, others went full vegan and believed that you should abstain from meat all together
- Then you had those who used to think that way, who have come to faith, and feel the freedom they have in Christ, no longer feel bound by the law or Jewish customs..so now they're enjoyin' their new pork chop and prime rib filled life and loving every minute of it!
- So now you have the people of God at odds with each other, because whenever they would get together for a church meal, you would have some piling their plates high with red meat, waving it around in the other's face like, "Doesn't it smell good! This is what the freedom of Christ smells like!"
- Then you have the other side showing up to the pot luck with "Meat is Murder" t-shirts on... just stirrin' the pot.
- And all this is doing is causing unnecessary division and quenching the Spirit and Joy among the people of God.
- So here's the first way we can avoid losing Joy in our lives:
 - **DON'T ARGUE ABOUT STUPID STUFF**
 - In verse 1, Paul says don't quarrel over opinions
 - He tells Timothy, "Have nothing to do with foolish and stupid arguments, they don't amount to anything good"

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- Now, I've gone on my rants about petty theological differences that don't really matter enough. So I'll give us a break from that
- But this is more about personal preference, personal opinion, and sometimes even personal conviction.
- Because you know sometimes you may have a strong personal conviction about something, that the Spirit may have even led you to, that is for you but not for everyone else
 - I remember in my early to mid 20's I lived a pretty strict lifestyle. I don't think that I was legalistic by any stretch, but I was a young single man serving as a youth pastor and I had to go out of my way to avoid the appearance of evil and try to live above reproach in ways that most didn't
 - And it made sense for me to do that in that season of life, with the responsibilities and ministry that I had, and the impressionable teenagers that I had looking up to me
- Where I went wrong however, was because I had those convictions and standards for myself, I thought that every Christian should have the same
- I didn't take the time to consider that, "Not many should become teachers, because we who teach will be judged more strictly."
(James 3)
- I had certain standards and boundaries that I had to set up for myself but I didn't have to place that burden on everyone else
- There may be some convictions that you have, that may be God-ordained, but that doesn't mean that He's given everyone else the same conviction
- You may feel strongly about not eating red meat...that's fine! But don't pass judgement on those who do, allow that to be between them and God
- I think one of the most relatable examples in our day and age...even though the meat issue is relatable, but not necessarily to Christians

specifically....but I think a very relatable example is when it comes to the issue of alcohol.

- There are some Christians that believe that alcohol should be completely abstained from. They believe that an alcoholic beverage should not even touch their lips, they don't believe that the wine that Jesus drank was alcoholic or anything like the wine we know of today
 - That is their conviction and they feel strongly about it
- There are other Christians that do not feel like they have that same restriction in their lives. They believe that in their freedom in Christ, they are free to enjoy alcoholic beverages, within moderation (there is no arguing that becoming drunk or drinking to the point of intoxication is sinful. Scripture is clear on that).
- However, they don't see any problem in having a drink
- And both sides have a tendency to demonize each other

- One side see's the other as legalistic bigots
- The other see's them as sinful drunkards who will not inherit the Kingdom of God
- Both responses are wrong
- Paul says, ***“Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.”***
-Romans 14:13 (ESV)
 - *In other words, value the person over your opinion*
 - *Cherish the community more than your personal conviction*
 - If you don't choose to abstain don't flaunt it in front of those who do.
 - Don't ever try to pressure someone into having a drink if its against their conviction, and if you know that you're going to be around those who abstain, who may take offense to it, or may have a weakness toward

it, don't blatantly have a drink in front of them to prove a point

- *That's not walking in love, that is not pursuing mutual upbuilding*

- And if you do choose to abstain, and you happen to see another believer out at a restaurant with a drink, don't chew them out and condemn them
- Leave it between them and God and don't break fellowship over it.
- *Paul says "so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." -Romans 12:18 (ESV)*
- He says in verse 19, ***"So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding." -Romans 14:19 (ESV)***
- If You don't agree on a personal conviction like this with another believer, that's fine leave it between them and God, don't throw this issue in each others face and focus on uplifting each other

