

Introduction

In John 10:10, Jesus declares, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” Jesus, God incarnate, came to this earth in order to save sinners and give them life in him. He did this by dying in our place and uniting us with him through the Cross. As believers, God sees us through Jesus Christ and we are fully accepted by him because of what his son accomplished on the Cross. This truth should be the believer’s foundation upon which she rests her joy.

In the beginning of this project, I decided that I would work on having genuine joy in my life. I did not want to have joy only when circumstances were going well. I wanted the joy of the Lord even when things seemed out of control. Though it was acceptable for me to feel joyful over the good things that God allowed into my life, I also wanted to have a deep-rooted joy that would allow me to feel secure even among trials and hard times. During my freshman year of college, I struggled with depression. This was an extremely dark time in my life and it was filled with deep sadness and despair. I felt hopeless. These emotions were so intense that I genuinely believed that my presence in this world would be missed by no one if I were gone. I can gratefully say that God brought me out of this dark season in my life, allowing me to receive godly counsel and to begin to understand the value my life had in Christ. It was during this time that God showed me more of how much he truly loved me. I am now able to look back at this time in my life and see God’s faithfulness and grace woven into my story. I am also able to inspect why it was that I entered into such a season of depression. Though my circumstances were not ideal and certain events brought out the depression in a more visible way, at the core of the issue was my lack of understanding in grace and in the gospel of Christ. It came from my lack of security in God’s unending love for me. As I looked back at this time in my life

throughout this project, I was able to see the lingering insecurities that exist in my heart concerning God's grace and love. My lack of joy can often find its root in not believing that I am who God says I am.

Throughout this paper, I will look at biblical joy and how it is and should be made manifest in the life of the believer. I will look at some of the blessings that can come as a result of entrusting one's life and circumstances into the sovereign hand of God, and also some of the things that can steal one's joy. Joy finds its completion in Jesus Christ and ultimately gives glory to God. True joy is found in choosing to put one's hope in eternity and the security that comes from the Cross of Christ.

A Biblical Understanding of Joy

The Bible has a great deal to say about the topic of joy. The Apostle Paul consistently tells us to rejoice in the Lord, specifically in passages such as Philippians 4:4 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Jesus speaks of joy in the book of John, telling his disciples that no one will be able to take away their joy (John 16:22). Throughout the Psalms, the psalmists constantly reflect on praising and rejoicing in God, finding their gladness in him.

I believe that we must begin with a definition of joy. The Holman Bible dictionary defines joy as, "The happy state that results from knowing and serving God."¹ C.S. Lewis defines joy as a sort of longing and hope for the future that cannot be attached to finite objects. He speaks of the fact that we catch glimpses of joy from things on earth, yet the things themselves are not what ultimately fulfill this longing. Rather, all joy points to God. As many of the Romantic poets did, we oftentimes rely on the finite, such as nature, to fulfill us and be the means of joy. This can become idolatrous when we begin worshipping these images and

¹ Robert J. Dean, "Holman Bible Dictionary," 1991, accessed April 17, 2014. <http://www.studydrive.org/dic/hbd/view.cgi?number=T3512>.

confusing them as joy itself. Yet, as Lewis says, “All Joy reminds. It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still ‘about to be.’”² Further, Jonathan Edwards, as he writes about in “The End for Which God Created the World,” believes that God’s glory is completely compatible with our happiness. Ultimately, our joy on this earth results from the glory of God, finding its root and its completion in him. Edwards declares, “The happiness of the creature consists in rejoicing in God, by which also God is magnified and exalted.”³ Therefore, joy is the content and happy state of the believer that comes from participating in God’s glory. It comes from knowing that the thing which the believer seeks is God himself and that nothing on this earth will bring the fulfillment that is only found in Christ.

