

The Pathway to Joy

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 July 2007

Preacher: David Wesner

[0:00] We're continuing with a study of selected psalms using Philip's book, *Walking with God*.! We're coming this morning to Psalm 16, so I'd ask you to please turn there. Psalm 16.

! And the title of this chapter in his book is *The Pathway to Joy*. *The Pathway to Joy*. Okay. Before beginning, launching into the psalm, I'd like to just begin with a few introductory remarks.

And the first being the importance of joy. Phillips writes, one of the clearest signs of communing with God is the experience of joy in all circumstances.

In other words, saying we want a vibrant relationship with God is the same thing as saying that we want to experience the Lord's joy all the time. According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, what's the chief end of man? Anyone?

Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. What three-letter word is inside the word enjoy? To joy in God forever. According to Paul, what is the kingdom of God about?

[1:18] In Romans 14.17, he says, For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

On the one side of the ledger, he speaks of the earthly. What's the most common things we can think about? About our human existence. It's eating and drinking. It's something we have to do every day. It's a necessity.

What's he put on the other side of the ledger? What's the most necessary thing we must be doing every day as it relates to the spiritual? Well, it's peace. It's righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, I'd like to provide an introductory remark regarding the ubiquity of joy. The ubiquity of joy. And I'm curious. I went through a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and I never heard or read this word ubiquity until I started reading computer magazines.

Does anybody here know what that word means? Ubiquity. Jason? Everywhere-ness.

Everywhere-ness. I like that. The everywhere-ness of something.

[2:26] It's just everywhere. It's everywhere you look. The ubiquity of it. And we're speaking of the ubiquity of joy. Is joy the same thing as happiness? Well, as I demonstrated, I believe, the last time I taught, Scripture uses the term synonymously.

Happiness and joy. But culturally, the idea we have in mind when we speak of happiness is often having a good time. In other words, having pleasing experiences and avoiding those things that are unpleasant.

And under this definition, of course, joy does not equal happiness. And joy will certainly not be ubiquitous in our life if that's what we're seeking.

The problem with this type of joy is that one's happiness is dependent on outward circumstances.

Again, Phillips writes, The world knows how to have joy when all is well.

The tragedy is that its joy is fleeting and utterly fails when troubles come. The Bible, on the other hand, focuses our sights on spiritual joy that is a gift of God's grace and can be experienced in any and every circumstances.

[3:35] As we have already memorized from Philippians 4, 4, Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice. The third and final introductory comment.

Happiness or joy is a fruit, not a pursuit. It's a fruit, not a pursuit. Happiness cannot be sought.

While everyone wants to be happy, any happiness that is realized by pursuit is by definition going to be fleeting at best.

The one who's seeking personal fulfillment is living by a twisted set of priorities. Rather, happiness is the fruit of glorifying God. We were created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

We are to worship Him, not happiness. We're to find joy in the Lord, not in things or circumstances. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones commented on the Beatitude, Blessed are they that hunger and thirst for righteousness, when he said, We are not to hunger and thirst after blessedness.

We are not to hunger and thirst after happiness. But that is what most people are doing. Whenever you put happiness before righteousness, you will be doomed to misery.

[4:52] That is the great message of the Bible from beginning to end. They alone are truly happy who are seeking to be righteous. Jesus taught that we are to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and then all these things will be added unto you as well.

Put another way, He said, Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. When we give ourselves to worship of God at all times, to doing His will and to trusting Him alone, then we will find joy.

So turning to Psalm 16. Psalm 16 lays out the pathway to joy. It puts into practical terms the theological truths that we've just been speaking of.

When a child of God hears truth, his heart's drawn to it, and we naturally just agree with it. We're warmed to it. And if you're a believer here this morning, you undoubtedly just did that very thing. As you heard me read Jesus' words, when you heard me speak of God being the priority, but the pathway that makes that truth practical is often obscure and hidden.

[6:12] Psalm 16 sets up guideposts to show us how to go along that pathway. I kind of like what Carl did last week, so I think I'm going to do the same thing.

He might be starting a trend. I'm going to give you the whole conclusion of the matter, of what the pathway of joy is, and that way if I don't get through all the material, you'll have it. Carl will know that we're on to something if Pastor John starts doing this in his messages.

