



LIVING IN JOY COURSE WORKBOOK

The bottom half of the image features a person in a white dress jumping joyfully in a field of tall grass and wildflowers. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, hazy glow and long shadows. Trees are visible in the background. A dark green banner is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text.

Also used for
Retreat/Small Group Leader Guide

LIVING IN JOY COURSE WORKBOOK

Leader Guide

WORKBOOK

RICHARD T. CASE



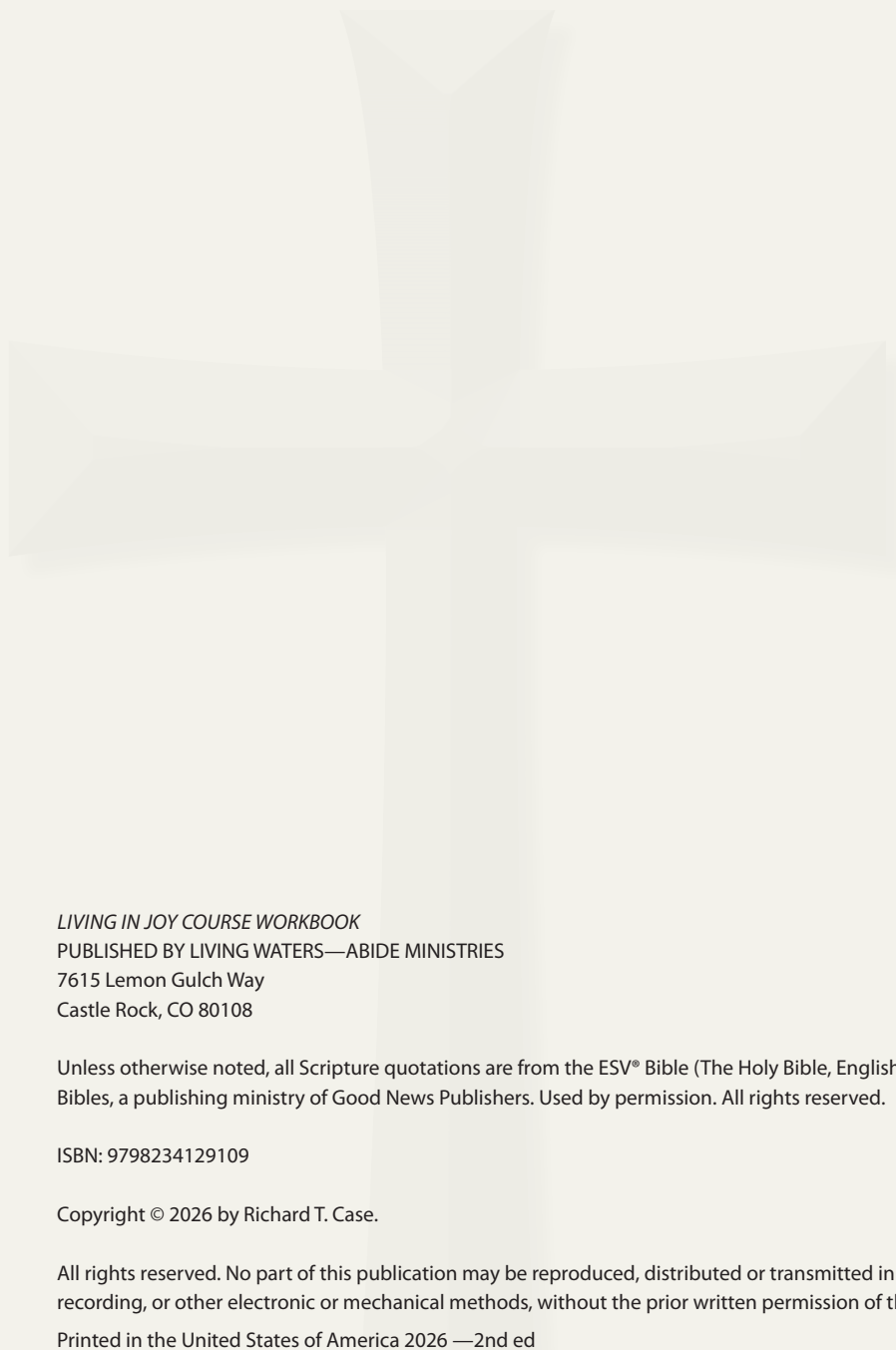
To my wife, Linda, whose spiritual name from God is Joy. We were meeting in Dallas to go to a C12 retreat, and she was driven from the airport in a taxi with a driver who is a spirit filled believer. As he was experiencing Linda's joy, he said that God had spoken to him that her name was Joy!—and it is! Her life is one of joy, she brings joy, and those around her experience her joy and, because of this being God's joy, experience God's joy. The key is that joy is the characteristic of God and is not dependent upon circumstances, which often are not joyful. This is not characteristic of the world and most believers who operate based upon circumstances only feel joy when circumstances are positive (which means there will be many times when they are negative because in the world, we will have trouble (John 16: 33). Joy will always be experienced in the Kingdom of God (Romans 14: 17). Thus, regardless of what we are facing, we are to live in joy. Linda exemplifies this—and she helps me, our family, and those in our ministry to stay in joy and understand that when we are not living in joy, there is something off—and then we are to go to God to understand why and how to regain joy, and remain in joy. We are so grateful to her life of joy that gives us encouragement to remain in God's joy.

Acknowledgments

We wish to honor all the leaders of our **Abide Ministries**. As each person and each couple have learned that as we live in God's Kingdom, we are to always experience joy. Since the most believers do not experience nor show the world God's joy, their commitment to give this away and make this key characteristic an emotion that all believers feel is beautiful to see. We together experience the joy of the life of God and experience another level of joy when we walk with others in this amazing truth of Godly life.

These leaders are:

Jake and Mary Beckel
Caden and Lauren Cardie
Colton and Alicia Cardie
Heath and Rebecca Cardie
Rich and Janet Cocchiaro
Larry and Sherry Collet
Katherine Cornell
Scott and Kristen Cornell
Dom and Dawn Deluca
David and Melissa Dunkel
Tom and Susanne Ewing
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Joel and Christina Gunn
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Chris and Heidi May
Rich and Kathy Meringolo
Preston and Lynda Pitts
John and Brenda Presko
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Bob and Keri Rockwell
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LESSON 1:

THE SOURCE, MISSION, AND ESSENCE OF JOY



**...is it possible,
in the middle
of trouble and
adversity and
things that are
not working, to be
joyful?**

WELCOME TO LIVING IN JOY

Welcome to our new course on joy—living in joy. It is a big subject because joy is an emotion, and the average person in the world is sad. People have difficulty in life because we live in a world of trouble. The question for believers is always: I know I am supposed to have joy, but I do not really experience it much. Even so, I will try to and say I do, even though I do not.

In this course we will walk through that. What does the Scripture say about joy? What does God say about joy? And then how do we live in joy—particularly since He said the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy? We will spend some time working through that together.

“The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy.”

—Romans 14:17

If you'd like to know more about
Abide Ministries,
please see our pages
at the back of the workbook

THE SOURCE, MISSION, AND ESSENCE OF JOY

BEFORE WE BEGIN—OPENING REFLECTION

- **How would you define joy in your own words, apart from any theological framing?**
- **What does the world typically say will bring you joy? Make a quick list—money, an event, a person, something working out the way you want.**
- **When circumstances are not in line and not working, can you still be joyful? Why or why not?**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

As we work through this teaching, be careful not to look at joy as a purely theological element—as if joy were just a spiritual thing devoid of emotion. Joy is an emotion, and it involves emotion. The question we will keep asking is this: is it possible, in the middle of trouble and adversity and things that are not working, to be joyful? That is what we are going to spend some time discovering.

LESSON 1:

THE SOURCE, MISSION, AND ESSENCE OF JOY

SECTION 1 • JOY'S SOURCE—CHRIST HIMSELF

Joy starts with, ends with, exists with, and is in Christ. The announcement of joy in Scripture is tied directly to a moment in history—the birth of Jesus.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **When in human history is the formal announcement of joy made by an angel of the Lord?**
- **Why would a Savior being born produce great joy “for all the people”?**

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!”

Luke 2:8-14 (ESV)

Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on Luke 2

1. The angel says, “I bring you good news of great joy.” What is the “good news”?

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2. Why is the beginning of true joy tied specifically to the arrival of Jesus, rather than to any other event?

3. How does “Christ the Lord” being born change the source of joy for the human race?

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts

- **Isaiah is prophesying about a people walking in darkness. What might that look like in a person’s life today?**
- **Watch for the words “light,” “joy,” and “the government will be upon his shoulder.” How do they connect?**

For to Us a Child Is Born

9 But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

² The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.

³ You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,

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as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

⁴ For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

⁵ For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 9:1-7

Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on Isaiah 9

1. Isaiah says the people in gloom and darkness were turned into joy. What turned them? Who turned them?

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2. What does it mean that “the government will be upon His shoulder”? How is His rulership a key element of what brings joy?

3. The text describes joy “as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.” What kind of joy is that—quiet relief, or full celebration?

So Christ is attached to the life of joy. When He came, His government—His rulership—was placed on His shoulders, and it rules forever. His rulership is a key element to what brings joy. He promises to bring it because that is who He is and that is what He came for.

 PAUSE & WRITE

Where in your life right now do you most need His rulership to break in? Name one specific area.

[illegible]

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SECTION 2 • CHRIST'S MISSION WAS JOY

Joy is not a side effect of Christ's mission—it is the mission. Hebrews tells us what was set before Him, and what He endured for the sake of that joy.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **What do you typically think Christ's "mission" was when He walked the earth?**
- **How would the cross relate to joy, of all things?**

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV)

Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on Hebrews 12

1. Christ's mission, according to verse 2, was joy. What was the joy that was set before Him?

2. How did the cross and the resurrection open up the possibility of joy for us?

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3. The requirement for joy used to be perfection and performance. What is the requirement now?

Christ's mission was joy. He had to go to the crucifixion and then the resurrection so that He could take on the penalty and open up the possibility of joy. So we have learned a couple of things: first, joy is Christ—it is His kingdom, His kingship—and second, we cannot earn it. We have to receive it.

CHRIST'S FIRST PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT—LUKE 4 AND ISAIAH 61

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **Imagine you are in the synagogue at Nazareth on the day Jesus stands up to read. He has not yet performed His public ministry. What would you expect Him to announce?**
- **What does the word “gospel” mean to you right now, before reading?**

¹⁶ And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and He stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰ And He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹ And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Luke 4:16-21 (ESV)

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Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on Luke 4

1. This is Christ's first public announcement of His ministry. Why does He choose Isaiah 61—a passage about good news, freedom, and the year of the Lord's favor?

2. What does it mean that this Scripture was fulfilled "today"—in their hearing?

3. How does Christ tying His mission to Isaiah 61 connect back to what we just read in Hebrews 12 about the joy set before Him?

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As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **1. What kinds of people does Isaiah 61 say the Anointed One has come for? Make a list as you read.**
- **2. Pay attention to the trades—ashes for what? Mourning for what? A faint spirit for what?**

¹ The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; ² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

³ to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.

⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

⁵ Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks; foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers; ⁶ but you shall be called the priests of the Lord; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast.

⁷ Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy.

⁸ For I the Lord love justice; I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

Isaiah 61:1-8 (ESV)

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Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on Isaiah 61

1. The phrase “oil of gladness” translates a Hebrew word meaning extreme joy. What does it tell you that God offers extreme joy in exchange for mourning?

2. He says He has come to bind up wounds, free prisoners, turn ruins into beautiful things. When does He say He will do this?

3. What is the difference between thinking the gospel is a ticket to heaven and thinking the gospel is the offer of life and joy right now?