We also see that joy has many facets. Throughout God’s Word, joy seems to be related to many other things, some of which seem to contradict joy but in reality, lead to joy. For example, we see that joy comes through experiencing trials in the book of James. We see through the life of Paul, an apostle who experienced much joy as he speaks of throughout his letters, that joy does not come from good, earthly circumstances. He could even be content in prison. Joy is not simply an emotion that one experiences from earthly pleasure, but it is a deep longing for the things that are above and eternal (Colossians 3:2). It is the ability to hope in the good things that are to come and the ultimate joy of being in perfect unity with Christ when we enter heaven. Though we are able to glimpse joy and experience it while on earth, our joy will be completed in eternity. As David says in Psalm 16:11, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” We can experience joy in this life as we hope for eternity with God (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). We also see that Christ experienced this hope in a future joy. In Hebrews 12:2, we are told that Christ

² C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (Hammersmith: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), p. 59.

³ J. Piper and J. Edwards, *God’s Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards With the Complete Text of the End for Which God Created the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), p. 158.

endured the Cross for the joy that was set before him. He knew the greater joy of experiencing the pain and sorrow of the Cross, to be seated at the right hand of the Father and to unite us to himself.

The joy of the Lord is part of God's plan for our lives, in the sense that we allow the Holy Spirit to control and produce fruit in our lives. As believers, the Holy Spirit indwells in us. Galatians 5:22-23 tell us, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." The fruit of the Spirit develops joy in us. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit points us to Christ and his saving work. We can do nothing by our own power. As we think about this and how it relates to joy, we see that the Holy Spirit points us to Christ and away from the sinful desires of our flesh (Galatians 5:16). Carrying out the sinful desires of our flesh can be a cause of our lack of joy. Therefore, this emphasis on Christ as opposed to self and the flesh develops joy in our lives. Throughout this passage, Paul speaks of walking by the Spirit. He lists the works of the flesh, including sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, etc. These things obviously do not lead to joy. Rather, Paul concludes that "those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21). These things lead to death while walking by the Spirit leads to life. We can gather from this passage that joy is a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Paul speaks a great deal about joy throughout his other writings. We see that he believes joy and thankfulness to be interrelated. For example, we read in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." In this passage, Paul is speaking to the believers at Philippi. As White says, "...Paul urges them to rejoice; to let all men see their evenness of temperament; to remember that 'the Lord is at hand;' and to turn all anxieties into grateful

prayers. That will bring peace beyond understanding.”⁴ The reader sees that Paul commands the believer to rejoice. This must mean that rejoicing is a choice; it is not merely based on one’s circumstances. We see this because Paul writes this letter from a prison in Rome. His circumstances are unsatisfactory in terms of earthly comfort, yet he is receiving his joy and thanksgiving from Christ and his salvation. By telling the believers to not worry about anything, but instead to pray with thanksgiving, he encourages them to find their joy and comfort in Christ. By presenting their requests to God, they understand that they do not have the ability to control their own lives. Instead, they trust God with their requests and in turn, receive his peace. Further, as we see later in the same passage, Paul calls them to be pure in their thinking and to dwell, ultimately, on things that bring God glory (Philippians 4:8). This way of thinking also brings about the peace of Christ. In this sense, God’s peace and joy can be seen as relating to one another. Being thankful, which is a true sign of humility in that one understands that every good and perfect gift is from God and everything is from God (James 1:17), can bring about joy. This joy understands that God is in control and he is the one who gives the believer strength (Philippians 4:13).

Jesus speaks of joy in the book of John, particularly in chapters 15 and 16. In John 15, he speaks of abiding in him, the true vine. In this passage, Jesus tells his disciples that they can do nothing apart from him (John 15:5). One cannot bear fruit apart from Christ. Jesus goes on to say that God is glorified when his disciples bear fruit (John 15:8). As his disciples bear fruit, they reveal God’s glory to the world. They share his goodness and his love. After speaking of abiding in him, Jesus says, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). We receive joy as we abide in Christ and his love. Abiding can mean meditating on his love, acceptance, and salvation. It also means that we keep his

⁴ Reginald White, *Meet Paul* (Wilton: Morehouse Publishing, 1989), p. 96.