So the pathway to joy, it begins with faith.

Step one is faith, belief that God is sovereign and good. Without faith, one's joy is necessarily dependent on humanly perceived goodness of one's circumstances.

The second step, faith leads to submission of God's providence, to God's providence. Submission to God's providence.

[7:11] This step demands the bending of my will to the Father's will. Until I can say with Jesus, my food is to do the will of him who sent me, I'm going to struggle with joy when life's circumstances cross my will.

The third step, submission lifts the heart to thankful worship. And then fourthly, worship is going to result in sincere joy. So we have faith, submission, worship, and joy.

That is the pathway to joy. Anybody have any questions? Well, let's take a look at them one at a time. Step one, faith.

We see, I was going to say Paul, we see David beginning with a prayer for help. David wrote this psalm while in some kind of danger, and likely while he was fleeing from Saul, who was envious and hateful of him for no wrongdoing of his own.

And the context in which godly joy arises is that of hardship and difficulty and emotional pain and sorrow. In John 16, 33, we read, I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace.

[8:31] In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world. When trouble comes, the Christian can choose to either focus on the circumstances themselves or take his troubles to the Lord.

Well, David chose the latter. In Psalm 16, beginning in verse 1, we read, Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.

Bringing one's plea to God is the first step on the pathway to joy. As he flees to God, faith enables David to see three different persons from a new perspective.

God, his saints, and unbelievers. And those are the three sub-points. Viewing God through the eyes of faith, viewing saints through the eyes of faith, and viewing unbelievers through the eyes of faith.

First, viewing God through the eyes of faith. Verse 2, we read, I said to the Lord, You are my Lord. Apart from you, I have no good thing. First, I said to the Lord, capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D, I must come to see God as my personal Lord and Savior, my odd and I.

[9:51] Our sinful nature chaffs under the rule of another. We want our independence and our so-called freedom. But consider the comfort of being able to directly address the Lord, the ruler of the universe.

I'm surrounded by enemies on every side. Well, they may not be the same enemies of David's, the enemies of sword and shield, horse. They are enemies, nonetheless.

And they're dispatched by the same tyrannical ruler, Satan. And they're intended for the same purpose, and that is my demise. My enemies might be enemies of pride and anger and lust, or enemies of financial ruin, enemies of broken relationships, enemies of earthly success that would beacon me to trust in my own resources.

As these enemies close rank and prepare to destroy me, I look up to the castle of my king, the Lord, and see the hosts of his protection surrounding these enemies of mine, and rendering them powerless and pathetic.

It's the familiar story of Elisha when he prayed, for the sake of his servant, O Lord, open his eyes so he may see. Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

[11 : 20] I must be actively reminding myself of the kingdom in which I dwell, the protection of the Lord, the Adonai of that kingdom. And as I do, it will profoundly affect the perspective I have of the enemies that are around me.

Secondly, you are my Lord. Faith must go beyond believing in God. It must make it personal if it is to be a saving faith. There's a vast difference between saying Pastor John is the pastor of Grace Fellowship Church and saying that he is my pastor.

The Lord, the King, the Adonai, is my Lord. He is mine and I am his. He has personal interest in me. You are my Lord, capital L, lowercase O-R-D. He is my Yahweh, that is my covenant-keeping God. Yahweh is the name of God that reminds us of the covenant faithfulness, of his covenant faithfulness to his people.

He's going to keep all of his promises to me. Last week, Carl surveyed many promises that God has made to his people. Yahweh is the covenant-keeping God that will never go back on a single one of those promises.

[12 : 38] So secondly, viewing saints through the eyes of faith. Viewing saints through the eyes of faith. A powerful weapon in Satan's arsenal is to undermine the believer's faith and he does that often by casting doubt on my relationship with God.

It's difficult to claim God's promises if my status regarding my relationship with him as his child is in question. In verse 3 of Psalm 16, David says, As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.

Do I delight? Do I love the saints who are in the land? Do I delight in them? Do I find that when I'm around the sons of darkness I feel like a foreigner, an alien?