We have a tendency to think the gospel is a ticket to heaven—that we get saved, which is terrific, and we get to be with Christ in eternity, which is fantastic. But then we think that is kind of it: we are going to live in a world of trouble and at least we get to go there. He said, actually, the good news is, I have come to give you life. I have come to give you joy—right now. I am going to bind up your woundedness. I am going to free you from prison. I am going to turn what has been ruined into beautiful things. And I will give you the oil of gladness—extreme joy.

So when you think of joy, He is saying, I have it to give to you through what I am going to do on your behalf. And the gospel—the good news—is that I can do that now. We can even say, I do not even know what joy looks like. And He says, yes, I know—that is okay. I can give it to you now. It is not about personality. It is about life and what I can give you.

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PAUSE & WRITE

Where have you been treating the gospel as primarily a ticket to heaven rather than an invitation into joy now? Be specific.

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SECTION 3 • CHRIST PRAYS FOR OUR JOY

Christ wants us to know how central joy is to His mission, so He prays it back to the Father in His final prayer before the cross. He is not just hoping we will have some joy—He is praying that His joy would be fulfilled in us, overflowing.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **This is Jesus' prayer the night before He goes to the cross. What do you imagine you would pray about if you knew you had hours left?**
- **Watch for the word "joy"—and notice the word "fulfilled."**

⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom You have given me, for they are Yours. ¹⁰ All mine are Yours, and Yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, which You have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I kept them in Your name, which You have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

¹⁴ I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. ¹⁸ As You sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

John 17:9-19 (ESV)

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Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on John 17

1. Whose joy does Jesus pray would be fulfilled in us? Why does that matter?

2. The word “fulfilled” here carries the sense of overflowing. What is the difference between having a little joy now and then, and a life that is overflowing with joy?

3. Jesus does not pray that we be taken out of the world. What does He pray instead, and how does that connect to joy in the middle of a hard world?

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He calls that we would have His joy fulfilled in us—overflowing. That means life is overflowing with joy. It is not once in a while. It is a life of joy. So one of His questions when we do go to heaven will be pretty simple: Did you have joy? Were you joyful? Because that is what I came to do. If you did not receive it, you missed it. That also implies it is not guaranteed and it is not automatic. He came to give it; we have to receive it; and one day we will answer that question.

“These things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.”

—John 17:13 ESV

PAUSE & WRITE

If Jesus asked you today, “Are you living in my joy—overflowing?” what would you honestly answer? Why?

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SECTION 4 • THE ESSENCE OF JOY—ABIDING IN CHRIST

If joy is in Christ, then the essence of joy must be staying connected to Him. Jesus puts it as a conditional: if you abide in me, then my joy will be in you, and your joy will be full.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **What does the word “abide” mean to you in plain language?**
- **Why do you think Jesus uses the picture of a vine and branches to describe our relationship with Him?**

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

John 15:5-11 (ESV)

Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on John 15

1. Jesus uses an “if/then” to define joy: “if you abide in me, and my words abide in you...” What is the “then”?

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2. Asking “whatever you wish” is not a blank check—it is rooted in abiding. What changes about what you ask when you are walking with Him?

3. Why does Jesus connect bearing fruit, the Father being glorified, and your joy being full all into one teaching?

A big definition of joy is rooted in this if/then. He says, if you abide in me—stay connected to me—and if my words abide in you, you can ask what you will. By the way, it is not, “Therefore I will go off and ask anything I want.” He says no—you will be asking what I am telling you, what I am giving to you, because you are receiving it. So the essence of joy is rooted in abiding in the relationship. Since He connects “if you abide” to “you will receive the fullness of joy,” the key is that my connection with you—your relationship to me—is in fact the essence of joy itself.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **David is going to talk about being in God’s presence. What do you think he means by “presence”?**
- **Watch for what God promises about your “lot,” your “inheritance,” and your “path.”**

⁵The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; You hold my lot. ⁶The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. ⁷I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. ⁸I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

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⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. ¹⁰ For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let Your holy one see corruption.

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.

Psalm 16:5-11 (ESV)

Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on Psalm 16

1. Where does David say the fullness of joy is found?

2. “At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” How do the pleasures God delivers along the way feed our joy?

3. Verse 8 says “I have set the Lord always before me.” What does it look like, practically, to set Him before you in a normal day?

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In your presence is the fullness of joy, and your path is pleasures forevermore—so the pleasures stimulate the joy, and the joy stimulates Him giving more pleasures, because we are with Him. He implies it is a walk: I am going to continue to give you these things while you stay in my presence. He is going to do some pretty terrific things and deliver to you, where your path will be pleasant and where you will have great shalom—great peace. The way I am going to take you will stimulate joy.

Now we always remember it is not perfection in the way we go, because He says, in the world you will have tribulation. He does not say to expect every element of the path to be pleasant in itself, but His walking with you through it is going to get you to that spot. You will live there primarily, and when you have trouble—which we will talk about—what do we do with that? Does that mean we lose our joy and we have to wait for that to happen? Not really, but we will find out what that means.

PAUSE & WRITE

Where have you been chasing pleasures to manufacture joy, instead of staying in His presence and receiving the joy that comes with Him?

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SECTION 5 • HEARING THE BRIDEGROOM'S VOICE

Abiding goes deeper than simply being near Him—it means hearing His voice. John the Baptist gives us a striking image: the friend of the Bridegroom rejoices greatly when he hears the Bridegroom's voice.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **John the Baptist calls himself the “friend of the bridegroom.” What does that role do at a wedding?**
- **Why would simply hearing someone's voice produce great joy?**
-

²⁷ John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him.’ ²⁹ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. ³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease.”

³¹ He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. ³² He bears witness to what He has seen and heard, yet no one receives His testimony. ³³ Whoever receives His testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. ³⁴ For He whom God has sent utters the words of God, for He gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

John 3:27-36 (ESV)

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Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on John 3

1. What specifically makes the friend of the Bridegroom rejoice greatly?

2. Hearing implies dialogue. How is hearing God's voice different from simply studying the Bible?

3. If you were in the middle of difficulty but you were genuinely hearing His voice, why would that produce joy?

He deepens this definition of relationship. So I am going to be in His presence, walking with me. But He makes a statement: the friend of the Bridegroom is joyful because he hears—what? Because I hear the voice of the Bridegroom. Which means he is in dialogue. He is in conversation. So it is not just being there. He goes deeper to say the joy comes from hearing the voice of the Bridegroom that reveals truth. I get to process truth with Him and dialogue with Him, because if I am hearing Him, He is talking to me, and I talk to Him and I ask Him questions. So abiding is that relationship where you are hearing His voice and it is personal. It is not the study of the Bible alone—it is based on the Scriptures, but it is the personal conversation of how does this go, and what does this do, and what about now?

Why would hearing His voice in the middle of difficulty bring you joy? Because of the great comfort of knowing you are in His will—that He is going to take care of this. He is actually personally interested and is personally telling you He is going to take care of this. You hear His voice.

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“The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice.”

—John 3:29 ESV

AN ILLUSTRATION—PRESENCE VS. INTERACTION

You see young parents with their kids—they are in their kids’ presence, but on their phones doing all kinds of stuff. The kids do not feel connected. The kids want to interact with you. Do not just be around me—talk to me. There is a big difference between being present and being engaged. The kids respond to being heard and being spoken to. So do we, with our Father.

PAUSE & WRITE

When was the last time you genuinely heard God’s voice—not just read about Him, but heard Him speak to you personally? Write what you remember, or write what is keeping you from hearing right now.

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SECTION 6 • JOY FROM EXPERIENCING GOD'S SUPERNATURAL WORK

As we abide—as we are in His presence and hearing His voice—we get to experience His real, supernatural work. Joy is not abstract. It comes from seeing God do what He said He would do, and recognizing that He is faithful.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **Solomon has just finished dedicating the temple. What kind of mood would you expect Israel to be in after such a moment?**
- **Watch for the phrase about not one of God's good promises failing.**

⁵⁴ Now as Solomon finished offering all this prayer and plea to the Lord, he arose from before the altar of the Lord, where he had knelt with hands outstretched toward heaven. ⁵⁵ And he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice, saying, ⁵⁶ "Blessed be the Lord who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. Not one word has failed of all His good promise, which He spoke by Moses His servant.

⁵⁷ The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us or forsake us, ⁵⁸ that He may incline our hearts to Him, to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His rules, which He commanded our fathers. ⁵⁹ Let these words of mine, with which I have pleaded before the Lord, be near to the Lord our God day and night, and may He maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel, as each day requires, ⁶⁰ that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other. ⁶¹ Let your heart therefore be wholly true to the Lord our God, walking in His statutes and keeping His commandments, as at this day."

⁶⁵ So Solomon held the feast at that time, and all Israel with him, a great assembly, from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of Egypt, before the Lord our God, seven days. ⁶⁶ On the eighth day he sent the people away, and they blessed the king and went to their homes joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had shown to David His servant and to Israel His people.

1 Kings 8:54-61; 65-66 (ESV)

LESSON 1:

THE SOURCE, MISSION, AND ESSENCE OF JOY

Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on 1 Kings 8

1. Solomon says “not one word has failed.” Joy is the experience of the real work of God. Why does seeing God’s faithfulness—not just hearing about it—produce joy?

2. The people went home “joyful and glad of heart.” What had they experienced that was not hypothetical?

3. If you knew, from your own history with God, that everything He has spoken to you will come to pass, how would your joy level change today?

He brought them great peace. He said: everything I spoke, He performed it. Joy is experiencing the real work of God. It is not hypothetical. It means you are in His presence, you are hearing His voice, and God says, I am going to speak my promises to you and over your life—and you will recognize that if you walk with me, everything will be fulfilled. They saw it. Not one thing was un-performed. They celebrated. And they went away with extreme gladness, not just because of the experience of what had happened, but because they recognized something: when God speaks, it is going to happen. He is faithful.

LESSON 1:

THE SOURCE, MISSION, AND ESSENCE OF JOY

A NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLE—SUPERNATURAL WORK IN SAMARIA

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **Imagine you are living in Samaria when Philip arrives. You have been sick or oppressed by a spirit for years. What happens to your “joy meter” when you are suddenly free?**

⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much joy in that city.

Acts 8:4-8 (ESV)

Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on Acts 8

1. What did the people of Samaria experience? Why did supernatural work produce so much joy?

2. Why does seeing God do what only God can do trigger joy in a way that mere teaching does not?

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3. If Christ had spent three years with His disciples only talking about God—without ever doing anything supernatural—how would their joy have looked?

They were experiencing supernatural work. They were together, experiencing supernatural work, and it produced great joy. Why do you get excited about supernatural work? Because it is something you cannot do. It is something that you did not do. It is something that He had to do. It was a deliverance from their oppression and sickness. He said He would do it, and then He did it.

Think of your emotion. When God does a supernatural work, your response is automatic—joyful—because you see the work of God, you get to experience the work of God, and then you realize that that is the way He lives—to deliver. So think of Christ. If you had been here for three years with His disciples, and all He did was talk—well, you just have to believe in God, and I am a Son, but He never did anything—how would they have responded? Basically, my life has not changed a bit. Maybe I could buy into it theologically, maybe if I get a ticket to heaven I might decide that, but does that create joy? It would not. The joy came in: wow, look at that—turning water to wine. Look at that. Remarkable.

LESSON 1:

THE SOURCE, MISSION, AND ESSENCE OF JOY

THE DESIRES OF YOUR HEART, SYNCED TO WHO YOU ARE

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **What is the difference between God giving you the desires of your heart and you chasing the desires of your heart?**
- **Have you ever experienced anticipation that was joyful all by itself, before the event even happened?**

¹ O Lord, in Your strength the king rejoices, and in Your salvation how greatly he exults! ² You have given him his heart's desire and have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah

³ For You meet him with rich blessings; You set a crown of fine gold upon his head. ⁴ He asked life of You; You gave it to him, length of days forever and ever.

⁵ His glory is great through Your salvation; splendor and majesty You bestow on him. ⁶ For You make him most blessed forever; You make him glad with the joy of Your presence.