commandments (John 15:10). We understand that we are dependent on the Lord and that it is only by abiding in Jesus that we have the ability to bear fruit and thus glorify God. We were created to bring God glory and by doing this, we ourselves are filled with joy by completing our purpose and the reason for which we were made. In this passage we see that Jesus made God's glory his end. Christ's life on this earth and his death on the Cross demonstrate the fact that God's glory was his highest end. Jonathan Edwards speaks of the way Christ was comforted by reminding himself that God's glory was the reason for his sufferings. In turn, salvation was made attainable.⁵ This is a great example of God's glory and human joy relating perfectly. In the same way that Jesus had joy because he obeyed the Father, Jesus' followers will also have joy when they obey.⁶

In John 16, Jesus declares the joy that comes from his salvation and the work that he is about to accomplish on the Cross. Throughout this passage, Jesus also shows us how our joy will continue to grow until it is completed when we enter eternity with him. James speaks of this as he talks of the sanctifying work of trials in one's life. It is joy for the believer to face trials because these things lead us to become more complete, more like Christ (James 1:2-4). In John 16, Jesus speaks of the fact that though the disciples will experience sorrow now, this sorrow will be turned into joy as they will have the ability to pray in Christ's name (John 16:24). In this passage, Jesus is speaking to his disciples concerning the fact that he must die in order to bring them salvation. This salvation is what will bring them joy and this joy will not be taken from them (John 16:22). We can also draw from this that we find joy as we focus on eternity with Christ. Though we face hardship in this life, nothing can compare with the joy that is to come

⁵ J. Piper and J. Edwards, *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards With the Complete Text of the End for Which God Created the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), p. 202.

⁶ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), p. 2055.

when we enter eternity and see Christ face to face (2 Corinthians 4:17). The joy of heaven and eternity with the Father will far surpass the troubles we face on this earth.

We see the theme of joy all throughout the book of Psalms. Psalm 104 is an example of a psalm full of praise and worship to God. The psalmist declares that he will sing to the Lord as long as he lives (Psalm 104:33). He worships the Lord by declaring how great he is and that all creation praises God. N.T. Wright says about this passage, “The glory of God, said the theologian Irenaeus, is a human being fully alive. The writer of Psalm 104, and we may hope the singer as well, is one such human being, not only celebrating God’s filling of the earth with his glory, but embodying that same reality in the life of praise.”⁷ In Psalm 33, the psalmist focuses on the Lord and the fact that he has made all things. He is the one who is the true deliverer and his love is steadfast (Psalm 33:18). The psalmist declares, “For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name” (Psalm 33:21). He is joyful because he trusts in the Lord. He knows that God is faithful in all of his ways and that he can place his hope in God’s steadfast love. This, in turn, causes him joy. As he finds his hope in a good and faithful God, he is able to find rest and be glad in the Lord.

Yet, it is not only in psalms of thanksgiving that we find the topic of joy. We also see the psalmists choosing joy and trusting God in many lament psalms. For example, in Psalm 42, the psalmist laments his current situation and tells God of his struggle. Lament psalms consist of the psalmist declaring his honest emotions to the Lord. Yet even in the psalmist’s trouble, he puts his confidence in God. Despite his distressed emotions, there is still a sense of hope because he believes that God can deliver him. Throughout Psalm 42, the psalmist tells his soul to “hope in God” (Psalm 42:5). He declares God to be his “salvation” and his “God” (Psalm 42:11). Although he tells God his problem and he does not downplay his situation, he still sees God’s

⁷ N.T. Wright, *The Case for the Psalms* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), p. 135.

hope as being greater than his problems. As he looks at his earthly situation, he is downcast. Yet as he pours out his soul, he remembers the good things God has done and the hope that he once felt and the “songs of praise” he once sung (Psalm 42:4). He remembers good days in order to restore hope in the present day. He begins to be more God-centered than problem-centered and this helps him see his problems in perspective. He focuses on the fact that he will one day “again praise him” (Psalm 42:11). The psalmist directs his heart to praise God and to find joy in him, even though his earthly situation is troublesome. Although his present circumstances cause him intense and painful emotions, the hope that he has in God’s deliverance and faithfulness is more powerful.

