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| Topic | Prayer for joy |
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| Speaker | Dr Peter Ng |

A Christian’s life should be one which is filled with relentless joy, no matter what the circumstances and yet often times it is not. There seems to be a disconnection between the joy that we supposed to have in Christ and yet the stuff that we are going through in life right at this moment now. So we are going to tackle this question of joy, how do we get this joy and there are a lot of definitions about joy. Some people think happiness and joy are two different things. Biblically, they are about the same. I like John Piper’s definition of joy which we are going to focus on today.

*Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as He causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the Word and in the world.*

We are going to look at joy through prayer through the lens of Jacob and if we look at Jacob this will be the worst time of his entire life and yet this is the time where he comes to the Lord in prayer and receives his joy and peace to know that God is his God. There was a family feud between Jacob and Esau, his brother. He defrauded him of his inheritance and after 20 years working with Laban he comes back and the last words that Esau has said to Jacob which surely would be ringing in his ears, “*I am going to kill you*” and he hears as he was coming back from his spies that Esau is coming to meet him with 400 armed men. Jacob got his whole family; he then starts to send off flocks, gifts in waves to bribe his brother. He divides his family into two and separate because in case if he attacks one camp the other camp will escape. He is all out of ideas. This is a day of reckoning, so he goes to God in prayer. So the prayer of joy basically had three points:

1. Begins Alone
2. Wrestles with God for Blessing
3. Works through Weakness

1. Prayer of Joy Begins Alone:

(Genesis 32:22-24 ESV)

**22** The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. **23** He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. **24** And Jacob was left alone

So in the face of the greatest trial of his life he chooses to actually be alone. Normally when we are in great danger we always want to be with our family for protection and encouragement. Most of the most important issues in life we always face alone. When we are sick we go alone in the operating theatre. When you die you walk through the valley of the shadow of death alone. When you go for judgment you sit alone, children when go for exam they sit alone. Jesus said in Matt 6:5-6;

**5** “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. **6** But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

So prayer is something that is intimate, it is personal, you go to be alone because alone means your authentic, you will find out whether your faith is real. If your faith is in the fellowship then it becomes difficult to adapt when you move to another fellowship. God does not feel real in this new environment, but the trouble may be we have been overshadowed by Christ but not really penetrated in our hearts because we have not really spent time alone. Our faith consist of the faith of our preachers, the faith of our pastors, the faith of our leaders or youth leaders or our worship leaders but actually we don’t have any faith alone because we don’t spend the time alone. When you are alone you are authentic, you come to grips with the real you, outside there are influences. When you come alone with God there is an authentic view, you cannot hide. Sometimes our religion is basically coming on Sunday, having tolerating a sermon and going out there spending time with your friends and then you go back and that is some total of your religious experience, if that is the case then you will be overshadowed by Christ but not penetrated into your souls and Jacob goes into be alone because he needs to come to grips with the real himself. Henri Nouwen says, *In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding*. The scaffolding is all the little props we put in life, all the social influences that comprise our faith. Our faith is coming to church, our faith is serving in the youth, our faith is singing those songs, our faith is reading some Christian books occasionally but they actually are all scaffolding. Now Jacob alone has to deal with his attitudes in life to God and he cannot hide anymore. Jesus before any big event spends time alone with God. Before he starts His ministry of three years he spends 40 days and nights alone with God, being tempted by the devil. When He hears the death of John the Baptist he spends alone. Before choosing his disciples, a very crucial step, this will be beginning of the new kingdom he spends time alone. After healing leper, after his disciples engaged in ministry, before transfiguration and at Gethsemane. Every seminal event in his life Jesus goes alone and yet many of us don’t do that. Our faith simply begins and ends on a Sunday and the rest of the days if you are actually very honest, the authentic view is nothing. Not only solitude helps us to get in touch with the real us, solitude also frees us. John Orthberg says, *Solitude is the one place where we can gain freedom from the forces of society that will otherwise relentlessly mold us.*