- Because there are things like this that aren't black and white sin issues. ... Now, It's not like we can say "Oh it's my personal conviction that I can sleep with whoever I want...."
- Shut up, no you can't, that's a black and white sin issue, don't try to go there.
- But there are times when we can have differing preferences, opinions, and convictions that both can still be God-honoring
 - If some Christians want to dress their best, wear their finest dresses and 3 piece suits in to worship. Let em be! If that's a way that they feel like the are honoring God, power to them! Let it be between them and God!
 - If somebody has a different worship style, and they choose to honor and praise God through a big blaring organ or in some way you're not used to...let em do it! Let it be between them and God!
 - This is what Paul was getting as in verse 5, when he says, ***"One person esteems one***

day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.” -Romans 14:5-6 (ESV)

- You don't have to concern yourself with how everyone else chooses to honor and revere God. And as soon as you start picking apart the opinions, preferences, and personal convictions of other believers: All you're going to do is break fellowship, turn your faith into a social competition, and the church will lose its joy.
- So don't argue about stupid stuff. Why? For our 2nd point, here's another way we can void losing Joy:
- **DON'T MAKE EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU**

- If you want a sure fire way to lose joy in your life, make everything about yourself
- If you want to make your world very small, put yourself at the center of it.
- The quickest way to a joyless life is individualization
- Why? This goes back to our illustration last week, whoever we try so hard to fill our lives on our own terms but because we have so many holes in our lives like insecurities, regrets, and weaknesses, we just keep ending up empty over and over and over again.
- So how do we get full and stay full? Well like we talked about last week, it's by hiding ourselves in the complete love of Jesus who covers all of our weaknesses and insufficiencies.
- Paul says here in verse 7, "***For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So***

then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." -Romans 14:7-8 (ESV)

- LIFE IS NOT ABOUT ME!
- As soon as I make it about me, I will completely lose joy in my life because the root of my joy will be in my happiness. My joy is going to be dependent upon my happenings and my feelings
- But true Joy is not dependent upon how I'm feeling. Joy is not dependent upon what side of the bed you wake up on.
- Do you know how incredibly selfish it is to allow your mood to dictate your day?
 - To allow your mood to dictate How you talk to people, how you interact with others, how you carry yourself.
 - That's not pursuing peace and upbuilding each other
 - That's not counting others more significant than yourself

- That's not dying to yourself...and you HAVE TO die to yourself
- Because Joy is not found in yourself, and the more you focus on yourself, the less joyful you will be
- Paul give us some insight into how to live in this joy
- In Phil. 4:4 he says, ***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.” Philippians 4:4-5 (ESV)***
- So first, the Lord is the source of your joy. We look to Him first, and we intentionally rejoice and celebrate how good and perfect He is to us. Then from that Joy, we allow it to flow into our relationships
 - He says, let your reasonableness: sensible, rational, logical, fair, fair-minded, just, equitable; gentle spirit
 - Are you reasonable, or are you opinionated?
 - Are you gentle or confrontational?

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- Are you someone who is easy to talk to?
That makes people feel safe
- Are you welcoming and easy to be around?
- Are you being the best you can be for the people around you?
- I think Paul puts this here because he understands that there is so much joy found in impacting people through our relationship and obedience to the Lord.
- Whenever you are able to lovingly help someone through a trial, even if you may be going through one yourself, there is sense of accomplishment that holds so much more weight than paychecks or trophies
- There is something going on that is so much bigger than ourselves, we need the right view of God and ourselves
- And the number 1 way we can avoid losing joy in our lives is to:
 - **FOCUS ON WHAT BRINGS HEAVEN JOY**
- There's an account in Luke chapter 15 where Jesus is confronted by some people who are a little bit blinded by their personal preferences, opinions, and convictions
- They notice that Jesus is at a dinner party with a bunch of tax collectors
- Now I kinda give these people the benefit of the doubt because on the surface I can get where there are coming from
- This Man, Jesus! Is supposed to be this great spiritual influence, and he's hanging out with professional extortioners
 - He's receiving the worst of the worst and sharing meals with them!
 - What's going on here??
- And Jesus addresses their concerns with a series of three stories.
- The first one He tells of a shepherd who is out in the pasture with 100 sheep. And as he's doing a count of the flock, he realizes that there's one missing.