But when I get around God's people I suddenly feel at home? Many years ago when I went to Europe I was having difficulty conversing with the natives for many reasons.

Language, of course, being one. Feeling quite out of place in their culture. And as we were touring a particular city I stumbled across a couple of fellow Americans.

[13 : 56] And we immediately hit it off. We both felt a mutual kinship as we began discussing things. And better yet, I found out they were from the promised land in Michigan.

And so we discussed things regarding that. We had a refreshing time of fellowship because we were able to share common experiences.

We had a common language. Do I find myself bathing in this kind of refreshment when I get around God's people? Finally, I can talk with someone who understands my language.

They appreciate my Lord and the experiences I have with Him. If so, I can take this experience as a strong testimony that God has made me His own.

a genuine member of His flock. 1 John 3.14 We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers.

[14 : 54] Anyone who does not love remains in death. But then thirdly, we begin viewing unbelievers through the eye of faith. We begin viewing unbelievers through the eyes of faith.

Verse 4 of Psalm 16 The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods. I will not pour out their libations of blood or take up their names on my lips.

Our flesh would have us consider the ways of unbelievers. The problem is that it only considers the here and now, the temporary. It looks at their prosperity and success, the gains they enjoy through sin and their own compromise.

And when we do so, it leads only to discontentment and despair. Such thoughts become for us a towering mountain that block the pathway of joy. I believe Carl is going to be looking at Psalm 73, so I'm not going to steal his thunder, but wasn't this Asaph's dilemma?

He envied the arrogant when he saw the prosperity of the wicked. And what was the solution for Asaph? Well, he considered their final destiny. Faith doesn't close its eyes to the reality around me and pretend that the wicked are living a life of unhappiness and misery.

[16 : 19] I know many people who are living for self in this world and are having a blast doing so. No, faith looks at their earthly prosperity and pleasure, but then values it accurately and fairly according to God's measures.

If you were to go down to the track and watch your children compete, and let's say they were running the 5K race and you watch some young novice bowl out of the gate and running madly the first two laps around the track, way ahead of everyone else, would we all be looking at him saying, oh, what a marvelous athlete?

No. Rather, we'd be saying he's starting too fast. He's not pacing himself. He isn't considering the 10-plus laps he's got to go yet. And when he comes crawling across the finish line in last place, certainly at that point, no one's going to be praising him.

In fact, his coach should be rebuking him that he didn't pace himself from the beginning. so why in the race of life do we envy those sprinting out of the gate as if they're running the 100-yard dash when in reality they've only started a marathon?

At the end of this life, with all of eternity still before them, when the wicked will come crawling to God's judgment in last place, will anyone be envying their initial fleeting glory experienced in those first few yards of the race?

[17 : 52] faith considers the end of the wicked as a safeguard against envying their present prosperity. It looks down the corridor of time through the window of God's word.

And thus, the truth secured by faith sets our hearts free from envy and despair. It's faith that overcomes the world. For everyone born of God overcomes the world.

This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. 1 John 5, 4. All of God's chosen ones will overcome the world, but the means for this victory is our faith.

And without faith, it is impossible to please God. Faith, then, is the starting point on this pathway to joy. It's amazing how a brief re-evaluation of one's situation can result in a completely new perspective.

David's gone from a desperate cry to keep me safe, to now confidently declaring, you have made my lot secure. In so doing, his focus has shifted from his circumstances to the Lord.

[19 : 02] You have made my lot secure. Well, the second step on the pathway to joy is submission to God's providence. God's God's God's God's providence.

And for this, 5 and 6. Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup. You have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.

Surely, I have a delightful inheritance. Submission to God's providence carries three primary aspects. God, submission, and providence. And I'd simply like to take the statement and focus on those three main words.

First, submission to God's providence. When David began the psalm, his circumstances were his focus. Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.

Keep me safe. It's like the believer is often like a child who when frightened by something bolts to the waiting arms of his father.

[20 : 10] Screaming as he runs, keep me safe, Daddy. His father's arms are a security, his place of refuge. As he begins his flight to safety, would we not be accurate in observing his attention as focused on his circumstances, that which he's running from, rather than his father?