We are in a society and there are all these influences and they are always molding us. It looks as if we cannot hear the voice of God. There are ambient sound generators. They generate a constant sound that makes distance voices indistinguishable. It generates an ambient sound like waves splashing on the rock and after a while when you do this no matter what anyone is saying next door you cannot really hear them. And when we come to society, society is like this ambient sound generator. God speaks to us all the time through the word and through our meditation but we cannot hear because we are in a society and society produces this ambient sound generator that gets us excited about everything else that is unimportant in life and there is still soft voice of God is not heard. They have actually done experiments with rats. In one group rats are together and the other group rats are alone and they were given amphetamines. Amphetamines are drugs that get you over excited. If the rats are given in a group versus the rats alone, the rats alone can take an amphetamine dose 20 times higher than the ones in the group because they got resilience, they are on their own. If you are influenced by the group, you die quicker.

We are looking at a society like ambient noise generator pumped into our ears and our lives so that we cannot hear God. So if we really want to find and plumb the depths of the peace and love and joy of God we actually have to get out of society. Do we have time during the week where we have actually purposely like Jacob get away from everybody else, even from the family to spend time alone with God. 150 years ago Soren Kierkegaard who is basically a Danish philosopher wrote these words which are so real today. He says,*“The press of busyness is like a charm. Its power swells. It reaches out seeking always to lay hold of ever younger victims so that childhood or youth are scarcely allowed the quiet and the retirement in which the Eternal may unfold a divine growth”*

He never saw an ipod in his life and he can predict what is happening to our generation today. Brothers and sisters if we really are missing the joy and peace of the Lord it is time like Jacob even in the midst of the darker situations to take time to be alone.

2. The Prayer For Joy Begins With Wrestling With God For Blessing.

Genesis 32:24

And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day

This is when God intrudes your space, God is an initiator. He becomes personal and the last thing he needs God to take control of his preoccupied fears. Lord Melbourne who was basically one of prime ministers of England and he was the main mentor to Queen Victoria when she was 18 years of age to 21 and he was very popular man of integrity, a Christian man, who actually put in place many Christian programs as he believed England was a Christian nation, but when the faith came near to his own voice and his own heart, he said these words,

*“Things are coming to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade private life “*

We have this idea that our faith is separate from what we do in our work life, we want to keep God out and here when we talk about wrestling, God comes into our personal space. We have to learn to wrestle with Him in prayer. Wrestling is uncomfortably personal, God intrudes into our space and we learn to wrestle with him in prayer. When we actually wrestle with God, we are being forced to confront God; it is honestly trying to talk to God about what we really want. You don’t get joy running away from God. We need to wrestle and interact with him. There are so many instances in the Bible where Moses wrestles with God, Jesus wrestles with God, Hezekiah wrestles with God, Abraham wrestles with God, Jacob wrestles with God, every time when there is a crisis we content with God. E.M. Bounds who wrote 17 books on prayer says,

*Prayer in its highest form and grandest success assumes the attitude of a wrestler with God*

Why do we need to wrestle? If God knows what we need he can give us, why to wrestle?

If we look at Jacob’s life, his whole life is described as a wrestling match. When he was in his mother’s womb he was wrestling with his brother to get out first. His brother has the birthright and he actually cheats him of his birthright by selling to him with a bowl of soup and then when his father is sick and old and it is time to give the final blessing he disguises as his brother, and he cheats his brother of his birthright and therefore he sows the seed of the harvest that is now come in the accumulating storm as Esau is coming with 400 men and then he goes to Laban, his uncle and then also he is struggling and wrestling because he falls in love with Rachel but cannot get her, on wedding night got the wrong woman. Therefore he has to work 14 years to marry the one that he really love and then he winds up with two wives. His entire family was split and the two wives are fighting day in and day out and then their concubines involved, it is horrible and then he is fighting with his uncle who tries to cheat him and he has to overcome his uncle and he finds that every step of his life he was wrestling because he wants what he wants in life. He is searching for a blessing in life and everything he touches instead of turning to gold becomes dust. That is the picture of Jacob’s life.

