

Fil-Am Community Church

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Title: **How to Raise Your Level of Joy**

Key verse: Matthew 2:1-12

Good morning Fil-Am as always it is a blessing to be fellowshiping with you this morning. This morning we are on part two of a three part series called **Surviving Christmas and Beyond**.

Let me get a show of hands this morning that think it just doesn't feel like Christmas yet... It is hard to believe that Christmas is just two weeks away do you have all your shopping done? Don't answer that question because I don't want to get any of you husbands on the hot seat just yet.....

Whether you are ready for it, feel it, or are prepared for it, the bottom line is that the Christmas season is upon us, ready or not...

All around us you can hear the many Christmas songs/carols; however, the joyful message **can be lost** when we're concerned by all the pressures and stresses of life.

We can look at the worldly way of celebrating Christmas on December the 25th and easily get caught up in the **hustle and bustle** of shopping and buying presents, cards, light, etc. It is easy to get caught up in the motion all around us.

You could see how it could be very easy to **miss the meaning** of Christmas. I would say the innkeeper was one of the first persons to Miss Christmas.

If we look at the story we will see that the **inn keeper** said there was no more room at the inn. If he had only known what was going to happen that night would change all of humanity.

If he had known that the baby that was about to be born would be the savior of the world I am sure he would have made room. But like so many he was too busy, carried away with other matters to realize what was happening right below his very nose.

Here is the million dollar question;

Does Christ have any room in your inn today?

It is sad to say but a lot of people miss Christmas because they are **too busy**. They are too preoccupied with the world around them that they never take the time to slow down and appreciate what's happening right in front of them, they just like the innkeeper miss the real meaning of Christmas.

This morning we are going to look specifically at three ways that we can find **Joy this Christmas**. Three ways to raise your level of joy this Christmas; let's dig right into the first way being;

I. Look for Jesus

The Magi in Matthew 2 show us how to increase our level of joy at Christmas by looking for the **right thing**.

When they train bank tellers how to spot counterfeit bills they do so with a method that is Biblical.

Do you know what they do?

They spend **countless hours** and hours going over and looking at every detail of..... Actual real bills, not counterfeit.

That's right they don't teach them by wasting any time looking at all they examples of fake bills, they do it by looking at real ones. That way when one comes across their cash register they can **spot it** immediately by the way it looks or feels because they are use to looking at the real ones.

If we were to **look to Jesus** as the perfect example just as bank tellers do instead of looking everywhere else how much faster do you think we would be able to spot the **counterfeits** in our life.

Jesus is the **only example** that will stand the intense scrutiny, and will pass the test every time. If Jesus was the measuring stick you used to guide all your decisions how much better do you think your decision making process would be?

Here is a short poem by Jim Wolf

The Real Meaning of Christmas.

It happened on a silent night,

Two thousand years ago;

God sent to us his only Son,

Because he loved us so.

While angels watched from up above,

The blessed babe was born,

And laid into a manger,

On that first real Christmas morn,

The shepherds came to worship him,

The Eastern wise men, too,

To celebrate his Holy Birth,

As now all Christians do.

The greatest story ever told,
Is not of shopping malls,
It's how God's Son was born on earth,
To Love and **Save US ALL!**

Getting back to the story of the Magi what was it they were looking for? Verse 2 tells us. They came to Jerusalem and said, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to **worship Him.**"

They were looking for Jesus. Christmas for them was an opportunity to **worship Jesus.**

What a difference Christmas was for them and what it has become today.

During this Christmas season, many people are worshipping the **wrong thing**. If Jesus is not your reason for enjoying this Christmas, if you think that gifts, relationships, the weather, and anything else will make you enjoy Christmas, then you're not worshipping Jesus.

Some people (Non-Believers) only enjoy this special time a year (Christmas) only once a year. As a (Christian) we should celebrate Jesus all year long.

It always reminds me of one of our sayings here at Fil-Am. Where we believed that every meal is a banquet, every day a Holiday, and ever gathering a **Family Reunion.**

This morning look to Jesus as he is our **strong tower.**

Proverbs 18:10 (Amplified Bible)

¹⁰*The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the [consistently] righteous man [upright and in right standing with God] runs into it and is safe, high [above evil] and strong.*

Psalms 61:3 (NIV)

⁶¹ *“For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe.”*

Don't miss the joys of life by only celebrating Christmas one day a year but make it a point to celebrate Christ all year long.

We can see the benefit of looking to the only perfect example Jesus now let's move on to our second point of how to raise you level of Joy that is.....