⁷ For the king trusts in the Lord, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved.

Psalm 21:1-7 (ESV)

Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on Psalm 21

1. "You make him glad with the joy of Your presence." How does His presence become the joy itself?

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2. He gives the desires of the heart—not because we chase them, but because He synced our hearts to certain things. How does that change how you pray?

3. Where in your life is anticipation of what God might do already producing joy, before the result?

He says, I have given you the desires of your heart. And remember, it is not us chasing those desires—it is rather, I know who you are. I have synced up life to stimulate you, to give you excitement and adventure relative to who you are. In my presence, you are living out extreme joy because I am walking with you in a place where you can continue to be excited about life—so that joy comes out of that excitement.

Think of exploring or going on an adventure. Just going on the adventure—you are excited to go. We have done retreats in Europe, going to a new place. The excitement of exploring that new place is fun all by itself, because we can hardly wait to find out the new things that we get to have on this adventure. I have never been there before, but I know it is going to be an adventure and it will be enjoyable. By the way, we get to do it with people who have a heart to go with us, and we have fun doing it together. You are joyful not just after it is done; you are actually joyful before it starts because of the anticipation of the adventure. That is what He said joy is going to be like—and I will deliver to you the blessing of that.

It is a lot like Ephesians 2:10. If you are walking in the works that He has prepared beforehand, that is going to be just fine. But the opposite is usually happening—we are not, and so we are not joyful, we are downtrodden and frustrated. He has actually already got it planned out, and it is specifically for us. When you lock into that, there is nothing better.

LESSON 1: THE SOURCE, MISSION, AND ESSENCE OF JOY

 PAUSE & WRITE

Name one supernatural work—small or large—that God has done in your life that you could call to mind right now to remind yourself He is faithful.

[illegible]

LESSON 1:

THE SOURCE, MISSION, AND ESSENCE OF JOY

SECTION 7 • JOY IN THE MIDDLE OF TROUBLE— HE DELIVERS

Joy is not the absence of trouble. He never promises that. He promises something better: in the middle of the trouble, He will deliver. And that promise—that He will move you out of trouble—is itself a source of joy in the storm.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **When you are in real adversity, what is your typical emotion? Worry, fear, sadness, anger?**
- **Could the same situation produce joy if you knew, with certainty, how it ends?**

¹ He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. ² I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

³ For He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. ⁴ He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, ⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. ⁸ You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.

⁹ Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place—the Most High, who is my refuge—¹⁰ no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.

¹¹ For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. ¹² On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. ¹³ You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.

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¹⁴ “Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. ¹⁵ When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. ¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.”

Psalm 91:1-16 (ESV)

Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on Psalm 91

1. What word does God use repeatedly about what He will do in trouble?

2. He says, “I will be with him in trouble.” He does not say He will exempt us from trouble. What is the difference?

3. How does knowing He will deliver you transform an “Uh oh” moment into “Well, this ought to be interesting”?

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He is implying you are going to have adversity. You are going to have trouble. He is not diminishing that. However, in the middle of it, what does He promise to do? What word does He use? I am going to deliver you. I am going to move you out of this trouble. I will overcome this trouble. He does not say joy is just accepting trouble and living in it and never having any change. That is not His definition of joy. He says, I will get you out of it. I will bring you out of it. I will deliver you from it.

So the question would be: typically, when you are in the middle of severe adversity, does that generate the emotion of joy? No. You get worried, you get fearful, you get sad. How come this is happening to me? What do I do now? He said it can produce joy if you knew what He has to say about it: I am going to resolve this for you. He then adds the element we have been learning: I want you to see it as an interesting adventure, because you do not know the answer. As far as you are concerned, it looks like it is not going to get resolved—but I will. So if you believe—see how He builds us—that everything I say I am faithful to do, then do not worry. I am going to get you out of this. I will deliver you from it, and you can expect it. Instead of it being an “Uh oh,” it should be, “Well, this ought to be interesting. What an adventure this is going to be.” And in the middle of that, you can be joyful, because the emotion is: I now know that it is going to turn out really well ultimately, and I can move through it.

LIVING IT OUT—A WITNESS FROM THE ROOM

This kind of joy is not theoretical. Rich and Linda have lived it out for many years. They have walked through some genuinely crazy circumstances, and they do not just teach this—they live it. They actually look at everything as, “Oh, I wonder what God has—this is going to be pretty cool to see how He does on this one.” It creates joy for the people around them, too—being able to sit back and watch them go through some of life’s most difficult things, and seeing how they instantly go to the Father and ask, “Okay, what are You doing?” That creates joy for everyone watching, seeing how He walks them through it.

As you learn that something has to happen—and He actually did deliver you out of it, and you get to see it—the response becomes, “I did not see that coming. Look at how amazing that was. God answered it in that way.” You get to share in the supernatural work that God did, and He says, I am not telling you how I am going to do it. I am just going to resolve this.

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And another piece—the trouble does not mean you missed God

Sometimes we get mixed up in our heads thinking, if I am living the life that God really wants me to live, bad things are not going to happen. But they do. It is one of those things to be able to see godly mentors go through difficulties and walk it out the way we are supposed to walk it out. Trouble is not evidence that you have stepped out of His will. It is the world we live in. The question is what He delivers you out of, and how you walk with Him through it.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **Watch how many of his troubles David expects God to deliver him from.**
- **Notice the connection between “seeking the Lord” and what we “lack.”**

¹ I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

² My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. ³ Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together!

⁴ I sought the Lord, and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

⁵ Those who look to Him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.

⁶ This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. ⁷ The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them.

⁸ Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! ⁹ Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints, for those who fear Him have no lack! ¹⁰ The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

Psalm 34:1-10 (ESV)

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Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on Psalm 34

1. How many of his fears did the Lord deliver David from? How many of his troubles?

2. “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.” What does it mean to taste—not just believe theoretically?

3. Verse 8 calls the one who takes refuge in Him “blessed”—happy. Why can David say that with such confidence?

You sought the Lord. You called out, “I need Your assistance, I have a problem.” And He delivered me—from how many? All. There is the joy. Even if we thought, well, yes, some of them can be delivered but many of them will not be, you would have to wait until you decided what happened. He said, no, I will deliver you out of all of them. You can believe it. You can trust it. He says, I am going to bless you—the word blessing means I am going to make you happy. You can trust that I am going to make you happy. You are walking in my presence and I am leading you to the solution of happiness—be happy now. Be joyful right now, because you know where to go and how it is going, and I will deliver you out of all your trouble.

So He does not say, I am going to exempt you from trouble. In the middle of trouble, you are going to have what you need—and we have all had stuff that is kind of crazy. But God says, I will deliver you out of all of them. The neat thing is, He does. We can be joyful in the middle of it because we know it is coming.

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As one of the participants put it: it is so important to learn these verses and go back to them when you are going through adversity, because that is what builds our confidence. As we speak those words and get them in our hearts, and He delivers us, we have much more confidence the next time. It gets easier and easier.

And remember—God does not see our problems the way we see our problems. He says, ten thousand may fall at your side, but it will not come near you. He says, I see all the enemies around you—I am going to set a table for you. I am with you. I do not see your trouble like you do. So hang on to that Scripture. Hang on to His words and His promise.

“I sought the Lord, and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears.”
—Psalm 34:4 ESV

 PAUSE & WRITE

Name one trouble you are in right now. Then write—in His voice, based on what you have read—what He might be saying to you about how He will deliver you out of it.

[illegible]

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SECTION 8 • HEALING, INSTRUCTION, AND RESTORATION

As He delivers us, He also instructs us. He heals what is broken inside, restores what we have lost, and leads us onto a highway that ends in joy. The pattern is the same: hear His voice, follow His instruction, watch Him restore.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **What is the difference between being a stubborn mule and a willing follower?**
- **Watch for the promise about being “surrounded with shouts of deliverance.”**

⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to You at a time when You may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.

⁷ You are a hiding place for me; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. ⁹ Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.

¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. ¹¹ Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Psalm 32:6-11 (ESV)

Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on Psalm 32

1. What does God promise to do that prevents us from having to figure out the way ourselves?

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2. Why is being like a mule—stubborn, having to be yanked—the opposite of joy?

3. If we cooperate with His instruction, what does verse 11 tell us to do?

He says, I am going to instruct you. I am going to tell you the way to go through the adversity. He said, do not be a mule—we know the euphemism. Do not be stubborn, where I have to yank you to get your attention to do something, where you are always trying to go the opposite direction. He says, why do you not just cooperate with me? I will give you instruction, and if you do, as I lead you through things, you will have exceptional gladness—exceptional joy. Why? Because I am instructing you. You are hearing my voice. You are taking the steps. And just as we read in Psalm 34, you are tasting along the way that God is good and He is going to deliver the good.

Along with that, He says—you do not even have any understanding anyway, so why are you fighting against me? You think you know more than me. There is a scene in the movie Evan Almighty where Morgan Freeman plays God the Father, and Steve Carell, who is Evan, says, “I have plans.” And all you hear is Morgan Freeman laughing—just laughing. So you have plans. So you think you know more than me. You think you can deliver more than I can? It is kind of like that—you do not really understand that much, you are better off letting me go. Just come with me.

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As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- David is talking to his own soul. Have you ever had to do that—to ask yourself why you feel cast down?
- Watch what David does about the discouragement. Where does he go?

¹ Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! ² For You are the God in whom I take refuge; why have You rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

³ Send out Your light and Your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your dwelling! ⁴ Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise You with the lyre, O God, my God.

⁵ Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God.

Psalm 43:1-5 (ESV)

Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on Psalm 43

1. What does David ask God to send out, that will lead him?

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2. He calls God “my exceeding joy.” What is the connection between God Himself being your joy and your circumstances changing?

3. When David’s soul is cast down, what does he do? What can you learn from his pattern?

He is talking about—yes, this thing is causing me to be sad, I am downcast and discouraged, I do not see a way out of this. And he is kind of saying to his own soul, why are you feeling that way? He says, so I understand something—I want You to send me light and truth to guide me to the answer that You have. And when I do, I know something: I will be exceedingly glad. I will be rejoicing. So David is really saying to himself, I know a truth: I just need to get back to hearing what You have to say and following Your instruction. That will lead me, and I will become joyful in that all by itself. So He gave us a little hint: when you are not feeling the joy—usually because we are struggling—what you need to do is go get more instruction and let God lead you and guide you back into that place.

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HE RESTORES FROM THE INSIDE OUT

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **Isaiah is going to describe the most unpleasant places—desert, dry land, hunting ground of jackals. What is God going to do with those places?**
- **Look for the words “strengthen,” “fear not,” “highway,” and “everlasting joy.”**

¹ The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; ² it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.

³ Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. ⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;

⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸ And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray. ⁹ No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.

¹⁰ And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Isaiah 35:1-10 (ESV)

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Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on Isaiah 35

1. What does God do to the most barren, hostile places?

2. Verse 4 speaks to those with an anxious heart. What does He promise them?

3. “Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” How does the Highway of Holiness produce that result?

Think of the descriptions He is using. In essence, the place that you are in—He describes it as the most unpleasant possible places: a dry place, surrounded by things trying to harm you, difficult, not pleasant at all. We can say, yes, I know those places. He says, what will I do? I will turn the desert into streams of rivers of water. I will turn the parched places into spectacular things. As a matter of fact, your reaction of fear, discouragement, sadness—all the things you typically experience in these difficult places—will be transformed into praise and extreme gladness. Because you will get on the Highway of Holiness, and I will transform you. So not only will I be doing these spectacular things, but I am going to deal with your inner soul stuff—your fear, your worry, your anxiety, your sadness, your resignation. I am going to deal with all of those along the way and get you onto that highway, because the Highway of Holiness leads you to both the resolution and the understanding that you are within my presence—and I am healing you from the inside out.