Biblical Understanding and Instruction Applied to My Life

Throughout this project, I realized that circumstantial joy was not at the root of my problem. As I read through Scripture and I studied Jesus’ life, I began to understand more of the way putting other’s needs above one’s own can develop joy. Jesus always did things according to his Father’s will and for his glory. He knew that his purpose was to complete the work God had given him to do. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2). He took the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). My problem was not that I lacked joy, but that I contained too much pride and self-centeredness. I did not have the attitude of Christ Jesus, who humbled himself and was obedient to the Father (Philippians 2:8). I believed that I deserved to have good things happen in my life and that I was, in some way, responsible for the good things that happened to me. I also felt that I somehow needed to prove myself to God in order to earn his love. I truly didn’t understand that God’s salvation was solely based in grace and not by anything that I can do. Though this is something that I have grown up knowing cognitively, it is not necessarily something that I have fully believed. My pride gets in the way of this truth. I

want to earn God's love and forgiveness by my good works. Then when I fail and sin, I feel that I need to earn God's forgiveness even more by doing good deeds. This cycle of thinking is self-centered as opposed to gospel-centered. This way of thinking is also at the root of why I sometimes lack joy. If I am not finding my joy in my salvation, salvation that is based in the work of Christ on the cross and not by anything that I have done, then I am placing my joy in something else. In reality, anything else besides the gospel that I place my joy in is unstable and will not last. When I place my hope in my own "goodness," I will constantly be let down because it will not and cannot measure up to God's holiness. I need a perfect savior.

I realized throughout this project that I was depending too much on myself and that I was deeply prideful. I began to understand a little bit more of how self-centered I truly am. My lack of thankfulness came from my pride and thinking that I deserved better things than I was receiving. This attitude stole my joy, as well. My lack of gratitude, focus on self, and deep issues of pride were at the core of why my joy in Christ wasn't full.

This was emphasized as I interviewed two godly people in my life. First, I interviewed my community group leader from church. She is a stay-at-home mother and she knows the daily struggle of fighting for joy. She and her husband miscarried a few years ago and she is currently pregnant with their second child. She deals with anxiety and tiredness as she stays at home with their son. She also feels a sense of loneliness as she stays at home. Yet, she finds that the times in which she lacks joy the most are the times when she focuses on herself. On the contrary, she feels much joy when she is sacrificing herself. She understands that joy and love for others relate to one another. By basking in the love of Christ and focusing on gospel truths, the fact that she is loved by God not because of the things that she does, she begins to feel more joyful. She also

understands that it is out of this love that God has for her that she can love others in a true and genuine way. She knows that true joy comes from giving herself to others and their needs.

This truth, that we can be filled by giving ourselves to others, is vital for true joy. Yet, this thinking is so contradictory to everything that the world tells us. By this, I mean that it is easy to believe the lie that we need others to meet our needs in order to be truly happy.

Christianity preaches the opposite message. Proverbs 11:25 says, “Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.” We are told to give up our lives in order to find true life (Matthew 16:25). We are also told to put the needs of others above our own needs (Philippians 2:3). This is what leads to real, sustaining joy.

Further, I interviewed my sister-in-law. She is someone who truly finds her hope in the Lord. Though she is extremely capable and gifted, she has chosen to stay at home with her two children. She encouraged me by describing the fact that joy is directly connected to wherever one’s hope lies. Jesus Christ is our hope of glory, and we have hope in this life because we know how it is going to end. Joy is something that is gifted to us by the Holy Spirit. When she is struggling with joy and contentment, she prays to be filled with these things. She clings to eternal promises. She seeks to set her heart and mind on things above, being grateful. Thankfulness is essential to have a life of joy. However, we all struggle and things will not always be perfect in this life.

I was very encouraged throughout this interview. Because she is family, she can be honest with me and give me insight into my own life and speak truth into my wrong thinking. I have struggled through this transient time in my life. Over the last few years, I have moved several times and I have been seeking the Lord with what he wants me to do with my life. In the process, I have become rather absorbed with myself and trying to control my circumstances.

Though I seek to obey God, I still struggle with submitting myself fully to him. My sister-in-law reminded me to focus on the sovereignty of God. His timing is perfect in my life and I need to focus on the big picture rather than all of the details. She also encouraged me to be consistent in my daily spiritual disciplines. This was a good reminder for me. Much of my anxiety comes from wanting to control my circumstances and not believing that God actually has a good plan for my life.