We are all Christians but we are looking for love in all the wrong places. C.S. Lewis knew this and he tells us that we are actually looking for things on earth which you actually cannot find, it is something like out of physical realm and he writes these words which are so true,

*There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you but they never keep their promise. The longings that arise in us when we first fall in love or first think of some foreign country or first take up some subject that excites us are longings that no marriage no travel no learning can really satisfy. I am not speaking of what would ordinarily be called unsuccessful marriages or holidays or so on. I am speaking of the best possible ones and yet there is always something we grasp at in that first moment that fades away in the reality.*

So you are looking for love in all the wrong places and that is the story of Jacob and that is the story of a lot of us. We may have come into the church and fellowship and said that magical sinner’s prayer but the way we actually live is like when God has just overshadowed us but not really penetrated the heart because we are still looking for love everywhere else and then there is a breakthrough.

Genesis 32: 25-26

When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.

Gen 32: 30

So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.”

When he was wrestling he finally realized when his hip snaps with a touch of a finger that this is actually God and if you actually are wrestling with God and the sun is going to come up, you are going to die because no man can see God.

Genesis 32:26

Then he said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

Here Jacob is basically having a desire for blessing and there is a danger of death. There are two things here, I want to be blessed, all my life I am wrestling with God to get kind of blessing that will make my life happy fulfilled and joyful and on the other hand if I hang on I will die, I will lose my life. So he was at a dilemma, do I let go and save my life or hang on and possibly die and get the blessing. So at this stage of life after looking for love in all the wrong places at this side of the River Jabok at the eve of the greatest disaster of his life he chooses blessing and hanging on to God. So basically the Psalm says

37:4 Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart

It did not say submit to God or obey God, it says delight yourself in Lord. So therefore “I will not let you go unless you bless me” is the same as delighting yourself in the Lord, hanging on to him because he is the one who gives all the blessing. He is the one where we will actually find the love for which we are looking for. He is the one where we actually have inner spiritual transformation. John Piper said,

*Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the Word and in the world.*

Joy is the good feeling to the soul but it is produced by the Holy Spirit, we cannot manufacture itself. Paul talks about boxing

1 Corinthians 9:27

But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

The word discipline here is ‘Hypopiazo’ which means wear out, treat severely, black eye that you get after a punch. The reason why we have to wrestle with God in order to get the joy that is rightfully ours is that we are addicted to our own selves. There are so many things we are addicted to. Young people look at facebook, Instagram everything else. We have to wrestle with our addiction, we have to wrestle with our fears, we wrestle with our anxieties, we wrestle with God about what life is supposed to be about. Economy turns down, you lose your job, your spouse turns on you. No spouse after marriage for any length of time remains the same, everybody changes and how do you cope with these changes and sometimes we rebel, we cannot take that, so therefore we need to wrestle with God. We bring to God what these things are, our disappointments and we wrestle with God.

True joy has several features.

1. With true joy we have in God is when we desire to communicate and have union with God. Do you actually desire to set apart a time where you actually sit and talk things over with God?
2. True joy comes when you are satisfied with God.
3. True joy is confidence when you wake up in the morning and you are wondering what kind of day this is going to be, whether it is going to be good, bad or ugly but you realize that God is going to be with you that is when you get true joy.
4. True joy is when we glad submission, when things turn for the worse and yet you believe that God is going to be with you this time his glad submission.
5. True joy is when you got deep interest in His glory to honor, honoring him at work and at business, in your relationship is the most important thing to you. Now that signs of true joy when you wrestle with God and these things breakthrough and trouble is we also have joy in the midst of pain.
6. Authentic joy in the lord comes in the midst of pain, it is not separated. A lot of people think I have true joy when I get into medical school or lawyer school. I will have true joy when I graduate, true joy when I get a girlfriend, true joy when I get married, true joy when my children go off to university, true joy when I am retired. That is not true joy. True joy occurs in the midst of pain. It is like having a child. The woman gets severe pain but severe joy as well, it is intermingle. Ravi Zacharias was asked in one of his literature on being human. Does a Christian ever becomes sad. Is there a reason to oxymoron? What is the place of pain and sorrow and Christian joy? He says quite profound words and I have been reflecting on this. He says, *A Christian is a person with joy at the center of his life. He will have sorrow at the peripheral area of the life*