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So He does not say deny it, and He does not say stuff it. He just says, learn that you move it into a place of joy. And I have to move it to joy by healing the essence of why you are afraid—and generally that is because of our past, our patterns, what we have experienced. He says, yes, I can heal that. I will transform you so that joy starts to become your element of life, no matter what is going on.

HE RESTORES WHAT WAS LOST—EVEN WHEN WE CAUSED IT

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **Notice that Israel is in a mess—and they caused it. Watch what God offers anyway.**
- **Look for the words “hidden things,” “healing,” “cleanse,” and “restore.”**

³ Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.

⁶ Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. ⁷ I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. ⁸ I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.

⁹ And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.

¹⁰ “Thus says the Lord: In this place of which you say, ‘It is a waste without man or beast,’ in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man or inhabitant or beast, there shall be heard again ¹¹ the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord:

“Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for His steadfast love endures forever!’ For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the Lord.

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¹² “Thus says the Lord of hosts: In this place that is waste, without man or beast, and in all of its cities, there shall again be habitations of shepherds resting their flocks. ¹³ In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negeb, in the land of Benjamin, the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, flocks shall again pass under the hands of the one who counts them, says the Lord.

¹⁴ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

Jeremiah 33:3; 6-14 (ESV)

Follow-up—work through these as you reflect on Jeremiah 33

1. Verse 3 invites us to call to God and hear “great and hidden things that you have not known.” What kinds of things do you most need to hear from Him right now?

2. Israel caused their own mess—and yet God promises healing, cleansing, restoration. Why is that good news for us when we have contributed to our own trouble?

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3. He says He will restore—and people will look on and ask what happened. How is restored joy a witness to others?

He is reiterating again that what He says will happen. Now He is describing—you guys are in a mess, and interesting enough, He says, I am going to cleanse you from your iniquity. Who caused this mess? They did. The Jews—they were the ones who walked away. They were walking in the flesh: I do not care, I can figure this out myself. And it got worse and worse and worse, and ultimately wound up in ruin, where Nebuchadnezzar came and completely destroyed everything they had. God is saying, well, let me say something to you. First, you are in a mess and you recognize you do not have any answer for being in this mess. You want to get out of the mess, but you do not have any answer to get out of the mess. He says, first of all, why do you not just ask me? Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.

So your first question is: are we going to get out of this mess? And how—what is going to happen to get us out? And then, the mess that I know I contributed to creating—I have lost something. I made a problem with my business, or my marriage, or my family, or something has happened here, and I know I have probably contributed to it. Is that ever going to come back? He says, yes. Let me tell you some things you do not know. Which means I am going to start showing you what the path is. I am going to bring you health and healing. I am going to cleanse you, so that you can be released of the guilt—which would be joyful all by itself. Then I will guide you into the resolution of this. And actually, what is going to happen is the people around you are going to say, what happened to you? Look at that. He says, I am going to restore to you what you have lost. He actually says here, I am going to give you double. Do not worry—I will take care of it. It will be more exciting. And the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride will be joyful, because you will be celebrating what I am about to do.

“Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.”

—Jeremiah 33:3 ESV

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Is there a place where you have contributed to your own mess and given up hope of restoration? Write what you would say to God right now if you believed verse 3 was true for you.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

LESSON 1:

THE SOURCE, MISSION, AND ESSENCE OF JOY

SECTION WRAP • PUTTING IT TOGETHER

As we look at the end of this first lesson, here is what we have learned:

1. **Joy comes from Christ Himself.** He is joy. His mission was to give us joy and have it overflowing in us.
2. **All of life is intended to be lived in joy.** We do that when we walk with Him—in His kingdom, in His presence, allowing Him to do His work.
3. **Joy is not the absence of trouble.** It is the confidence that He delivers us out of all of it, instructs us through it, heals us inside, and restores what was lost.
4. **Joy is an emotion, not a posture.** It is rejoicing. And it is meant to be ours all the time, because of who He is and what He delivers.

Next session, we will get into some of the activities that we would then look at—how we truly receive joy, particularly when we are in difficulty. We encourage you to ponder this week, to maybe go back over the verses you went through, and ask: what really is joy? And what are we to experience all the time, because of who He is?

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THE SOURCE, MISSION, AND ESSENCE OF JOY

SECTION DISCUSS • DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Work through these nine questions individually first, then bring your responses to your group. Use the writing space provided.

Scriptural Understanding

1. Looking back at Luke 2:8-14 and Hebrews 12:2, how does Scripture present joy as the central reason for both Christ's birth and His death? What does it tell you about God's heart that the "good news of great joy" is announced before any teaching, miracle, or resurrection?

2. In John 17:13, Jesus prays that we would have His joy "fulfilled" in us—overflowing. In what context did He pray this, and what does the timing of this prayer add to its weight?

3. Psalm 16:11 says, "In Your presence there is fullness of joy." Tracing the thread through John 15, John 3:29, and Psalm 32:8, what is the relationship between abiding, hearing His voice, and following His instruction—and how does each contribute to joy?

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Deeper Understanding

1. Rich made the point that joy is an emotion—not just a theological idea. Why is it important to keep joy as an emotion, rather than reframing it as a stoic spiritual posture? What is lost when the church treats sorrow as a badge of honor?

2. Joy is described as both the fruit of God's supernatural work (Acts 8:8; 1 Kings 8:66) and the anticipation of it (Psalm 21). How can we be joyful before the resolution arrives—and what does that say about where joy actually comes from?

3. Psalm 91 promises deliverance from trouble; Isaiah 35 promises healing of the inner soul. How are these two kinds of work—outer rescue and inner healing—both necessary for a life of overflowing joy?

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Personal Application

1. If Jesus asked you the question Rich proposed—“Did you have joy? Were you joyful?”—and you had to answer honestly about the past month, what would you say? What is one obstacle you can name that has been keeping joy from being your normal way of life?

2. Think about a current trouble in your life. What would it look like, this week, to treat it as “an interesting adventure” rather than an “Uh oh”? What specifically would you do differently—in prayer, in your thoughts, in conversation with God—to live out Psalm 91 in this situation?

3. Jeremiah 33:3 invites you to call out and hear hidden things you do not yet know. Where in your life—a relationship, a decision, an old wound, a dream you have given up on—do you most need to hear God’s voice this week? Set aside time, and write down what you sense Him saying.



LESSON 2:

RECEIVING AND MAINTAINING JOY



**He says, develop a life
of thanksgiving—a
life of praise—
sharing His beautiful,
miraculous works.**

In our last session we discovered that joy is Christ Himself. When He came to earth, His arrival was announced with joy. He came with the purpose of giving us joy. He gave us a mission to experience the fullness of His joy. This includes Himself and His presence—through abiding, through spending time with Him, through being in His presence. He has joy in being in us, and He wants us to have joy in being in Him.

We also learned that we live in a world where circumstances are not always joyful. Jesus Himself said, “You will have adversity. You are going to have trouble.” But circumstances are not the determinant of joy. He has promised to deliver us from trouble—He is loyal to deliver the covenant—and circumstances do not stop Him from delivering it. Yet He also does not exempt us from the trouble itself.

TODAY’S QUESTION

If joy is meant to be a lifestyle rather than a moment, and if trouble does not exempt us from joy nor exempt joy from us—then how do we receive it and maintain it? This lesson walks through twelve practices Rich draws out of Scripture for building a life that both expresses and experiences the joy of God.

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SECTION 1—A LIFE OF THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE

First, He says there is a certain way to look at life.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **When you think of someone who lives a life of thanksgiving and praise, what comes to mind?**
- **Have you tended to think of joy as a moment, or as a lifestyle? What is the difference?**
- **What “supernatural works” of God in your life would you tell someone about right now?**

⁷ Then on that day David first appointed that thanksgiving be sung to the Lord by Asaph and his brothers. ⁸ Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! ⁹ Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works! ¹⁰ Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice! [...] ²³ Sing to the Lord, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day. ²⁴ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! ²⁵ For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and he is to be feared above all gods. ²⁶ For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. ²⁷ Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place. ²⁸ Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength! ²⁹ Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; ³⁰ tremble before him, all the earth; yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved. ³¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, and let them say among the nations, “The Lord reigns!”

—1 Chronicles 16:7-10; 23-31

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He says, develop a life of thanksgiving—a life of praise—sharing His beautiful, miraculous works. Out of those experiences of His miraculous works you are giving thanks and you are praising. He said, tell others of His wondrous works.

In order to experience a life of joy, praise, and thanksgiving, you have to share the supernatural thing that has happened to you. Which means: something supernatural must be happening to you.

It is not “act joyful.” It is “express joy because of what I am doing in your life.” If you walk with Me in My presence, you will experience these supernatural things, and that experience will cause you to be thankful and to praise. As you are thankful and praising, I will do more supernatural things. Look at it not as a once-in-a-while event but as a lifetime.

“In My presence is splendor and majesty, strength and joy.”

—1 Chronicles 16:27, paraphrased

Did He say, despite your trouble, act joyful? No. Did He say, in My presence is just joy? No. He said, in My presence—with Me doing these supernatural works—you will experience splendor (spectacular things), majesty (so that when you recognize a majestic thing, like a castle or a palace, your life will feel that way), might and power, and joy. The emotion of joy is coming because you are stepping into the splendor, the majesty, the power, and the joy of Who He is.

He did not qualify it with “in My presence when circumstances are all lined up.” He just said, you are going to be in trouble, but when you step into My presence, you will have the joy. Then what will you do? You will be thankful and you will praise. You will reflect that by sharing it with others. Think of joy as developing a lifestyle that always has the joy that expresses that life.

He says it slightly differently in Psalm 100.

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As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **What does it mean to “serve the Lord with gladness”? Is gladness a feeling, a posture, or both?**
- **When you read “his steadfast love endures forever,” what do you actually picture?**

¹ Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! ² Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! ³ Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. ⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! ⁵ For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

—Psalm 100:1-5

When you read the word “mercy” here, it is His loyalty to deliver the covenant—and it is everlasting. So you can be joyful about that. Enter His courts with thanksgiving. Have gladness in your heart because of His delivering the covenant to you. You are experiencing it, and so you reflect it. You are not forced to be thankful—you are automatically thankful with joy. You are expressing that beautiful emotion of happiness and joy because you get to experience Him even in the midst of trouble.

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STORY—LINDA RECEIVES THE NAME “JOY”

We were at a session and I had to go from the airport to the hotel in Dallas. I ended up in this cab with this African American gentleman. He was just so much fun. He started saying, “Well, what are you here for?” I said, “Well, we’re part of this ministry and we’re here.” I started talking about how we abide in the Word and how God is doing these miracles and these kinds of fun things. And he just bubbled up and he said, “Oh my gosh, I feel so much the Holy Spirit in you. I think I could speak in tongues.” We just laughed. We had such a good time—a real blessed time. I was blessed. He was blessed.

I get out of the car. That night we had a big dinner with all these businessmen. I’m sitting there and one of our friends sitting next to me—I’m telling him what happened. He says to me, “Well, you know what? God gave you a new name. He gave you the name Joy.” And that’s how I got the name.

—Linda Case

She exudes it because she has developed the life of joy. Don’t think of moments of joy. God wants you to live a life of joy and to reflect the expression of that—that people notice you have the emotion of praise and thanksgiving and honor, and that it is noticeable.

STORY—FINDING OMA AT THE MOVIES

When we went to a movie theater, Aiden was probably about five years old, and he was with us. He and I went to get popcorn and a drink, and Linda went and sat down. By the time we got there the movie had already started—this was way before the thirty minutes of trailers—and it was dark. Aiden says, “Well, how are we going to find Oma?” I said, “Just hold on a second. We’ll know in about a minute.” And in a minute—because Linda is exuberant—we heard her laugh. I said, “Oh, there she is up there.”

She is really the reflection of joy. And it’s not a phony thing. It’s her life. That’s how she has developed a life of joy. So it’s a lifestyle.