- And the way he poses this story makes me chuckle a bit because He says, “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?”
 - If I’m there I’m like, “Ummm, me! I wouldn’t! Now I’m no sheep scientist, but I’m pretty sure 99 is a lot more than one. So if I have 100 sheep and lose only one of them I’m still very much in the positive.
 - I’m not going to leave my 99 good sheep to go find just one of them. That one deserves to be lost because he’s DUMB! He shouldn’t have wandered off in the first place!
- But Jesus speaks of a Shepherd who care so much about each individual sheep that if even one goes missing, He’s willing to drop everything to go find that one
- And when He finds it, He’s going to invite all of His friends, throw a party, and celebrate the fact that He found His lost sheep.
- And Jesus says, **“Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” -Luke 15:7 (ESV)**
- And then the 2nd story is along the same lines, where a woman loses a coin, finds it, and then throws a party with all of her friends because she found her lost coin.
- And again, Jesus says, **“Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” -Luke 15:10 (ESV)**
- And then thirdly, He tells a story about a man who has two sons. And one day the younger son comes up to him and says, “Hey dad, you know all of the money that I would inherit whenever you die? Yea, I want it right now.” You sure that’s what you want son, yea, that’s what I want. I’m 21 now, I know what I’m doing.” “Ok son...”
 - “Wait a minute, hold up. What kind of dad is this?!”

- His son is obviously an idiot, and it's still YOUR money, smack this kid upside his head and make him go to his room!"
- Why in the world would he give him what he wants??
- Because what the Father values is a relationship, and there's no relationship without a choice.
 - *Sometimes the Father has to allow us to make mistakes and some stupid decisions because sometimes you will never understand how much the Father loves you and how much He does for you until you fail.*
- So the Father in the story allows the son to take the money, and he takes off to Vegas.
 - He spends recklessly, parties hard, but he's only got friends as long as he's got cash.
 - So before long all of the money is gone and his friends leave with it. And right around the time when the money runs out, a famine hits the land.
- The economy crashes, the cost of living goes WAY up
 - He gets desperate and He gets to the point where he takes a job on a pig farm, but in the fine print of the job description is that he's not even allowed to eat the pig slop that the pigs eat from.
- In the midst of literal rock bottom, he finally comes to himself and thinks, *"Wait a minute, back at dad's house, even the servants had enough food to go around, and I'm about to starve to death on a pig farm!"*
 - So he comes up with a plan, and he prepares a comeback speech.
 - He figures he'll go back to dad tell him, *"Dad, I've sinned against heaven and against you, I'm no longer worthy to be called you son, please just hire me on as one of your hired servants."*
 - He gets his speech down in his head and he makes his way back to dad's house.

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- And then Jesus says, while he was still a long way off, the Father saw him.
 - How many hours, how many days did the Father spend looking out over the horizon waiting to see his son walking toward Him??
- And then finally the day comes whenever He sees His boy. And then Jesus said whenever the Father saw him, He RAN to his son.
 - And when Jesus said that the Father would have ran the audience would have gasped, because Jewish dudes in that day did not run.
 - It was degrading for a man in that culture to run,
 - But The Father didn't care how ridiculous He looked or how it sounded, all He cared about was that His son was coming home!
- So He runs to him, He grabs him, and he doesn't scold him and tell him how much of an idiot he's been, he hugs him and kisses him.
- The son tries to get his comeback speech out, *"Father I've sinned against heaven and against you, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son."*
- And you know what the Father does? He completely ignores it!
- This son has the audacity to think he was a son by worth? There was nothing he could ever do to earn being His son because he's not a son by worth, he's a son by birth.
 - How many of us have developed a comeback speech for God as if we can impress Him with a cleverly worded statement?
 - How many of us try to prove our worth to God, as if we can really do anything to impress Him.
- We think God is up in Heaven saying, "WHOA, GUYS! COME CHECK THIS OUT! SHE JUST PRAYER FOR 28 MINUTES STRAIGHT! HE JUST READ 2 FULL CHAPTERS TONIGHT! NEVER IN ALL OF ETERNITY HAVE A SEEN

SOMETHING LIKE THIS! THEY ARE DEFINITELY MY CHILDREN!”