In the center of your life if you have Christ, the question is who you are, why you were born, what is your purpose in life, what will happen to you in future? All those things, no matter what happens to you or what diseases you have, what accidents you have that is sorted out. That is the center of your life, it cannot be moved and that is the joy which the Holy Spirit produces. At the periphery of your life, may be tomorrow you will fail in your life and you have sorrow but the center of your life you will have joy. Without Christ in your life at the center of your life you will have sorrow because you are still looking for love in the places that you cannot find. You are looking for blessing that can never be filled. You are looking for something in your life because you do not know who made you, why you are here, what is your purpose in life. Imagine living that life, I am an animal; I have been evolved, when I die I become fertilizer. At the center of your life you don’t have Christ you have sorrow. There is deep spiritual sorrow. In the periphery of life you have joy.

A psychologist, Cheryl Macdonald wrote this article and it says,

How do we get joy? If you don’t have Christ at the center and this existential questions in life are not answered then what do you do,

* Choosing to Smile
* Meditation and Imagining.
* Positive Thinking
* Feeling Grateful
* Notice Immediate Surroundings
* Become Active and Support a cause that you really believe is worthy.

When you do all of this the psychologist tell that you increase your endorphin levels. These are the feel good chemicals in your body. You drink chocolate, meditate, drink tea, they all exercise even sex, you will get a lot of endorphins, so therefore you will become happy but that happiness is at the periphery of life, it is not the center of your life. The Christian is the one where joy is at the center and sorrow is at the periphery at the same time, so therefore every time you feel the devil is trying to get you down, you tap back into the center, you drill back into the center that is the source of our joy.

Heb 11:24-27

**24** By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, **25** choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. **26** He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. **27** By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

Here we have Moses born in the cots, he exchanged the center, he chose Christ and he preferred to suffer 40 years outside, he choose to give up being the prince of Egypt because he choose the center and that is the picture of us as Christians as well. That is why we have joy in the midst of sorrow.

3. Pray For Joy Works Through Weakness

(Genesis 32:25-26)

**25** When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. **26** Then he said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.” But Jacob said, **“I will not let you go unless you bless me**

We are all stubborn people; we will not cling until we are broken.

Genesis 32: 27 And he said to him, “What is your name?”…..

Genesis 27:18-19 So he went in to his father and said, “My father.” And he said, “Here I am. Who are you, my son?” 19 Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn.

Jacob is a liar. God cannot move into our lives until there is a space occupied by repentance. If we continue to hang on to our pride and hang onto to who we are, we won’t be able to cling, so therefore God always makes us face our mistakes.

Gen 32: 27 And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” Then he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed

So God gave him a new nature and Jacob is now broken but blessed. Broken means he is totally dependent, totally repentant, totally at the place where he is clinging to God as the only joy and treasure in his whole life. That is all what he wants, nothing else but God. On the other hand he is totally transformed because he has a new name, a new purpose in life. So as Christian we are all Jacobs, we have brokenness but we are also blessed because we got the blessing as we got a new name, a new nature, a new purpose, a new life but we are also broken because we are completely dependent on God. When our crisis comes alive we can either be broken and blessed or we could take the other view, the theology of glory. Now Christians are misled by this wrong idea that in life as a Christian you look like superman, you want healing it must be now, you want the victory it must be now, you want the power yesterday, and you want to change yesterday. A lot of preachers will tell you this but it is wrong. If we look at Jesus Christ, the greatest moment of Jesus power was when on the cross, perfect mercy, perfect justice, perfect love. On the other hand if we don’t subscribe to this then you wind you broken bit bitter.