—Rich Case

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FOLLOW-UP—REFLECT ON THE PASSAGES

1. First Chronicles 16 ties thanksgiving and praise to telling “of all His wondrous works.” What is the relationship between experiencing His supernatural works and having a life of thanksgiving?

2. Rich says, “In My presence is splendor and majesty, strength and joy.” What does it look like, in practical terms, to step into His presence today rather than waiting for circumstances to line up?

3. Psalm 100 commands joyful noise, gladness, singing, and thanksgiving. Which of those are most natural for you, and which are the hardest? Why?

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SECTION 2—DEDICATE (CONSECRATE) YOUR LIFE TO HIM

Then He says, dedicate your life to Me.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **What does the word “consecrate” mean to you? When was the last time you used it?**
- **What does it look like to surrender your will—not in theory, but in a specific decision this week?**
- **Who are the people you are committed to following God with—your inner circle, your spouse, your group?**

¹ As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. ² And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord’s house. ³ When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” ⁴ Then the king and all the people offered sacrifice before the Lord. ⁵ King Solomon offered as a sacrifice 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. ⁶ The priests stood at their posts; the Levites also, with the instruments for music to the Lord that King David had made for giving thanks to the Lord—for his steadfast love endures forever—whenever David offered praises by their ministry; opposite them the priests sounded trumpets, and all Israel stood. ⁷ And Solomon consecrated the middle of the court that was before the house of the Lord, for there he offered the burnt offering and the fat of the peace offerings, because the bronze altar Solomon had made could not hold the burnt offering and the grain offering and the fat. ⁸ At that time Solomon held the feast for seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly, from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of Egypt. ⁹ And on the eighth day they held a solemn assembly, for they had kept the dedication of the altar seven days and the feast seven days. ¹⁰ On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their homes, joyful and glad of heart for the prosperity that the Lord had granted to David and to Solomon and to Israel his people.

—2 Chronicles 7:1-10

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When you have a sacred assembly, you are saying, “I surrender my will to You, and I will follow You—and we will do that in community.” You and your spouse, you and your good friends, you and your inner circle, you and your group, ideally even a church, would consecrate yourselves: “We are going to follow God.” They did it through sacrifices.

Our sacrifice—if we are going to sacrifice to dedicate our life to God—is what? Time. Talent. Treasure. Our will. Our life. We are going to be serving Him. We actually sacrifice our will and follow His will. I dedicate myself to that. I consecrate myself to that. I’m going to live a life of surrender. The text repeats: “Your mercy endures forever.” The word for mercy here is covenant loyalty—His covenant loyalty endures forever. So we surrender our will to Him.

Think about the simplicity of why we would surrender our will to Him. Because He is dedicated to what is best and done better for us. He is going to demonstrate that—He is going to deliver the covenant to us regardless of circumstances. To develop a lifestyle of joy is to commit to surrender our will. When you do, you feast and you wind up with gladness and joy because you are experiencing it, and you know you will experience it.

He asks us to do this in a different way in Psalm 27.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **When you are afraid, where do you naturally run first—to a person, to a fix, to a distraction, or to His presence?**
- **What does it mean, practically, to “dwell in the house of the Lord” when you are not in a church building?**

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? ² When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.

³ Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. ⁴ One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days

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of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.
⁵ For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock. ⁶ And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord. [...] ¹¹ Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. ¹² Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence. ¹³ I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! ¹⁴ Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

—Psalm 27:1-6; 11-14

He is describing that you are in trouble and things are coming against you. You say, "I am not going to fear, because I know who is in control. I will seek the Lord." I am going to go be in Your dwelling. I am going to go with You. I know it is a safe place.

It does not imply that you do not experience the trouble—He said, "I will deliver you from that." But in order for Him to deliver you from it, you must be in His presence. You have got to dwell with Him and get used to the pattern: "Uh oh—I have a problem. I am going to go be with Him in His place. I am going to be safe. I won't be afraid. He will deliver me." When I am in His presence, I can rejoice with gladness and joy—because I am with Him, and I am safe, and it is going to get resolved.

He says, "Instruct me in the path that will lead me to the resolution of this. Along that path I am going to be safe—and You can trust it." It does not mean you are still not going to have trouble. Sometimes it seems to get even worse. But you are getting in the habit. We are trying to develop a lifestyle of joy. So it is: surrender my will. And then when things happen, I have got to learn to be with Him. The more He resolves those things, the more supernatural He does—which He says He will do all the time—the easier it becomes, and your joy starts to be a lifestyle.

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PAUSE & WRITE

Where in your life right now are you tempted to run to a fix instead of running to His presence? Write the situation in one sentence—then write what dwelling with Him in it might look like today.

FOLLOW-UP—REFLECT ON THE PASSAGES

1. Second Chronicles 7 describes consecration as a sacrifice. What is the “sacrifice” God is asking you to bring as you surrender your will?

2. Psalm 27:4 says, “One thing have I asked of the Lord... that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.” What is the “one thing” you are most asking of Him in this season?

3. Rich says it is a habit—“Uh oh, I have a problem; I am going to go be with Him.” What is the current habit your problems trigger, and how would you like that to change?

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SECTION 3—RESTORE THE JOY OF YOUR SALVATION

Now think about Psalm 51 as David having failed completely—adultery, murder, and basically covering it up so that he thought nobody would know. Of course, Nathan comes to him and says, “What would you do if a guy did this?” David said, “I would have that guy killed.” And Nathan says, “What? You are the guy.” He had to repent. And in his repentance, David makes an interesting statement.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **What is the difference between fixing your sin and repenting from it?**
- **When you have walked away from God, what is the first thing you usually try to do—distract, perform, hide, or return?**
- **Out of all the things David could have asked God to restore, why do you think he asked for joy first?**

⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. ⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. ⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

—Psalm 51:5-12

He says, you are going to make mistakes. You have a sin nature. You could walk away from Me. Even David walked away from Me—and he had consequences. He recognized that the problem was that he was not walking with God, and he had justified not walking with God. It turned into him rationalizing his action—which he later recognized was error and was not walking with God. So he was in the flesh.

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He repents, and he basically then says, “Cleanse me.” And as You cleanse me—restore to me what? The joy of my salvation. He recognized something when he sinned: he lost his joy. He knew the difference. He said, “Of all the things I would like to re-experience with You, that is it. Restore to me joy. I know the remedy is just to come back and let You cleanse me—and then I will have joy.” It was not a list of A, B, and C to perform. It was: when I come back and You cleanse me, restore to me joy. I want to live that way again.

“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”

—Psalm 51:12

What is interesting is that David is trusting that God is going to restore him. He just had to go back. He says, “Restore to me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit”—which is God’s work in him.

In the situation where we recognize and see our sin, it does not have to be that depth of consequence. The sin is that we walked away from God. He says, “When you walked away from Me, did you recognize that you lost your joy? What did you do? You went to fear. You went to anxiety. You went to determination. You went to ‘I’m going to, I’m going to, I’m going to.’ Now you are getting into heaviness.” Did you recognize that?

What is the remedy? You have exited the kingdom. You have exited Him. The remedy is repentance—come on back. Don’t go fix the problem. Repent and come back. Your prayer is really simple: when I walk back, I know You cleanse me. Why? “I have already cleansed you. When you are with Me, My righteousness covers you. It is not what you did. It is where you are.” You are back. You are abiding. You are back in the relationship. Your prayer would be simple: “Restore to me the joy of my salvation,” because I am in Your presence. And He says, “Welcome back. Let’s go.”

As we live a life of joy, He says, keep looking at this as an indicator. Are you walking with Me? It is consecrating your life to Me, surrendering your will. It is calling to Me when you are in trouble and being in My presence. And when you exit—which you will—come on back and ask Me to restore it, and I will restore it right away.

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PAUSE & WRITE

Have you exited recently? Don't fix anything. Just come back. Write a one-sentence prayer below—"Restore to me the joy of my salvation, because I am back in Your presence."

FOLLOW-UP—REFLECT ON THE PASSAGE

1. David asks God to "create in me a clean heart" and to "renew a right spirit within me." Why does he describe these as God's work rather than his own?

2. Rich says joy is an indicator—when joy is gone, it is a signal. What signals does loss of joy look like in your own life (fear, anxiety, determination, heaviness)?

3. Why is repentance described as "coming back" rather than "fixing the problem"? What is the difference, in practice?

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SECTION 4—WALK IN DIALOGUE WITH GOD

As you live this way, He says, start to walk with Me—keep dialoguing.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **When you pray, are you asking God to do your will, or asking Him for His will? What is the difference?**
- **Have you ever asked God a specific question and listened for an answer? What happened?**
- **What would it change about your day if you believed every promise of God to you was Yes—not “maybe,” not “perhaps”?**

²³ In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. ²⁴ Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

—John 16:23-24

This is an interesting statement: “Until now you have asked nothing in My name.” These were the disciples. What was Jesus about to do? He was going to leave them. Up until now, what had been their relationship? They had been walking together every day, watching Him do supernatural, miraculous things. Whose presence were they always in? His. When they had a question, who did they ask? He was right there to ask. Jesus made a statement; what did they do? They got an answer—He would answer them.

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Or Jesus would make a statement and sometimes they would not get it at all. After the feeding of the 4,000—this is the second time—Jesus said, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, the leaven of Herod.” The disciples say, “I guess He’s mad at us because we forgot the bread.” Jesus says, “I perceive that you are trying to reason things out and you guys don’t get it, do you? You need an answer, and you wondered what I just said. Instead of trying to figure it out yourself, why don’t you just ask Me? You always have the privilege of asking Me.” In that situation, did they ask Him? No, even then they did not. Did He explain it to them? No. It is as if He said, “Are you going to walk with Me or not?”

Generally they were walking—they learned to keep asking, keep dialoguing. Jesus was saying, “You are seeking My will. I have demonstrated the answers to My will for you all the time. You had Me to do that. Now I am leaving. Until now you have not had to do this. Now what do you do? You can live the same way.” Prayer is the same way. It is not going to change, because, “I am going to put Myself within you, and now you keep the dialogue going and live that way. If you do, My joy will be in you, and your joy will be full”—by the opportunity to be in dialogue. He said, “You always have it.”

Don’t think of prayer as going off, “God, would You? Would You? Would You?” Rather: “I have a question. What is Your will? What does that look like? You have said, You have done. I am experiencing this. What now?” He says, live that way and you will have joy—because He will give answers and start guiding and directing.

This was one of the most powerful things from the first Abide retreat—the thought that journaling can be reading Scripture, then asking a question, and truly hearing. He says it Himself: He will no longer speak to us in figures of speech, but plainly tell us. As Jesus said, “I am going to tell you even clearer, because I will be with you all the time.”

And then He says—by the way—you can understand something. You are talking to Me. You are dialoguing with Me. Read 2 Corinthians 1:18-24.

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As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **If God's promises are always Yes in Christ—never Yes-and-No—what does that change about how you ask Him for things?**

¹⁸ As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. ¹⁹For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. ²⁰ For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. ²¹ And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²² and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. ²³ But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. ²⁴ Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.

—2 Corinthians 1:18-24

As you are seeking His answers, His promises are not Yes and No. If they were Yes and No, what would that mean? They would just give a confusing answer—"Maybe. Perhaps. Let's find out." He said no—all the promises are Yes in Christ Jesus. What He speaks to you, when He says it, you can believe it is going to be Yes. It is not that you are unlucky or that you are one of the people who don't get it. When He speaks it to you, you can trust that it is going to be absolutely Yes.

Think about that. What He says will be Yes. So what would you want to know? What He says—and get clarity about what He says. It is not about "I want." See the difference? It is not about "I want, would You?" That is when we think, "Well, He said no." Why? Because we said, "I would like You to do X." He says, "You have got it backwards. Do not ask Me to do your will. Your will is not going to fulfill what I want to do for you. Ask Me My will—and when I speak it, it is going to happen. Get to know that. Go after that. Look for that."