- How often do we try to live our lives in such a way where we think we can impress God with a good enough streak and earn our way to be His child?
- *But the only thing that impresses God is His Son. That's why it's impossible to please God without faith because it's impossible to please God without Jesus. And once we accept Jesus are lives are then hidden in Him.*
- *This is why Jesus uses the language of being Born Again, because it's no longer us who live but Christ who lives through us and because of the Cross we can be covered in the perfection of Jesus and the Father sees us as Holy, Loved, Accepted, and Approved as His Children. Not by worth, but by birth.*
- So the Father in this story doesn't even entertain the son's comeback speech.
 - He just turns to the servants and says, *“Bring out the best robe, put it on him, put a ring on*

his hand, give him some shoes, get the best steaks that we have, get everyone together and let's celebrate!”

- Translation, "We're gonna have a party and we're gonna have one right now!"
- How much time took place in- between this son to coming home in shame, to hitting the cha-cha-slide on the dance floor??
- Does this not rub anyone else the wrong way??
 - Here's this kid, who took what wasn't his yet, went out, lived SO irresponsibly, and the Father is treating him like he's coming home with a PHD from Harvard?!
- The only one that seems to be thinking logically here is the older brother!
 - He's out working in the field, doing what he's supposed to be doing, doing all of the right things, and then all of the sudden he starts to hear music and dancing.

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- So he asks someone what's going on and they tell him, "Oh your brother has come home safe and sound!"
- He's thinking "Are you kidding me!?" And he refuses to go in! And I don't blame him!
- His dad goes out to talk to him, and he's like "Are you Kidding me Dad?? How long have I faithfully served you?? Where's my party! Where's my celebration?! This other son of yours squanders your money on prostitutes, dishonors your name and this entire house, and you throw HIM a party? ITS NOT FAIR!"
- ***"And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'" -Luke 15:31-32 (ESV)***
- Jesus wants us to rethink what is really worth celebrating. He wants us to rethink what we express our joy in.
 - How often are we the older brother?
- We've been living for God, doing all the right things, not being an idiot...but we lose the JOY of it because all we're thinking about is where's MY party, where's MY acknowledgement, when is it MY turn to be celebrated?!
 - And Jesus is saying, "That's all well and good, I love you and I'm proud of you, and you're always with me."
- But what if you stopped trying to get yourself celebrated for all of these finite accomplishments and spent your energy celebrating the one who just went from death to life?"
 - We gotta get over ourselves. We can't get caught up counting other people's blessings and comparing them to ours. Remember it's not about us!
 - The party here, I would go as far to say, was less about the prodigal son, and more about the goodness of the Father.
 - Always remember, you replicate what you celebrate

Sunday, April 30, 2023

- The more we celebrate the Goodness of the Father the more we would replicate the Goodness of the Father through our lives.
- The longer that we pursue our own recognition, the longer we will miss out on what the Father is actually trying to do, and in doing so, Lose the Joy we're supposed to be standing in.
 - And, He came to SEEK and to SAVE the lost.
 - For those of us who are already saved, we already have everything we could ever possibly need in the person of Jesus,
 - But what about those who don't?
 - That's where are focus should be,
- And the greatest joy we will ever experience in this life, is whenever we are able to celebrate being a part of seeing someone come into the Kingdom of God
 - If that's what causes Heaven to be full of joy, that's what should cause us to be full of Joy
- The joy of our church is not going to be found in setting up services on Sunday mornings
- The real joy is going to be found whenever God sends us the one, who had been lost and wandering, squandering life away, not knowing the Love of the Father
- But whenever they come Home and accept their place as His child....man we're gonna throw parties.