My thinking needed to change. My lack of joy did not come from outside circumstances. Rather, it came from my unbiblical thinking. I needed to put off my old way of thinking, which involved a focus on myself and my own needs, and renew my mind in God's Word. God's Word told me that I am saved only by grace (Ephesians 2:8) and that it is by God's grace that I am even able to change. As Thomas Watson says, "How you should admire free grace, that God has not only brought the light to you, but given you eyes to see it; that he has enabled you to know the truth 'as it is in Jesus.'"⁸ I needed to have the heart knowledge that it really was not anything that I did to earn Christ's death on the cross for me. Rather, I am nothing without him and his love for me. I am completely helpless without him, yet he chose me to be united with him. This truth should make me eternally grateful. The more I began to grasp what a sinner I was and that it is only by God's grace that he chose to save me, the more joyful I became. This promise secures my eternity with God. I needed to begin truly believing that I was created in order to bring God glory, not myself. I am simply God's creation. Though he has chosen to love me and save me and has given me worth, I was made to honor him and glorify him, the creator of the universe. In order to begin renewing my mind in these truths, I began reading a book by Beth Moore that speaks on the topic of security in Christ. This was beneficial for me because it was a reminder that anything else in which I place my security will disappoint me. I believe that

⁸ Thomas Watson, *The Godly Man's Picture* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), p. 28.

placing my security in something is synonymous with placing my hope in something. This goes back to finding my joy in things that do not last and that ultimately bring dissatisfaction. I also decided that I would be more intentional about giving thanks. God's Word tells me to give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18). This included when I was working, even when I was not particularly enjoying something. I also began to work on having the right mindset towards circumstances. I wanted to see things as inspired by God and ultimately under God's sovereignty. This would require meditating on God's Word daily and taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). I also chose to begin fasting through breakfast and lunch most Fridays. I have several decisions approaching and these big choices can cause anxiety in my life. By choosing to fast, I believed that I could focus more on the Lord as I sought to hear from him. I also chose to begin praying more intentionally for others in order to get my mind off of myself.

Through this process, I began seeing concretely the benefits of giving thanks. There were many times when I did not want to go to work and when I felt like complaining while I was there. Instead I chose to thank God that I had the opportunity to make money and pay my bills. While I fasted for several Fridays, God's grace was evident. He gave me such joy in his presence. I noticed that by being hungry and by not satisfying that craving with real food, I was able to have deeper prayer times and focused times of reading Scripture. On these days, when I began to grasp that my real, spiritual food was God's Word and the gospel, I was filled with more joy. God also spoke to me during these times about my need for him. He revealed things about myself during these days. Though he did this gently, he showed me how deeply prideful I am. I wrote this in one of my journal entries:

I feel like this focus on circumstantial joy this semester has really begun a battle with my pride. I've begun to realize what a prideful person I am-- the way I do "good" things to

be seen by people and not in order to please God. This paragraph really spoke to me in *Killing Sin Habits*. “Your goal is all about Christ, not self. If your focus is on Christ, rather than self, then real mortification is taking place. Selfish goals are apparent when your priority is the approval of other people, or your heart’s desire is to be esteemed, to have a better life, or to feel better about yourself. If your purpose for pursuing holiness flows out of gratitude and a desire for an abiding walk with Christ, for his Honor and glory, then you are engaged in God’s kind of mortification” (54).

In this, I see how my lack of joy and my struggle with people-pleasing go hand in hand. Oftentimes, I do things to be seen by people. I began to realize that I compare myself to others on a regular basis. When I feel like I measure up to others, then I feel satisfied. However, when I feel inadequate compared to others, my pride is hurt, my security becomes unstable, and I slip into depression. These things are obviously not from God and these emotions come from finding my hope in things on this earth. What good is it if I gain the approval of others if I am displeasing God in the process (Mark 8:36)? People-pleasing actually steals my joy.