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PAUSE & WRITE

Bring Him a real question right now. Not “Would You do X?”—but “What is Your will here?” Write the question. Then quiet yourself, and write what you sense Him say.

FOLLOW-UP—REFLECT ON THE PASSAGES

1. John 16:24 says, “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” How is the fullness of joy connected to the practice of asking?

2. In 2 Corinthians 1, Paul says all of God’s promises are Yes in Christ. What promise of God do you most need to receive as Yes today?

3. Rich draws a sharp line between asking God to do your will and asking Him for His will. Where in your prayer life does that line need to be redrawn?

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SECTION 5—STAY IN UNITY THROUGH DISAGREEMENT

As you walk this way, you are going to have conflict with people. Go to Psalm 4.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **Is anger a sin? What is the difference between being angry and sinning in your anger?**
- **When you are in conflict with your spouse or someone close, what happens to your joy?**
- **Have you ever been in a disagreement and found joy in the middle of it? What made that possible?**

³ But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him. ⁴ Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah ⁵ Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord. ⁶ There are many who say, “Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord!” ⁷ You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. ⁸ In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

—Psalm 4:3-8

Look at the simplicity of what He just said: “Be angry, and do not sin.” Is anger sin? No. Are you going to be angry? Yes. Why? Because stuff happens all the time. People cross your line of justice, and you are angry. It could even be with your spouse. Be angry—and don’t sin.

He says, “What I need you to do is stay with Me and let your heart become right”—go to forgiveness—“and let Me put back into you the joy and gladness while you are angry.” He doesn’t say “after it’s all resolved.” He says, “Now—get your heart right with Me—and you can have joy and gladness now, knowing that I am going to do it. You are working toward resolution and reconciliation. Even when you are not yet reconciled with somebody, you can be joyful now.” With your spouse, you are called to always move to reconciliation, and you will be even more joyful because you will see His very best.

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In your anger, do not let anger drag you into sadness, hostility, frustration, and bitterness—as opposed to, “Yeah, this isn’t right. I have got to get this resolved. I have a feeling of anger.” Can you have the feeling—the emotion—of anger and joy at the same time? Not deeply. But can you still be angry and have joy? Yes. In other words, it has not been settled yet—but it is not, “I am going to let go of what they did.” It is, “I just know that I can have joy while we resolve it. Let’s go.”

And He says, here is how. Read Philippians 2:1-6.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **What does it mean to “complete joy by being of one mind”? Have you experienced that with anyone?**
- **When you and someone you love are in disagreement, do you typically push for unity, push for your way, or cave?**

¹ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,

—Philippians 2:1-6

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He says, make My joy complete by being of one mind. Harmony. Stay in harmony. Come together and come to an agreement, which is God's will—best and none better—and He will show you the answer. He is implying: why do you need to come to unity? Because you are not in unity. Why would you not be in unity? You are in disagreement. Is it okay to be in disagreement? Sure. Are you and your spouse going to have disagreement? Yes. Are you going to have disagreement with the people around you? Yes. He says, "Well, that is okay. That is natural and normal. As a matter of fact, it is healthy." Process it. Move toward harmony, unity, knowing God's will together with His Spirit.

Here is the key—and look closely at what it says and what it does not say: "Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." If it had said, "In order to resolve it, look only to the interests of others"—that is the way the church often operates: "You should give in to the other person's desires. Isn't that holy?" Is that what the verse says? No. You will not come to harmony that way. He says, actually, My will is discovered through unity. So if you are in disagreement, maintain your integrity with what you believe to be true—with honor and respect. While you are doing that, what do you want to say to your spouse who has a different opinion? "Look out for her interest as well—what do you think, feel, and believe?" "Well, we don't agree." Don't change your position—until what? Until God shows you as well. He will show you the answer. Either, "Hey, Rich, what Linda believes—that is really the right answer." "Hey, Linda, what Rich is believing—that is really the right answer." Or, "You know what? Neither of you is there yet. Keep going."

So—can you be in disagreement and still be joyful? Sure. Because you just don't yet know God's will. What we usually do when we have a disagreement is, "Well, we have gone as far as we can." Actually—Rich says—I don't want Linda to cave. Why not? Because her spirit isn't there yet. And I am not there yet. I don't want her to cave. I want her to say, "This is what I think, feel, and believe." But either we don't know the answer yet—and we are not going to let it ruin our night, our weekend, or our week—we just don't yet know God's will. At the same time, we are in disagreement, and we can still be in great joy because we are walking through it. Where are we headed? Toward unity, which is best and none better. It is going to be His will. So therefore: let's go do it. Let's have fun. We can have joy while we are doing disagreements. We just have to learn how.

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PAUSE & WRITE

Bring to mind one disagreement you are currently in—with a spouse, family member, friend, or co-worker. Where are you headed in that disagreement? Can you find joy in the journey toward unity, even while you remain in honest disagreement?

FOLLOW-UP—REFLECT ON THE PASSAGES

1. Psalm 4:7 says, “You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.” What earthly “grain and wine” is currently competing with God’s joy in your heart?

2. Philippians 2:4 says, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” How is this different from caving in?

3. Rich says joy can coexist with unresolved disagreement, but not deeply with sin. What is the practical difference?

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SECTION 6—COOPERATE WITH GOD THROUGH TRIALS

As you are in the middle of conflict and trouble, cooperate with God.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **How do you usually respond when you are under “extreme pressure”? What is your default move?**
- **Have you experienced a trial that turned out to be a “test of faith”? What was being tested?**
- **What is the difference between God’s solution and your solution to a problem?**

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

—James 1:2-8

He says, count it all joy when you encounter trouble. The word there is “extreme pressure.” It is when this is not working and I do not see an answer to it, and I am in the middle of an extreme pressure. He says, “I want you to be joyful, because it is really a test of faith.”

There is a separate course on overcoming adversity that goes into the depth of all this. God Himself does not bring all the adversity. We can cause it by walking away from God and experiencing adversity because we were not in the right spot and were not following His will. If you are in the world, you are going to have adversity. You can actually cause your own adversity because you were not walking. But eventually the solution is going to be a test of faith.

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It does not even matter the source. Eventually it is, “Okay—I caused it. Now what?” Or, “I am in the middle of this problem and it is over everybody.” For example, this lesson is being taught while the government has shut down. Are people experiencing adversity? Is it personal? Did they do something wrong? It is global. It is just there, affecting everybody. He says, that could be the problem—but the solution is My solution to move you out of the adversity. Why? Because, “I am going to deliver you out of the problem.” He doesn’t say, “When it is the perfect problem.” It does not matter the source. He just says, “I will get you out of it.”

Eventually it is going to be a test of faith—by definition. Why? If I am seeking an answer, who do I have to go ask? What is He going to say? “Here is My promise, which I am asking you to trust.” Now you have heard what He said. Now you have to walk by faith until He delivers what He said. The only way you won’t is if you decide to go figure it out yourself, walking away from what He just said. And, by the way, you may think you have got there, but you haven’t. So He is going to test it—not out of condemnation, but to show you that you simply haven’t got it yet.

STORY—LINDA’S FORGIVENESS TEST

Linda has a great example. She was seeking power, and God said, “Well, you have unforgiveness.” She said, “Okay.” She knew who it was—and it was not me, by the way. She had to go receive forgiveness, and it took her a while to spend time with God and receive that. After two or three weeks of abiding—“I have this problem; I have this adversity; I have this conflict; You have asked me to go to forgiveness, and I’m there.”

Linda explains: “What is interesting is that when you are in the Word of God and you are meditating on the scriptures of what Christ did and how He forgave me, I sat many hours at the kitchen table writing those verses out, saying, ‘Yes, I understand You have forgiven me, and You have also forgiven that person—however, they did this, and this, and this.’ My flesh and my spirit were fighting back and forth. What I discovered was the hardness of my heart toward that person—because the living Word of God was softening my heart, and I was beginning to receive His nature, which is forgiveness. As I went through that, after two weeks, the real heaviness and the anger and the deep hate—the bitterness—was really lifted. I felt, ‘Wow—this is good. So I think I’ve got it.’”

We were going to the airport, and I said to Linda, “How is it going on your forgiveness?” She said, “Oh, I think I have it.” Because I can

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talk to the Father, just like Jesus said, I asked, “Is that true?” And He said, “Not yet.” So I said to Linda, “Are you sure?” She said, “I sure am.” I said, “You’re sure?” She said, “I’m 100% sure.”

When she made that statement—the person calls her on the phone. I picked up the phone. I think I am on the phone for, like, two minutes—and bang! I put that phone down on the roof of the car, and the phone flew off. Then someone said, “Well, how do you think now?” “It’s not done yet.”

So God tested. The test is just to help you stay with it—finish the trial. It is by faith, and He will finish that faith. His testing is really just to demonstrate to you, “Yep—you’ve got it,” or, “You don’t.” A couple of weeks later, she did.

—Rich and Linda Case

So cooperate with God. “I have a problem. I have to hear Your promise. I have to start believing that promise. And I do know You are going to verify that I actually am living it out and believing it.”

FOLLOW-UP—REFLECT ON THE PASSAGE

1. James says trials produce steadfastness, “that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” How does that reframe what a trial is for?

2. Rich says it does not matter the source of the adversity—only that God’s solution is to deliver us. What changes when you stop asking, “Why is this happening?” and start asking, “What is His solution?”

3. Linda’s test was a phone call when she thought she had forgiven. What is the difference between believing you have got it and actually having it?

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SECTION 7—ASK HIM FOR WISDOM

As you are in the middle of these trials, you also need clarity for the next step. He says, ask Me—I will give it to you generously.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **What are you currently asking God for wisdom about?**
- **Have you ever asked God for wisdom and then second-guessed His answer? What did that look like?**
- **What does it mean to be “double-minded” when you ask?**

⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

—James 1:5-8

As you are trying to get clarity about the steps to take, He says, “Ask Me for wisdom and I will give it to you”—with generosity. The word there is “with great clarity.” “I will let you know exactly.” With Linda, the wisdom was, “You have got to get in the Word, Linda. You have got to process this, and I am going to have you stay with it. That is My instruction to you. My wisdom for you is this.” It is going to be a variety of things.

He says the only condition to receive the wisdom is: have faith. Don’t be double-minded. The faith is not what He is testing you on—it is not the “what.” It is, “Do you believe I am going to give you the wisdom? I am going to guide you into the answer that you need. You said you are asking for it. You have got to believe I will get it to you. If you don’t believe I will get it to you, I am not going to bother—because you keep saying, ‘Is that God? Is that not? Is it this or is it that? Am I getting it or am I not?’ You are still trying to decide it.” He says, “If you ask Me, I will get it to you. Trust Me.” That is what that piece is all about.

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PAUSE & WRITE

Write down one thing you need wisdom from God about. Now write a single sentence: "I trust You will get it to me."

FOLLOW-UP—REFLECT ON THE PASSAGE

1. James 1:5 says God gives wisdom "generously to all without reproach." What does it mean to you that He gives without reproach—without scolding?

2. Rich says the test of faith is not whether God will give wisdom on the right thing, but whether you trust that He will give it at all. Where are you currently double-minded?

3. What does it look like to ask once and then trust Him to deliver, instead of asking and then re-deciding?

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SECTION 8—REFRESH ONE ANOTHER IN FELLOWSHIP

And He says, you have to do this with other people. Joy is sustained in community.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **Who is your inner circle—the people who refresh your heart?**
- **When you are heavy, who is the first person you call?**
- **Whom are you currently refreshing? How would they describe being with you?**

⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶ and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. ⁷For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

—Philemon 1:4-7

He says, “I have joy because the hearts of the saints are being refreshed. Why? Because they are with you, and you are with Christ, and you are bringing them into the presence of Christ. Your joy is experiencing that together because you are doing it together.” You need this. You need you and your spouse to be that for each other. You need an inner circle to do that with you and refresh you.