II. Learn from His Word

The Magi looked in the right place when they looked to God. While there they discovered where they should have looked in the first place—the **Bible**.

The scribes in Jerusalem said that according to the prophet Micah the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. He says;

During this Christmas season, if you're feeling stressed out, if you're feeling like you're ready to give up, turn to the **Word of God** for some words of encouragement.

Be refreshed as you dwell once more on the life-giving words of God.

Psalms 19:7-8 (NIV)

The psalmist says, ⁷ *The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.*

⁸ *The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.*

The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

– They all point to the same thing – the **Word of God**.

Hebrews 4:12 (NASB)

¹² *For the word of God is **living and active** and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

1 Peter 1:25 (NASB)

²⁵ “But the Word of the Lord **endures forever.**”

Psalms 33:4 (NASB)

⁴ *For the word of the LORD is **upright**, And all His work is done in faithfulness.*

Proverbs 30:5 (NASB)

⁵ *Every word of God is **tested**; He is a **shield** to those who take refuge in Him.*

The Word of God is the solution to **all your problems**. There is not a problem that any of you are facing that is not found within the pages of the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV)

¹⁶ *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,*

The scriptures are **divinely produced**, just as if God breathed his very own breath on them. Therefore they carry value for building up the believer into maturity, in order to be equipped for every good work.

By the **Authority of the Bible**, I mean that the Bible as the expression of God’s will to us.

It possesses the right superiority to define what we are to believe and how we are to conduct ourselves. It is through the Bible, God’s Holy Word that you get a **glimpse of his revelation**.

When I say Revelation I am saying it is through God's **Revelation** that he makes his **truth** known to mankind!

Inspiration preserves it, making it widely accessible. **Inspiration Guarantees** that what the Bible says is just what God would say if he were to speak directly to you!

And finally **Illumination** by means of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps the scripture reader or hearer understand the Bible and creates the conviction that it is the True Word of God!

John 14:26 (NIV)

²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

The thing that still amazes me is the Bible also tells us the strategy of the enemy, not only does it tell us what we are facing but tells us the game plan of the enemy.

This issue that still plagues us today is for too many they do not **center themselves** on the Bible to provide that sound judgment or counsel but rely on other things to fill that void in their life.

Many people center their life around their **work**. They throw themselves into it and spend all their time worshipping it. We could get very centered on certificates, awards, diplomas and degrees. However, they will leave you very lonely in the end. Because no matter how good your job is there will come a time in everyone's life when they have to face retirement and if your job is what defined you where are you left then?

Is it possible to center your life around **friends and family**? The answer is YES you can, and many would say that is not a bad thing. But let's look at the flip side of this situation. What happens if your son or daughter or your spouse dies? Will you be able to survive if your center is taken from you?

Is it possible to center yourself around **material things**? Sad to say far too many people get caught up in this endless cycle of needing and wanting more. The common response is if I just had this or made this much then I would be happy. The cold hard reality of it is a never ending, never fulfilling cycle that once you're on is very hard to get off.

Am I preaching to anyone here today?

Do we find ourselves matching any of the above mentions pitfalls that will suck the Joy out of your life? Here is the way you can keep away from those pitfalls.

If you center your life on the **Word of God**, you can never go wrong. Because when the world comes crashing in around you, as it always will the WORD, Jesus and the Holy Spirit will never fail you. If you place your trust in anything else you will be disappointed every time.

The Word of God will **never** leave you on a dead end road. It provides Sound Guidance that is just as relevant today as it was two thousand years ago.

III. Live it Out by Loving and Giving

Verse 11 says “On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.”

The Magi came to Jesus' house bearing gifts. The gifts they gave were entirely appropriate. They gave gold. Gold was a gift for a king. By giving it they acknowledged that Jesus was and is the King. They gave frankincense. Frankincense was a gift for a priest. It was incense used by priests in temple worship.

By giving it they acknowledged that Jesus was a priest—**the one** who would bring us to God. They gave myrrh. Myrrh was a gift for the dead. It was a fragrant ointment used to anoint a body before burial. By giving it they acknowledged that Jesus had come to die for the sins of the world.

Whoever Loves Much does Much.....