I also saw the benefits of meditating on Christ and his love for me. I did this during several of my morning devotional times. I memorized Ephesians 2:1-10 for one of my classes. This passage, that focuses on how I was dead in my sins and hopeless before Christ died for me according to his grace, reminded me that it is not by anything good that I have done that has earned my salvation. Rather, I can do nothing by my own accord. This was something that I needed to repent of. I needed to repent of my pride in this area and the fact that I still believed in a sort of works-based righteousness. (This is a belief that I constantly need to be aware of in myself. It is something that I need to repent of immediately, immersing myself in the gospel of Christ.) I needed to see this as based in pride and as something that displeased God. I also needed to see my lack of thankfulness as based in pride. In reality, when I lack gratitude, I am believing that I deserve better circumstances and that God’s plans are not as good as my own plans. I am not genuinely trusting in God’s sovereignty or his goodness over my life. Thankfulness helped

me focus more on eternity. When I see things as gifts from God and as God's grace in my life, I have a thankful spirit and one that focuses on the eternal rather than the earthly. I remember that my hope is really based in the cross of Christ and in being fully united with him in heaven. This brings unspeakable peace and joy in my life. Thomas Watson says concerning heaven, "This hope comforts a godly man in affliction; hope lightens and sweetens the most severe dispensations. A child of God can laugh with tears in his eyes; the time is shortly coming when the cross shall be taken off his shoulders and a crown set on his head."⁹ Doing things now for eternity will be worth it beyond comparison at the end of this life.

Further, I saw the importance of placing other's needs ahead of my own needs in order to feel authentic, God-given joy. As I looked back at my journal entries, I saw the theme of doing things to please God instead of man. This includes serving men in order to please God and not them. It means doing everything for God's glory. He has placed certain people in my life that I have the opportunity to serve. By serving others through God's love (because God loves me and I am fully accepted by him), I feel more joyful than when I try to serve others out of duty and in order to gain their approval. I wrote this in my journal concerning this:

I'm realizing more and more that my hope must be based in eternity. *Holiness* spoke a great deal about this and the fact that although we must count the cost in our Christian lives (choosing God over the things of this world), it is totally worth it in the end! Our reward is in heaven! Today I chose to serve others rather than serve myself. My friend came to visit and my time and attention went to her rather than schoolwork. My friends were moving this afternoon and I chose to help them rather than doing more homework or working out. Yet, this life is about serving others! I'm so thankful for the fact that I chose to do these things. I chose to step outside of myself and this, in turn, gave me more joy.

God showed me a great deal throughout this project. Repentance needed to take place in my life in order for me to experience a deep, sustaining joy. I quench the Spirit when I complain

⁹ Ibid. p. 106.

and have an ungrateful mindset. The fruit of the Spirit is joy, so how can I expect to have this truly when I hinder his work in my life? I needed to repent of my pride and my self-righteousness. Though these are things that constantly sneak into my life, I know that I need to be aware of this easily-besetting mindset and seek to immerse myself daily in God's Word.

Results

As I began this project, I struggled with negativity and putting my hope in temporary circumstances. I found a great deal of my joy in what others thought of me and how loved I felt by others. Fear of man certainly had an influence on this. I was not basing my hope in eternity. Rather, I was thinking in a worldly way. I was also basing my joy in how I felt, whereas Scripture makes it clear that joy is a choice. Even when we face trials, James calls us to count it as joy (James 1:2).

Throughout this semester, the Lord showed me the importance of focusing on eternal things and basing my hope in the security that I have in Christ. This joy is lasting and not based on the things that happen around me. Further, the Lord showed me the importance of getting my mind off of myself and focusing on the needs of others. This is something that I began to do more intentionally. By focusing on others and asking them questions, I was actually able to receive more joy. By pouring myself out, the Lord made me more satisfied. Even more, I learned to give thanks even when circumstances were not ideal. Becoming a more thankful person has made me more joyful. By God's grace, I have learned to respond to situations with more thankfulness than in the past. This has especially been apparent at work, where I give God praise for allowing me to have a job even when it is difficult. In these ways, God has given me more genuine joy throughout this semester.