Remember, you are in the middle of trouble, and your tendency is to go to heaviness. You can be refreshed when somebody around you says, “Well, what did God say?” “Oh—well, then I believe that. So let’s go that way.” You are refreshed: “Oh yeah, the story isn’t over yet. Oh yeah, we are going to get there. Oh yeah—God is going to deliver the covenant.” He says, do that in community. Your community is, first of all, the two of you in marriage—and then your inner circle, your small group, your family. Practice that. They will do it for you, and you do it for them. The goal is to refresh you so that the joy is full.

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FOLLOW-UP—REFLECT ON THE PASSAGE

1. Paul prays that “the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.” How does sharing faith become a refreshment to others?

2. Rich says the question to ask a friend in trouble is, “What did God say?” Why is that question so refreshing?

3. Where in your life is community currently functioning the way Paul describes? Where is it absent—and what is one step you could take this week?

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SECTION 9—CELEBRATE AND FEAST

Another element—and generally Americans are pretty weak at this—is feasting.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **When did you last truly celebrate? What were you celebrating?**
- **On a scale from “drive, drive, drive” to “stop and feast,” where do you live most weeks?**
- **What rhythms of celebration could you build into your year?**

¹ Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to keep the Passover to the Lord, the God of Israel. ² For the king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the Passover in the second month—³ for they could not keep it at that time because the priests had not consecrated themselves in sufficient number, nor had the people assembled in Jerusalem—⁴ and the plan seemed right to the king and all the assembly. ⁵ So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the Passover to the Lord, the God of Israel, at Jerusalem, for they had not kept it as often as prescribed. ⁶ So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, as the king had commanded, saying, “O people of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria.” [...] ¹³ And many people came together in Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month, a very great assembly. [...] ²² And Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good skill in the service of the Lord. So they ate the food of the festival for seven days, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the Lord, the God of their fathers. ²³ Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the feast for another seven days. So they kept it for another seven days with gladness. [...] ²⁶ So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. ²⁷ Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to his holy habitation in heaven.

—2 Chronicles 30:1-6, 13, 22-23, 26-27

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This is where they had stopped celebrating, and they said, “Oh—we are supposed to get back to celebrating.” Passover is again recognizing that God will provide—the supernatural work. They gathered together and they started to celebrate. It was prescribed for seven days. They celebrated, and they had a really good time. What did they do? “Hey—let’s do this some more. This feels good. Let’s celebrate more.” They celebrated another seven days. As they did, they experienced great joy of celebration.

We are so drawn into getting things done that we drive, we drive, we drive—and yes, we get something done, and then it is the next thing, and the next thing. He says, while you are doing that, take time to celebrate. Take time to rejoice.

PRACTICE—A QUARTERLY CELEBRATION

Linda and I take a break every quarter and we celebrate. We get away from the house and go somewhere, and we just celebrate. We look at what God has been doing this last quarter. How is our margin? How are we doing as a couple? What would God have us do next? And let’s celebrate.

Linda is probably the master at celebration. She makes everything special—for our kids, for our grandkids, for our friends. When we go to leader retreats, we really celebrate. The response we have? It is always so full of joy. Everybody just loves it. It is full of joy, and everybody is ready to get back together again. You anticipate it: “I am looking forward to it.” Then you remember it: “That was fantastic.”

Linda has always brought into our family this truth—and because she is so joyful, she wants to bring that joyfulness to the celebration, which increases it. So spend more time planning those out and gathering people together—rehearsing and talking about the joy of the Lord. Include that as part of your life. Build a lifestyle of joy, and have fellowship, and have moments of celebration.

—Rich and Linda Case

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PAUSE & WRITE

On the calendar, when is your next intentional celebration? If there isn't one, choose a date and write it below—even just one. Who will you celebrate with? What will you rehearse together about what God has been doing?

FOLLOW-UP—REFLECT ON THE PASSAGE

1. Hezekiah's assembly extended their feast another seven days simply because the joy was so great. What does this say about the role of celebration in our walk with God?

2. Rich says Americans are weak at celebration. Do you agree? Why or why not?

3. What is the difference between celebrating accomplishment and celebrating God's deliverance and provision?

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SECTION 10—JOY IN WORK, MARRIAGE, AND FAMILY

He says, the highest and best calling—where joy lives most days—is your work, your spouse, and your family.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **Are you enjoying your work? (Remember, “work” is what you do every day, not just what pays.)**
- **Are you enjoying your marriage? Your kids?**
- **If the answer is “not really”—is it a heart issue, an unresolved conflict, or a season?**

²⁴ There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? ²⁶ For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

⁹ What gain has the worker from his toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. ¹² I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; ¹³ also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man.

—Ecclesiastes 2:24-26; 3:9-13

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He says, there is nothing better than to eat, drink, be merry—be joyful. That is eating and drinking, working, enjoying your work, enjoying your spouse, enjoying your family. Living the life—the highest and best—is to enjoy life all by itself: with what you do (your work), and with the people you are around (your spouse, your family, your friends). That brings great joy.

So if that brings great joy, the question about your work would be: are you enjoying your work? If the answer is, “No, not really,” then He says, “Okay, there is an issue.” It could be a heart issue. It could be that you have conflict that you have not dealt with. You could be in a culture where you are going to have to work through it—or, “I want you to go somewhere else, or do something else.” Get to that place of finding your joy in what you do.

By the way, work is not income. Work is what you do every day. You could be a stay-at-home mom—and believe me, you are working. Are you enjoying that? Then enjoy your marriage. Are you enjoying your marriage? Are you enjoying your kids and your family? He says, get all of that resolved first.

Don’t worry—you will have a chance to give it away to others in your ministries. But this is the highest and best. So keep thinking, “Joy is the way I am living, and I am living with an element of work, an element of where we are in our marriage, and an element of our family. I will process all of that to enjoy.” Because He says, there is nothing better.

If you live that way, that is what we are after—to actually live Ecclesiastes out. Joy in my work. Linda enjoys her work. We enjoy each other. We enjoy our family. Our life is joyful. Now—we have got trouble, and we have got to work through that. There are moments of consternation: “Uh oh—is this ever going to work?” But God says, “I will give you a life of joy because we live this out, and it is beautiful.”

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PAUSE & WRITE

Take an honest inventory. Where is your joy thriving—work, marriage, family? Where is it stuck? Don't fix it on paper—just notice it. Ask Him what is in the way, and write what you sense.

FOLLOW-UP—REFLECT ON THE PASSAGE

1. Solomon says, "Apart from Him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?" What is the connection between God and the simple enjoyment of daily life?

2. Rich says joy in work, marriage, and family is the highest and best—before ministry. Why does he order them that way?

3. Where in your daily life have you accepted "not really enjoying it" as normal? What might He be inviting you to address?

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SECTION 11—CARRY OUT YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Then He says, to carry out the assignments I give you—go to Esther.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **If God has put you somewhere “for such a time as this,” what is the “this”?**
- **What might happen if you said yes to your assignment, even if it looked impossible?**
- **Are you trying to solve God’s problem, or trying to follow His instructions?**

¹ When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry. ² He went up to the entrance of the king’s gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king’s gate clothed in sackcloth. ³ And in every province, wherever the king’s command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes. [...] ¹⁰ Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, ¹¹ “All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days.” ¹² And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. ¹³ Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not think to yourself that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴ For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

¹³ A copy of what was written was to be issued as a decree in every province, being publicly displayed to all peoples, and the Jews were to be ready on that day to take vengeance on their enemies. ¹⁴ So the couriers, mounted on their swift horses that were used in the king’s service, rode out hurriedly, urged by the king’s command. And the decree was issued in Susa the citadel.

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¹⁵ Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a robe of fine linen and purple, and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. ¹⁶ The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor. ¹⁷ And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them.

—**Esther 4:1-3, 10-14; 8:13-17**

Haman had come with a plot to basically get all the Jews killed, and he was executing that plot. It looked like he was going to succeed because of a law he had gotten the king to agree to. Esther had been captured, was part of the women around the court, and the king had selected her to be queen. So God put her in place. Then this comes about, and Mordecai says to her, "You have got to go in to the king and get this changed." Her response is, "I haven't been invited." "If he doesn't invite me in and I don't have the opportunity to answer a question he asks me—if I just go in and tell him—actually, he will get rid of me. So this isn't going to work."

Mordecai says, "Going to need somebody else to do it." He says, "My perspective is that God has done this for such a time as this. You are the person God has put in place to let this happen. By the way, it is not your work—you are joining God's work. Who is going to deliver us? Don't walk away from your assignment." Esther says, "Okay. All right. If I die, I die. I am going to go ahead and do it." Through the story, God saves them all. Not only that—He gave them permission and favor to live with great opportunity. The reaction of the Jews was great exceeding joy, because the assignment was fulfilled.

As you have joy, part of it is going to be your assignment, regardless of how difficult it might look. You have to think of it as "for such a time as this." The assignment He is going to give you to the people around you is because you are the only one standing there who can help them with the truth. You

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will give away what it means to abide. You will give away what it means to live in joy—because nobody else knows, and you are the only one standing. “My assignment to you is to be part of that—and for such a time as this. Why? Because you are the only one there who can do it.”

You say, “Okay—I am willing to do it.” It is not, “Go do it”—though. Could Esther solve the problem? She had to follow God’s instructions to solve the problem, because God was going to solve the problem. We are not taking over. We are walking with Him in the assignment.

He makes a statement about this in Matthew 25.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **When you read this parable, do you tend to identify with the five-talent servant, the two-talent servant, or the one-talent servant? Why?**

¹⁴ “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’ ²¹ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ ²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.’ ²³ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’

—Matthew 25:14-23

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He gave them an assignment. The five-talent servant brought back more, and the master's comment was, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You followed My assignment. Enter into the joy." The two-talent servant—who had less—came back with his assignment. What was the response? Exactly the same: "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into My joy."

It is not about the result at all—because He didn't say, "Well, you get more because you did more." It is, "You were faithful to the assignment." That is the key. Joy is going to be related to, "What is God calling me to be part of right now? I am going to be faithful to that."

For example, for someone with a little three-year-old who is about to have another child, one assignment is going to be to raise disciples—to build those two little kids. The assignment is to parent them together, to build them into a life of living joyfully themselves while they are living life. So are you going to be able to be an elder of a church? Well, not at the moment—because your assignment is them. By the way, your assignment is also to have a great marriage while you are serving them. That is an assignment. Why? Because that is what He is asking you to do. The only question He is going to ask is, "Were you faithful to what I showed you to do?" "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy." The assignment brings joy all by itself.

So—what would be important for us to know? We had better learn what the assignment is. That is where we need His assistance: "What is God asking us to be part of right now? Are we having margin with that? Are we having joy with that? Are we having refreshment while we are doing that assignment?" Don't think of it as joining a ministry. It is, "What is God asking me to be part of right now? Be faithful."

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PAUSE & WRITE

Write your honest answer: What has God assigned you to right now? List the people. List the work. Don't add what He hasn't added. Don't subtract what He has.

FOLLOW-UP—REFLECT ON THE PASSAGES

1. Esther 4:14—"Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" What is the "such a time as this" He has placed you in?

2. Matthew 25—both servants who were faithful received the same words: "Enter into the joy of your master." What does that say about how God measures faithfulness?

3. Rich distinguishes between joining a ministry and saying yes to God's present assignment. Where is that distinction important for you right now?

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SECTION 12—DISCIPLE OTHERS

As you do that, you are going to do it with other people. Discipleship is the natural overflow of joy.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **Who are you currently walking alongside in their walk with God?**
- **What does it mean to “help someone walk into the covenant”?**
- **When have you experienced the joy of seeing someone else receive truth from God?**

¹ The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. ² Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. ³ For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. ⁴ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

—3 John 1:1-4

There is not a whole lot to say. “I rejoice when you are experiencing the covenant. You are living life to God’s fullness—which is all the things we have talked about—and you are walking in truth.” The truth is His truth for you, His assignments for you, the way He wants to resolve your issues. There is no greater joy than to do that together—and to assist you in walking that way.