But something happens after he's flung himself into his daddy's waiting arms. Those strong arms that wrap around him and hold him tight. And that is that that thing which was so frightening just a moment before doesn't look so scary anymore, does it?

Now he's secure to be able to turn his attention to his father. He slowly turns his dad's head to him and he starts petting his face and playing with his ears in his nose.

Now his attention isn't on his circumstances anymore, it's on his daddy. And he's able to do that because he's restfully secure. And so it happens with God's true children.

And so it happened with David. The Lord has become the starting point for all his statements. You have assigned me my portion and my cup.

[21:28] You have made my lot secure. But unfortunately throwing ourselves into the waiting arms of our God is only part of the story. For submission to God's providence has that distasteful little word submission in it and that leads to the second word I'd like to focus on.

Submission to God's providence. It's this aspect of God's sovereignty and providence that our flesh isn't so excited about.

When I jump into my father's arms I have submitted myself to the paths that he's choosing for me in life. A child in their daddy's arms has relinquished their independence, their control over where they're going.

And while daddy's arms are a great place to be when you're frightened, it isn't long before that child begins tugging and pulling and trying to get out of those arms. How many daddies have experienced that with their little child?

God often sends us trials to send us fleeing back into his arms. But our sternest test, once we're there, is to sweetly remain content within those arms.

[22:46] Which translated means we must remain content and submissive in our present circumstances. Not everything appears good to our perception. Certainly not everything in life is going to be according to our flesh's liking.

And when such times come, we want to begin tugging and pushing and pulling ourselves away from our father's grasps, what must we do? Well, let's look to our Lord as our example.

Jesus said, My father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not as I will, but as you will. We follow our Lord's example and submit ourselves in faith to our father's will.

Spirituality isn't a state of having no will of my own. It is a state of complete willingness to subjugate my will to the father's will. Whenever he starts heading me down a path, it isn't to my will's liking.

And it's this very act of submitting my will to the will of my father that produces joy. Again, using our Lord as an example, after submitting himself to the will of his father, what enabled him to pass through that unspeakable trial of propitiating God's wrath on our behalf?

[24:08] We catch a glimpse of it in Hebrews 2.2, who for the joy set before him endured the cross scorning its shame. God made us to worship him.

And often, it's at the times when the pull of my flesh is the strongest, when my security is threatened, or sin again attacks with unusual power and strength, or when death comes knocking at the door, yet I still submit my will to the will of my father.

It's at such times that the experience of joy is the strongest. The third word in this submission to God's providence I'd like to focus on is the word providence.

Submission to God's providence. In God's sovereign kindness, mercy, and grace, he uses everything for the good of his people. We know that. Romans 8.28, my covenant keeping God is faithful to all his promises.

I come to recognize and acknowledge that every good thing that I have comes from him. Psalm 16.2, apart from you I have no good thing, David said.

[25:21] We're so quick to complain about those things that come into our lives that we perceive to be bad, but the pathway to joy lays hold of my mind and directs it to consider that everything in my life is part of God's wise and good providence for me.

As Phillips puts it, we calmly rely on God's sovereignty and goodness and are enabled to submit to his wise and loving provision which is revealed in our circumstances.

We come to know God and knowing him to trust him with joy. While God's providence is certainly filled with circumstances that our flesh chaffs against, for the believer and no one aspect of God's providence is the fact that surely I have a delightful inheritance verse 6.

Just as Jesus after enduring the cross sat down at the right hand of the throne of grace, so the Christian also has a sure and delightful inheritance that casts a completely different light over everything we experience in life.

Why is it that God's people have a delightful inheritance? Well, it's because it was secured by the resurrection of Jesus. David was confident of his own resurrection because God did not abandon his Holy One to the grave.

[26:44] And who is this Holy One? Well, we read in Acts 2.31 in Peter's Pentecostal sermon, Seeing what was ahead, he, David, Psalm 16, spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was

not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay.

I cannot improve on Philip's words at this point, so listen as he writes, it is by the resurrection that God overwhelms our every fear, wipes away every tear, overturns every injustice, removes every curse, and makes way for the blessing of his love.