Mark 12:28-31 (NIV)

²⁸ *One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”* ²⁹ *“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one* ³⁰ **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.**’ ³¹ *The second is this: ‘**Love your neighbor as yourself.**’ There is no commandment greater than these.”*

John 13:34-35 (NIV)

³⁴ *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ **By this** everyone will know that you are my disciples, **if you love one another.**”*

John 15:17 (NIV)

¹⁷ *This is my command: **Love each other.***

November 9 and 10, 1913 did not bring any comforting memories to Nellie Williams. In fact those two days would continue to haunt her dreams, waking her up in a cold sweat with tears soaking her pillow. Her life would never be the same...

Hurricane-force winds squealed across Lake Erie for the duration of those two days, and the Light Vessel 82 (L.V. 82), captained by her beloved husband, Hugh, who was hit head on. Overwhelmed by the ferocity of the high winds as well as the breaking waves, the crew realized that their fight for survival was hopeless.

This wasn't the only vessel to fall prey to this brutal storm. Over 250 people aboard a dozen ships lost their lives.

Storm wreckage began to wash ashore at the foot of Michigan Avenue, in Buffalo, NY. Among the debris was a piece of wood from Light Vessel 82.

This piece of wood displayed a penciled message from Captain Williams to his wife. Realizing he had but moments to live, his last thoughts went to the one he loved so dearly. He wrote "Goodbye, Nellie, The ship is breaking up fast. Williams."

If love like this was our only motivation, how **different** this world would be. Did you know that Jesus gave us only one direct command in the whole New Testament?

Strangely enough, love is the one thing we struggle with the most!

Marriages don't last, and any couple fortunate enough to have been married past the twenty-year mark becomes an **icon** in our society.

The question they hear most often? "How did you do it?"
Young couples just ask Elvin and Bebutte.....

Undeterred Jesus repeated that same command three times in His last conversation with his disciples.

Loving one another should be our **only priority**, not only as a benefit for ourselves, but also to others who have not heard the great news about what God has done for humanity.

So many leave churches after just a couple of visits, because of the utter indifference they find among its members.

Where love does not thrive, **God's message is lost!** In fact God's message can only thrive where love reigns! All those who do not know real love tell but a cheap imitation of the message!

"My command is this: **Love each other** as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:12-13 NIV)

The love that Jesus urges us to experience is a deep committed love, one where we gladly "lay down" our lives for our friends.

That's **powerful...**

It's never too late to start having real friends. It's as simple as starting to love others the way Jesus did!

Pure love is only possible when we get to know our Heavenly Father.

Once we start this kind of relationship with God, we'll have no choice but to love the way He does!

John 17:26 (NIV)

"I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

Just like the story above about the ship wreck of her husband we too find ourselves standing on the shore and noticed washed ashore, a simple message addressed to us from the Lover our souls: (God)

John 15:9 (NIV)

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. "

You can take the above verses and see that Jesus ***How will we respond?***

himself said this was not only a commandment but the most important one, then again in John giving a new commandment.

How will the world know that we follow Jesus? It has nothing to do with the **way we dress** or where we attend church.

It has nothing to do with the amount of **money** we tithe or how many charitable organizations we support.

It has nothing to do with how many **Sunday school** or home group meetings we have been to.

It has nothing to do with how many Bible verses you **can quote** or how often you read the Bible.

It has to do with the way you **Love people**, the way you treat people.

How can we apply this today?

It is simple you show love not only in lip service but in deeds. You show your love in actions.

It does you no good to sit through class after class or read verses after verse **without the application phase.**

The power and the blessing **comes** when you put the word of God into action.

Show me you love me **don't tell me** you love me....

Love at first sight is easy to understand, it's when two people have been looking at each other for years that it becomes a **Miracle.**

The way the world is suppose to be able to recognize us is the way we love each other.

Today it looks as if so many Christians have been baptized in Lemon juice. They walk around looking grumpy and mad.

Shirley is constantly telling me to relax and not be so mean looking because it gives off the wrong signal.

We are supposed to be Christ's example in the world. Someone that is approachable and can help provide the solution to the problem not be the problem.

The biggest problem we have, that needs to be addressed in a follow on sermon is we as **Christians just need to grow up.....**

OK I get it your feelings are hurt get over it we have a mission and a purpose here.... let's get to it..... We need to **see the difference**, we need to **feel the difference** we need to **be the difference...**

Remember if Jesus had been born in Bethlehem a thousand times but never in your heart it is still a **Christmas lost.**

The real message of Christmas is the **GOSPEL** of **CHRIST**. His supernatural birth, sinless humanity, horrific death for all of us on the cruel cross of Calvary, his **SPECTULAR** resurrection from the dead, coupled with his offer to free Humanity from Satan's chains of Bondage is the **true meaning of Christmas.....**