The way I assist you is by having you be in Whose presence? God’s—because God will do the work. So discipling—giving it away— isn’t complicated. “Where are you at? What have you got going? Let me help you walk into the covenant.” As I do, I will have great joy to see you rejoicing in the covenant. When you experience it, what will you do? You will do the same thing. That is how multiplication happens. It is all around the joyfulness that brings—you are experiencing it, you are helping others experience it, they help others experience it, and you get to see it all.

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FOLLOW-UP—REFLECT ON THE PASSAGE

1. John says, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.” Whose walking in truth would bring that level of joy to you?

2. Rich says discipling is not about us doing the work—it is about bringing someone into His presence. How does that change how you approach discipling someone?

3. Where might you be over-complicating discipleship in a way that is robbing your joy?

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SECTION 13—JOY INTO ETERNITY

He makes an interesting comment in Isaiah.

As you review these verses, answer the following questions/thoughts:

- **Have you tended to think of joy as something you will fully experience only after this life?**
- **What changes if joy in eternity is the continuation of joy now, rather than the beginning of joy?**

¹⁷“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. ¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. ²⁰ No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. ²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. ²³ They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their descendants with them. ²⁴ Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. ²⁵ The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,” says the Lord.

—Isaiah 65:17-25

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Joy goes with us into eternity. The aspect of what you understand and experience of joy will continue into eternity. There is an element of it that isn't, "Well, I live a sad life here, and then I get to be joyful there." He says, no—you are joyful now, and it carries with you into eternity. Which means all the same things will be happening, will be progressing—we will be experiencing the covenant, rejoicing with others, celebrating, having assignments. The whole thing continues. He says, "If I were you, I would learn it now and start to enjoy it now. Eternity is now."

FOLLOW-UP—REFLECT ON THE PASSAGE

1. Isaiah 65 describes a future where labor is not in vain and where God answers before we even call. How is that future already breaking into our lives now?

2. If eternity has already begun, what is one way you would live differently this week?

3. What does it mean that we are not waiting to enjoy God—we are practicing forever right now?

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CLOSING BENEDICTION

He says, let me put a capstone on it—a benediction.

²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

—Jude 1:24-25

“May the God of joy give you joy. Live joy. Have joy. Why don’t we live that way?”

—Rich Case

The essence of what we have been saying is that joy is the nature of God. He says, “Come and be in My presence. Learn to let Me deliver real solutions to your life—which I know are needed supernaturally. I want you to build a life of joy. Learn to be thankful. Learn to rehearse. Learn to celebrate. Learn to come to Me when you have got trouble. Learn to give it away. Learn to do that with other people.” What this beautiful course is really saying is: commit that you do not need to live without it. Rather, commit to build a life that expresses and experiences it.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank You that it is not fuzzy—that life is intended, the highest and best, to have joy walking with You. May we learn it. May we experience it. May we start to broaden that out into our spouses, into our children, into our community. We thank You in Christ’s name. Amen.

—Rich Case

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These nine questions are for group conversation at the close of the lesson. They are organized into Scriptural Understanding, Deeper Understanding, and Personal Application. Numbering runs 1 through 9.

Scriptural Understanding

1. First Chronicles 16:27 says, "Splendor and majesty are before Him; strength and joy are in His place." In context, what is the relationship between being in God's presence and experiencing splendor, strength, and joy? What might this mean for the follower of Christ today?

2. In John 16:24, Jesus says, "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." Unpack the keyword "ask" in light of His statement that, until that point, the disciples had asked nothing in His name. What did Jesus mean by that, and what is He inviting us into now?

3. James 1:2-4 calls us to "count it all joy" when we meet trials, because the testing of our faith produces steadfastness. Why does Scripture tie joy specifically to trials, and what does it mean that steadfastness should have its "full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing"?

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Deeper Understanding

4. Rich teaches that joy is not “act joyful” but “express joy because of what God is doing in your life.” In your own words, explain the difference—and how that distinction reframes the whole concept of a “life of joy.”

5. When David sinned, he asked God to “restore to me the joy of my salvation.” Rich says joy is the indicator that we are walking with God. How does that reframe the role of joy in the Christian life—as a measurement of relationship rather than a measurement of circumstance?

6. Throughout this lesson, Rich repeatedly says we can be joyful in disagreement, in conflict, in trials, and in unresolved situations. What is the theological foundation for that claim, and how does it differ from simply suppressing or denying difficult emotions?

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Personal Application

7. Of the twelve practices in this lesson—thanksgiving and praise, consecration, restoration, dialogue, unity in disagreement, cooperating with trials, asking for wisdom, fellowship, celebration, joy in work and family, faithfulness to your assignment, and discipleship—which one is currently most absent from your life? What is one specific step you will take this week to begin building it?

8. Rich and Linda model joy as a lifestyle, not a moment—quarterly celebrations, refreshing fellowship, dialogue with God, faithfulness to their assignment in the season they are in. As you look at the rhythms of your own life, where would others say your joy is most visible? Where is it hidden, and why?

9. Rich closes by saying, “Eternity is now.” If you truly believed that joy now and joy then are the same continuous joy, what is one thing you would stop waiting for—and one thing you would start practicing today?

AN INVITATION TO GO DEEPER

This workbook is a starting point, designed to open your eyes to the incredible life of partnership God has for you. But the journey of walking in the Spirit, hearing His voice, and ministering His power is a daily one, and we are committed to providing resources to help you live it out.

If this material has stirred your heart and you are hungry for more, we invite you to explore the other resources our ministry provides. We have developed these tools specifically to equip you and your community to walk in the fullness of what you have learned.

- **Books and Small Group Curricula:** For those who want to build a solid, biblical foundation, our books and curricula provide in-depth teaching on abiding in Christ, hearing God's voice, and living in the freedom of the Kingdom. They are perfect for personal study or for creating a powerful small group environment where you can learn and grow together.
- **Podcasts:** For encouragement on the go, our podcasts feature practical teachings and real-life testimonies of how these principles are transforming lives, families, and businesses every single day.
- **Retreats:** For a truly immersive experience, we invite you to attend one of our retreats. These are dedicated times set apart to unplug from the world, press into the presence of God, and receive personal ministry and revelation that can accelerate your journey in Him.

You were not meant to walk this path alone. To explore these resources and take the next step in your adventure with God, please visit our website. We look forward to partnering with you as you discover the joy and power of living the full covenant life He has for you.

More information is available at www.AbideMinistries.com



History of **Abide Ministries**



In the 1990s, Rich and Linda Case received a call from God to dig into what it means to truly live in the Spirit.

In the 1990s, Rich and Linda Case received a call from God to dig into what it means to truly live in the Spirit. They had been believers for most of their lives and regularly attended church and Bible studies, but began to realize that, despite knowing the Bible intellectually, their personal experiences seemed disconnected from the promises and truths found in scripture. As they then learned these essential truths through their abiding and hearing God's voice – and began to see the grand life play out in their lives God called them to give that knowledge away. In 2001, God initiated the ABIDE ministry at a retreat with friends in Austria, and through their personal experience of this abiding life, their friends noticed the change in their lives and inquired if Rich and Linda could host a similar retreat the following year. This was repeated three years in a row, and then God called them to host weekend retreats in their home in Colorado.

Through the formal development of the truths revealed by God with Abiding and additional electives, they founded All for Jesus – Living Waters Ministries, now Abide Ministries – and have seen it grow exponentially since then, with 24+ retreat leaders all over the world, 29 online courses, eight books on various aspects of living life with Christ, and a daily podcast. Rich and Linda have also worked with various churches to strengthening them with the truths of an abiding life in Christ, and seeing Christ bring reconciliation and new vision to desperate situations.

Their heart is to bring the truths and promises of God to as many people as possible, showing everyone that when you abide in Christ and seek Him daily, your life can be completely and utterly transformed – enabling you to experience the grand life promised by God.



Vision

At our core, we believe in walking along God's path and connecting to the vine (abiding). As we walk in unity with others and understand God's Word as the truth, we are sure to experience His promised grand life and thus, willingly accept God's will as our chosen path.



Mission

1. Live out and invite everyone to experience the grand, spectacular, abundant life by hearing God's voice.
2. Share God's majesty, a close relationship with us as he yearns for our restoration.
3. God is majestic, grand and pure goodness, so that we can experience His nature in real life.
4. Communicate to everyone, irrespective of their condition, that all are meant to experience God's Divine Life (grand, majestic), by receiving His personal plan for us.
5. God delivers this life for us in a SUPERNATURAL way, transcending human comprehension, and thus, becoming normal in our life.
6. Teach that personal truths are revealed to us by God, grounded on His word – the embodiment of Truth.
7. Recognize that abiding in Christ changes our life in tangible, real ways, and is not just learning about or studying this life.
8. Teach that as we abide in Christ, we learn to understand and follow God's will for our lives, as He leads us personally into His grand, Divine plan for us. His personal plan calls us into His bigger story with our best interest at heart (blessed to bless others).

Statement of Non-Profit Status

Abide Ministries is a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization that has been fully funded by our founders, leaders and retreat participants since its inception.

Tax-ID number: 27-1731819

Testimonies

"If I'm not abiding, I feel like I'm dying. Abiding is living...It's powerful to know that you have God's perspective on something."



Steve

"This was the first time that I understood what people meant by God's living Word. And I've been a Christian for a lot of years, but this was the first time it really came alive for me and I really could experience that."



Dan

"It doesn't matter where you are at in your walk. If you just got saved yesterday or if you've been a 20+ year believer like I have, learning how to hear God's voice and learning His will is just as important in day one as it is in day 3,426. You wanna hear God's will and this course has helped me hear Him more clearly."



Bob

"Abiding turned out to be the most transformational thing I've ever had since salvation in my Christian walk and in our marriage, and it's just been amazing. God has a path for us and He is there and He's showing it to us."



Heath

"Before, in my quiet time, it was more of a checklist thing for me to do in the morning, and, honestly, some mornings it was the thing that went if I was busy, and some days it didn't even happen. Now, it's become so personal to me and the time flies by in the morning and God speaks so directly to me and I just never felt that way on a daily basis before. That has been life-altering for me."



Rebecca

"I heard about people living in peace, I heard about people living in joy, and realizing all kinds of things around them are happening. And then we realize, wait a minute, we're there, we have peace beyond understanding."



Brad

Giving to the Ministry

Have you experienced abundant blessing from your time with Abide Ministries?

Pay it forward by donating at abideministries.com/donate and help us support others in learning how to seek Christ and abide in Him! We appreciate your desire to help us share the Abundant Life with the rest of the world.



Learn More at abideministries.com

Podcast

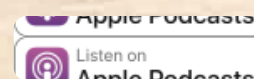
Escape the chaos and uncertainty of the world with our podcast, ***“Come and See, Finding Truth in a World of Chaos,”*** available on YouTube, Apple Podcasts, and Spotify.



CHANNEL



PLAYLIST PAGE



Tune in five days a week as our hosts, Rich Case and Kathy Rocconi, dive into the scriptures and discuss what it looks like to live an abiding life with Christ. Join us as we seek God's truth in a world of turmoil and darkness.

Online Courses



Abide Ministries online courses uncover life-changing biblical truths, with practical application and wisdom. Our courses are joyful and life-giving and are perfect for small groups as well as individuals.

Each course has an accompanying workbook. Join us as we learn about biblical topics like Hearing God's Voice, Discerning God's Will, the Covenant, Living in Forgiveness, Living in the Kingdom of God, Living in the Supernatural, Christ, Clutter and the Calendar, Living the Grand Life, and many, many more.



COURSES

Abide Retreats



Learn more at
abideministries.com

Do you have friends or a small group that you would like to experience what you just experienced?

Would you be interested in attending another retreat, which we call electives to go deeper in your walk with God?

See the various options on our website.
The topics for retreats and courses are the same.

RETREATS



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