

Fil-Am Community Church

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25 May 2014

RECOVERING YOUR JOY

Good morning everybody. It's good to see you. We're glad you're here.

Take out your notes. I want to begin today with a survey. The question I want to ask you this morning is, What, in your mind, is the easiest thing to lose? How many of you could say, "My glasses." How many of you would say, "My keys." How many of you would say "My mind." How many of you would say, "My cell phone." What else? What else is it easy to lose? "The TV remote." Yeah, that's a big one. How about your hair? Your job. It's easy to lose a job nowadays. Salvation. No, that's not easy to lose. In fact, you don't lose it. How about patience? Many of you would agree with that, right?

But you know what's the easiest thing to lose? The easiest thing of all to lose is your joy. You can lose it just like *that*. One phone call and *boom*. It's gone. One email. A letter. A conversation. A call from the doctor's office. You can watch a breaking news on TV and lose your joy. Like the news the other night about a 22-year-old guy who went on a killing spree in a relatively peaceful neighborhood in Isla Vista, CA. Joy is the easiest thing in the world to lose. And a lot of people in a lot of circumstances are conspiring to rob it from you.

For the past few years, America has been in kind of a gloomy time. Since the recession set in, we've got millions out of work. Then, a couple of tragic news in the past few months made it gloomier. The Malaysian Airlines plane went missing and is still missing together with hundreds of people. The South Korean ferry sank with over a hundred students still missing. There are a lot of things. There's

kidnapping of young girls in Nigeria. There's unrest in Ukraine and in some parts of the world.

So, many people are not joyful because of what's going on around the world. Add to that your own personal problems, and if you're not careful, you'll end up a basket case.

Joy, or the lack of it, is a serious, serious issue. When God's children aren't filled with joy it makes God look bad. Cranky Christians are a bad witness. Do you know what I'm talking about? *Don't look at them right now!* But you know what I'm talking about. Cranky Christians. They look like they've been sucking on pickles or something. Just kind of never really smiling, never really happy. That makes God look bad. Why? Because God wants us to be witnesses with our countenance, with the look on our faces.

The Bible tells us that the Christian life and the kingdom of God can be summed up in three words. The Bible says in Romans 14:17 *"The kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, [in other words the life that God has for you, God's kingdom and God's rule and reign is not about rules, regulations and rituals. It's not about what you eat and it's not about what you drink] the kingdom of God is about living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."*

Circle "goodness," "peace," and "joy," because those three words define the kind of life God wants you to live. That's God's goal for us. In following Jesus, the Bible says, when we follow him it brings joy.

Reality is, you can lose it so quickly. But then, the Bible says it's actually quite easy to get it back. How do I get my joy back? This morning, I'd like to share with you seven steps to restore joy in your life.

1. The first step that I need to do is Admit I've lost it.

I need to admit that I've lost my joy. Obviously, logically I can't recover something until I realize I've lost it. If you've ever lost a child in a store or a mall

and they were gone for thirty seconds before you noticed, you can't find them until first you know they're gone.

The way you do this is real simple. You look at your past and you ask yourself a couple of questions: Has there ever been a time in my life when I was closer to God than I am right now? Has there ever been a time in my life when I was more joyful in the Lord than I am right now?

If so, now's the chance to make the change. But you've got to start by admitting that you've lost what you've had in the past. You could ask God about it. He's waiting to help you. King David prayed this in Psalm 51:12 *"Restore to me the joy of your salvation."* He doesn't say restore my salvation because he hadn't lost his salvation. He had lost the joy of his salvation.

2. The second thing you do is you Analyze the cause.

You look at your life and you ask yourself, how did I lose it? How did I lose my joy? What is robbing my joy? There are certain things, certain circumstances, people, actions that rob us of our joy. So we have to look at our lives.

The Bible tells us to do this many times in Scripture. It says to examine your life. One example is Lamentations 3:40 *"Let us examine our ways and test them and let us return to the Lord."* Circle the three things: "examine our ways," "test," and "return." That's how you get your joy back. You examine your life. What has caused me to lose my joy? You test it out. What are the killjoys in my life? Then you return to the Lord.