If you wind up in life broken and blessed you could wind up blind and believing that healing. I have seen some people go in the hospital and pray for people, they say I declare the healing but it does not work. A Christian is broken and blessed.

*Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the Word and in the world.*

2 Corinthians 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another

When you tune guitar strings for young people you press on the string above the string you got to tune, pressing one and others also vibrate because of being in same frequency. We are made in the image of God, so whatever we see in him is reflected in us and there is a resonance. When you read the words of scripture, when we see the life of Christ, there is a resonance and peace that comes upon our lives and that is when we get the joy, if we don’t do that how are we going to resonate with the kind of joy that God has decided to give us. We won’t look until we are broken. Joseph in the pit for many years suffered as a slave, Moses 40 years in the backside of desert, Paul struck down.

(Acts 9:16) For I will show him how much he **must suffer** for the sake of my name

Every single person is broken before he is blessed. John Ortberg writes

*“Jesus does not come to rearrange the outside of our life the way we want it. He comes to rearrange the inside of our life the way God wants”*

Jim Bakker was a very famous evangelist who basically ran Praise the Lord Ministries. He was found out to be sexually immoral. He was found out to have cheated his ministries, people give him money to pray but he never prayed for them and he was sentenced 45 years in jail and yet he writes a book in which he tells his journey back from being broken. When they got him to jail a lot of people threatened him and in fact one man tried to rape him twice and somehow by God’s intervention the man was transferred out to another prison and some people in prison helped him. There were prison lawyers and they helped him cut the sentence down to 18 years and another lawyer found a loop hole and he got it cut down to five years. Bad things still happen, his wife Tammy Faye left him, had an affair with somebody else and divorced him. At the last end he describes being in toilet and wishing that he will die because he was such a famous evangelist fall all the way down, he wished he would die in the toilet there that was full of dirty water and the prison guard said to him, “Jim you got a visitor”. He told the guard that he do not want to see any visit and he refused to go out. The guard said, “I think you need to see this one” and then he said, “Okay I cannot change I am dirty, but I will just meet him like this”. So he got up and he went to prisoner’s room. He saw Billy Graham there, the most despised preacher in the world meeting the most celebrated Christian speaker in the world. Billy Graham approached to him with a smile on his face and wide open arm, before saying anything he just shook his hand and hugged him. At that time Jim Bakker felt the love of Christ and the joy of Christ. You cannot see Christ, you cannot feel the joy until you are broken and that is what it means. Brokenness comes before blessing.

(Psalms 34:18) The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit

Jim Bakker was a crook, Jacob was a crook and many of us are also crooks. Some of us made money the right way, some of us made money the wrong way but the question is that cross of Jesus Christ takes care of it. The word of God says the Lord is near to the broken-hearted, he saves the crushed in spirit. May be we are struggling in life but God is near to us when we come broken because that is the only way you can cling to God.

We have to pray:

1. Begins Alone
2. Learn to wrestle with God in all the things that bug you, don’t run away from God. Bring it to him, struggle with him.
3. When he works through blessing when we are broken we will see his Joy.

OUR CHALLENGE

Time Keller says*, “Jacob held on at the risk of his life to get the blessing for him; but Jesus held on at the cost of his life to get the blessing for us.”*

Jacob struggled for himself but Jesus Christ wrestled with God in garden of gethsemane and on the cross he received the full impact, the entire cup of wrath for God, not for his blessing but for ours. So therefore we have Jesus who understands us, our brokenness, our sin, our wrestling.