However, I still have a great deal to go. The Lord is showing me more areas in which I need to change. For example, by working on having a more sustaining joy, God has revealed that I struggle a great deal with fear of man and pride in this way, wanting to please everyone in order to be praised by others. God is showing me that he wants the glory for himself, not for me. By continuing to focus more on eternity, the Lord, and others, God is showing me that this life is not about me and paradoxically, this is increasing my joy. I plan to continue praying more intentionally for others and seeking out their needs. I also plan to continue reading God's Word daily and meditating on God's love for me so that I can pour that love out on others.

A Plan for Counseling Another

Here I have a tentative plan for counseling someone seeking to have sustaining and genuine joy in her life. I would be praying for this counselee, specifically that she would grow in self-awareness and have an open heart to obey God's Word and allow the Holy Spirit to work in her life. I would also plan to let the Holy Spirit lead me throughout these sessions, making adjustments if they were needed. We would begin and end each session with prayer.

Throughout week one, I would spend time getting to know the counselee, making sure that she understands the gospel and that she has a relationship with Christ. She knows that she lacks joy, but she does not know why she lacks joy. She does not realize that joy is a work that the Holy Spirit does in her life through obedience to God's Word and a focus on eternity. Throughout this meeting we would talk about her expectations for our sessions and how she desires to change. I would challenge her to begin keeping a journal throughout the twelve weeks that we plan to meet. I would ask her to begin keeping track of her emotions and the triggers that cause her depression and lack of joy.

I would like to read through James 4:1-10 together, which speaks of our problems coming from the evil desires within us. She needs to begin to understand where her sinful thinking comes from.

During week two, I would make sure that she is keeping her journal. We would begin this week by reading through Ephesians 2:1-10. I would like to study the gospel this week and focus on the fact that in Christ, she is accepted. This is so important in counseling and in the topic of joy. I would like her to begin understanding, not only cognitively but also in her heart, that she is loved by God and she can rest in the fact that her future is secure. For homework this week, I would like her to practice the spiritual discipline of meditation each morning for ten minutes, focusing on the Cross of Christ and her acceptance in him.

Throughout week three, I would begin focusing on her desires and what triggers her depression. Biblically speaking, what is she desiring and not getting that actually causes her to lack joy? This lack of joy is coming from her desire to control her circumstances and have things work out the way she finds acceptable. I would like to ask her what she thinks she should be desiring. Biblically speaking, what does she believe that God's purpose is for her? (Eventually, I want her to come to the conclusion that she should be desiring God's glory.) For homework this week, I would like her to study Ephesians 1:3-10 (which speaks of God predestining us for his glory) and come prepared to talk about these verses for the next session.

In session four, I would like to discuss Ephesians 1:3-10. I would like her to tell me what she believes it looks like to live for God's glory, and what she thinks God desires from her life. I want to ask good questions throughout these sessions so that she can come to her own conclusions. Then we would look at Ephesians 1 together and see what this looks like in light of this passage. I would like her to begin to understand that since God chose us, he desires us to live

for his glory and only by doing this will we find joy in this life. Only by completing the purpose God has called us to will we be satisfied and fulfilled. Her focus needs to be on Christ and all that he has already done for her. This week, I would like her to memorize 1 Corinthians 10:31.

Throughout session five, I would like to make sure that she is still writing her journal because I would plan to read some of it the following week. I would like to begin understanding why she struggles with finding joy, whether it is something in her past (family struggles, etc.) or choices that she is making. If it is a present, ongoing sin she is struggling with, I would like her to identify this so that she can begin repenting and finding joy through obedience to Christ. Also, she may be lacking joy due to her lack of understanding the gospel and God's grace in her life. I would like to read through 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 together, which speaks of the fact that God's grace is sufficient. Even if things have happened in the past or if she is struggling with a current sin, God's grace is sufficient to allow her to overcome these things. For homework this week, I would like her to begin a daily thankful journal, where she writes five things that she is thankful for that God has done in her life.