There are several killjoys in life. Let me just give you four. They're the most common ones I see in peoples' lives.

One thing that robs your joy is an unbalanced schedule.

If you're overworked or if you're underworked, either one of them can cause you to lose your joy, to get bored, to lose your passion. You always need a balance

between rest and work, between input and output. For example, if your expenses exceed your income, you lose your joy certainly.

Some of you, you're always giving out. You're always caring, you're always serving, you're always sharing. But you don't get any input in your life. Pretty soon you'll get compassion fatigue. In compassion fatigue you stop caring. You stop caring about others and you stop caring about God and then you stop caring about yourself. I remember years ago when I was still a student pastor and I led our worship every Sunday. There came a point when I felt so tired already. Like I was just going through the motions whenever I went in front to play the guitar and lead. I didn't know what was happening. Until a friend of mine invited me to their worship service one afternoon. And I just stood there and sang. And then I felt like something heavy was being taken out of my chest. And I felt relaxed and relieved and tears came down my cheeks. I realized I needed to be ministered to. God ministered to me through the songs we sang.

The second thing is an unused talent. An unused talent causes people to lose their joy so very fast. You were created by God for a purpose. We've talked about this many times. God has wired you up with certain gifts and talents and abilities and passion and heart and experiences. We call it your SHAPE. God has SHAPED you. If you're not using your shape, if you're not using the talents God has given you, you're going to lose your joy. You're going to get frustrated and you're going to get stuck in a rut. If you come to church and just take notes and not get involved in any kind of service, however small it is, you're going to get bored eventually, and you'll lose your joy. You see, if you're not physically active, you get fat and you become slow and lethargic. In the same way, if you're not flexing your spiritual muscles, you lose enthusiasm about life and you begin to feel down and depressed.

The third thing that will cause you to lose your joy is unconfessed sin.

Unconfessed sin piles up in our lives. We don't admit it to God, we don't admit it to ourselves and we don't want to admit it to anybody else. Few things rob your joy, your confidence, faster than guilt.

You can rationalize it consciously, but it festers in your subconscious and you can feel the drain. It happens like a slow leak in a tire. It festers in your mind and you cannot be enthusiastic and joyful at the same time as feeling guilty. Guilt and joy cannot be in the same mind at the same time.

Fortunately this killjoy is very easy to resolve. Just admit it to God, receive forgiveness, confess your sins. He's waiting to forgive you. There's no reason to ever go longer than about three seconds with guilt. None whatsoever. Christ died to remove the guilt in your life. That's what the cross is all about. So you don't have to nail yourself to the cross. He died for you so you can live without guilt.

A fourth thing that will rob you of joy is an unresolved conflict.

Have you ever started the day, you get up in the morning and think, this is going to be a great day. Then you have an argument with your husband or wife or friend or neighbor or relative. And your passion and your joy just drains out of you. It just goes down instantly. Then you've got to go off to work and you don't have time to resolve the conflict. Then you're feeling cruddy all day because you've got that unresolved conflict that hasn't been dealt with. You need to deal with it. That will rob you of your joy.

You need to make peace. Like I said, it's kind of like the air coming out of a tire. Your attitude goes flat. When you have an unresolved conflict in your life it just keeps going on and on and on.

The third thing you need to do, once I admit I've lost my joy, and I've analyzed the cause, and I've figured out what was causing it, the third is real simple:

3. Correct what's wrong.

I've walked with Jesus Christ for thirty years. I've talked to a lot of people during that time. During that time I've noticed the number one reason, people lose their joy is when you know the right thing to do and you don't do it. That will rob your joy faster than anything else. The Bible says in James 4:17 "*Anyone who knows the right thing to do but does not do it, is sinning.*" So let me ask you very bluntly: what do you know you need to be doing but you're not? What has God told you to do but you haven't started doing it yet?

What am I talking about? I'm talking about obedience. It is the secret to continual, abundant, overflowing joy. It's doing what God tells you to do. Every time you do what God tells you to do, your life's going to be filled with joy. Every time you ignore it, you lose your joy.