The resurrection tells us that God will not abandon us to our circumstances, that death and sorrow will not have the final say. Here is a power that broke the bands of death, a strength that meets our every need.

It is the light that burst from Jesus' open tomb and inspired David to say, you make known to me the path of life. And it is with confidence in God's power that we may speak of the glories yet ahead.

In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. seeing his master's goodness in his circumstances naturally led David to burst into praise for his king, which leads to the third step on the pathway to joy, and that is thankful worship.

[28 : 12] Thankful worship. Verse 7, I will praise the Lord who counsels me even at night. My heart instructs me. briefly three aspects of this worship that I'd like us to consider.

The necessity of worship, the definition of worship, and the fruit of worship. First, the necessity of worship. Thankful worship is a requisite of joy because we were created to worship God.

Therefore, not only is worshiping God eminently right, it is ultimately what is best for us. Secondly, the definition of worship. It should go without saying that God is center to worship.

I will praise the Lord. Worship means praising God, and we can do it anywhere, anytime, in any and all circumstances. We should be constantly reminded of this truth because we so easily slip into so many forms of idolatry.

It's easy to say, God should be the center of my worship, and I should always worship him. but how easy it is to not do so even in the things we think we are worshiping him in.

[29 : 26] There's a subtle but idolatrous difference between being thankful for the gift rather than praising the giver of the gift. There's a subtle difference between becoming enamored with the truth rather than the one who is truth, and how much I've seen this in my own heart through the years.

Thirdly, there's a fruit of worship. Following David's expression of worship in verse 7, we read in verse 11, You have made known to me the path of life.

You will fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand. Knowledge of the path of life is not mine for the taking. I can't just decide, okay, I'm going to head down the path of life now.

No, it must be revealed to me. God must make known to me the path of life. It doesn't say that when I discover the path of life, it says that God made known to me the path of life.

And he does so while I'm worshiping him. Can we see how utterly dependent we are on God for the ability to see and enjoy him? this is where one of the greatest consequences, I believe, of the beliefs of our Arminian brothers falls short.

[30 : 53] And it's on this aspect of feeling that I have the ability to come to God whenever I want, to worship him as I will, and not seeing that I am utterly dependent on him, to give him the praise, do his name, to give him the honor and glory do his name, and that he must put within me the ability to do that, and I can only do that as I follow his means of grace by which he has commanded me to come to him.

So worship, in fact, has a fruit, and the fruit is the ability to worship him more. The fruit is the ability to see him as he truly is, to see this pathway of joy, to rightly discern what is true from what is false. What is the right path, and what leads to destruction. It's only because of God's stabilizing power and grace that I don't fall.

We see that in verse 8, because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Well, finally, the ultimate fruit of worship, then, is joy. Sincere joy, step four.

Joy comes, then, as an overflow of worship. Verse 9, therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices, my body also will rest secure.

[32 : 16] As we worship with glad and sincere hearts, we feel God's pleasure and receive joy from the Lord, writes Phillips. When is it that I will shout for joy? Well, Psalm 71, 23 says, my lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you.

You see the cause and effect? Again, Phillips writes, that is the secret, if you will call it that, of abiding joy in this world. God wants us to give him our hearts so that he might become our strength and that our joy might be found in him.

Joy is found in the presence of God, secondly. Joy is found in the presence of God. Verse 11, you will fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

God-inspired joy isn't dependent on our circumstances. Anyone can praise God in plenty and comfort, but to be able to worship God at the sickbed of a child, at the gravesite of a husband, in the tumult of war, or amidst the sorrows of a broken world, causes the angels to gaze in silence, shuts the mouths of demons, and makes the watching world stand up and take notice.

God usually brings us to the place of joy, not by changing our circumstances, but by changing us, by changing me. How often, when I'm in a place of utter despair, I cry out to God, and he fills me with joy by taking me down these same steps, the same pathway to joy that we've just gone through.

[33 : 57] It's funny, but nothing in my life has changed. The only thing that changed was my perspective. So the next time our flame of joy is about to be extinguished, let us remember this pathway back to joy.

Faith, belief that my God is sovereign and good, submission to God's providence, thankful worship, which will then lead to sincere joy.

Thank you, and we're dismissed.