At the beginning of session six, I would collect her journal. I would hope to be seeing changes in her life, someone who is more secure in God's love for her and who is becoming more thankful for his grace. To further this process, I would like to read through John 15:1-17 with her, which speaks of abiding in Christ. This is vital to joy and to growing one's relationship with the Lord. In verse 11, Jesus says that he speaks these things in order that we may have joy. I would like to discuss with her how this joy differs from the way the world defines joy. This week for homework, I would like her to seek to abide in Christ. I would like her to begin reading God's Word daily, starting a Bible-reading plan. I want her to realize that her relationship with the Lord is the most important thing.

During week seven, I would go over her journal with her. I would have marked the portions that spoke the most about her lack of joy. By seeing the highlighted portions, hopefully she will see the self-centeredness that lays behind her lack of joy. I would like to talk to her about pride this week and how a lack of thankfulness is actually a result of pride. I would like to read through Philippians 4:2-9 with her, where Paul tells us to rejoice always. Paul's circumstances were not ideal as he writes this, seeing as he is in prison. Paul is making a choice to give thanks and to think on praise-worthy things. I would like thankfulness to become a pattern in her life. For homework this week, I would like her to memorize Philippians 4:8 and to keep up her thankful journal. I want her to see the importance of her thought patterns concerning her joy.

By week eight, I am hoping that the counselee will be a more thankful person and thus more genuinely joyful. This week, I would like to begin (as usual) with prayer. However, during this prayer time, I would like the focus to be on others. I would like to spend a great deal of time praying out loud for the needs around us, whether that be for our families, friends, or churches. I believe that this may help her see the joy that comes from focusing our hearts on others. This week I would like to read through Philippians 2:1-11, which speaks of Christ's example of humility and the command to count others above ourselves. For homework this week, I would like her to intentionally seek out someone that she can spend time with and serve, possibly an elderly person she can visit in the church, a single parent she can babysit for, etc. I want her to see the needs of the people around her and the way she can bring glory to God by serving others.

Throughout session nine, I would like to begin by praying for others again. I would like her to continue to see the importance of serving others in the Christian's life and the joy this brings. I would like us to focus our hearts on Christ during this session, reading Hebrews 12:1-

17. Christ is the author and perfecter of our faith and he gave us the perfect example of how to live. Through him, we are able to let go of our sin and live for God's glory. I would give her the same homework as last week, to seek out someone that she can serve and be a blessing to.

During week ten, I would like to focus on hope and where her ultimate hope lies. Though we have discussed this some, I would like to study it further. If she is finding her hope in the things on earth, then she will always be disappointed. I would like to read Philippians 3:12- 21 together. We would focus on our citizenship being in heaven and what that means for us while we are on earth. I want her to focus on eternity and the hope that she has in her salvation. For homework this week, I would like her to write a letter to herself that focuses on God's grace in her life. I would like her to keep this and read over it often, especially during times of despair. This can be a reminder to her of God's past faithfulness and the ultimate hope that she has in her salvation.

Throughout session eleven, I would like to focus on the Holy Spirit's work in the believer's life. We would read through Galatians 5:16-26, which speaks of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. I want her to see that her joy is ultimately a work of God's grace in her life and it is something that the Spirit produces. We do not want to quench the Spirit by sinning, but we want to allow the Spirit to work in our lives by practicing godliness (possibly through spiritual disciplines). Anything good that we do is a work of God's grace, but we must allow the Spirit to work in our lives by giving up the desires of the flesh. For homework, I would like her to memorize 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, allowing her to meditate on the fact that it is God's will in her life for her to be thankful.

During our final week, I would like her to write out her own plan for how she should continue to change. I would like her to do this for accountability and as a reminder of God's

grace in her life. I would like her to be specific in this plan, writing out her focus and how she will be held accountable for this change. During this session, we would read over Hebrews 12:1-2, which speaks of running with endurance the race that is set before us. I would like to reemphasize during this session the joy that she has in eternity and the perfect example that she has in Christ. Ultimately, she was created to bring God glory and by giving him glory, she will allow the Holy Spirit to work in her life and give him room to produce his joy in her. Joy is a result of God's grace and by focusing her heart and mind on the Lord and others, being thankful in the process and focusing on the eternal, she will begin to be more genuinely joyful.

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