Why does God give us all these principles, these commandments in his Word? Because when you look at the commandments, some of them seem the absolute opposite of human nature. It's not what I'm naturally wanting to do. When God says for instance, I want you to give the first ten percent of your income back to me, that's called the tithe, to honor me and to show faith, Why does God tell me to do that? He wants what it represents. He wants your heart.

When God says I want you to save sex for marriage. That doesn't seem natural to me. God says I know what will keep you safe. I know what will keep you from having a broken heart.

Why does God put all these commandments in the Bible? John 15:11 Jesus says, "*I have told you these things so that you can have the same joy that I have and so that your joy can be the fullest possible joy.*" (NCV)

The Bible tells us that God wants us to live with joy. But you get to choose. He's not going to force joy on you. You get to choose how much joy you have in your life. It's based on how much you choose to trust God and how much you choose to obey what he says to do.

If you come to the point you say, “I know God says to do this but I don’t really think that’s right. I think I know better than God. I think I know what’s best. I’m going to do it my way.” You’re going to lose your joy. It’s all based on obedience.

Jesus says *“If you obey my commands, you’ll remain in my love, just as I’ve kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”* (John 15:10-11 NIV)

4. If you want to restore the joy in your life you need to Think about what’s good in your life.

I need to think about what’s good in my life. Stop focusing on all the negative and all the problems and all the difficulties, on what’s wrong and all my fears, and all the things I wish I had done differently. You stop focusing on that and you think about the good things in your life.

David says in Psalm 126:3 *“The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy.”* The more you focus on what God’s done for you, the more joy you’re going to have in your life. Why? It produces gratitude. Study after study has shown that the attitude of gratitude is the healthiest human emotion. If you want to be healthy, you develop the attitude of gratitude in your life. Studies have shown that the more grateful a person is the more emotionally healthy they are. And the more ungrateful a person is the more emotionally unhealthy they are. It’s all about gratitude.

There’s an old hymn called *Count your Blessings*. “Count your many blessings name them one by one and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.”

So what do you need to be thankful for? You need to go home and make a list and write down all the things that you can be thankful for. But then don’t just be thankful, but think about the good in your life. It’s all what you focus on.

Philippians 4:8 “*Think about the things [and the Bible gives us eight things to think about] that are good, and worthy of praise, think about things that are true and honorable and right and pure and are beautiful and respected.*”

That sounds just like television doesn't it? No, it doesn't. It's the exact opposite of television. Watching television is supposed to be for entertainment. Gone are those days. Now, it's to scare you, to make you anxious, to tempt you, to stress you. You turn on the TV and the first thing you see is the news about a shooting somewhere. TV robs you of joy for the most part.

The Bible says “*The fool feeds on trash.*” There's a lot of trash out there because advertisers are willing to pay for it. The same goes with the internet. The Bible says in Psalm 101:3 “*I will refuse to look at anything vile and vulgar.*” If you were to just cut out a little bit of television or the internet you could begin filling your mind with spiritual food like good books. If you don't like to read you could listen to CDs or things online that could fill your mind, that make you a more joyful person.

Here's the fifth way to recover the joy in your life.

5. Spend time with God every day.

Did you know that God wants to spend time with you? He really does. That may be hard to imagine. He's got a whole lot of things going on doesn't he? Why would he want to spend time with me? But if you think about all the times in Scripture when God invites us to come into his presence – “*Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I'll give you rest...*”

He wants to spend time with you. And there's a joy that comes when we spend time with God in a daily quiet time. It's really pretty simple. Because coming to God in a quiet time, that's how we learn to hear his voice. That's how you learn to find out what God wants you to do with your life. That's how you get to know him better, know his character better, how he thinks about things.

The more time you spend with him, the deeper your friendship with God develops. What kind of relationship would it be, say in a marriage, if the husband and wife never spent time with each other.

There are some simple ways to have a quiet time. The first thing you can do is get into the Bible. This is God's gift to you. This isn't some rule that a church has made up. The Bible is God's gift; it's a love letter that he's written to you. He is communicating to you. He has something he wants to say to you every day.

Then another part of spending a daily quiet time is in prayer. God has something to say to you. He wants to hear from you. So you talk to him in prayer. It doesn't have to be formal. It doesn't have to be a ritual. It's just a conversation between you and a friend.

The Bible says in a couple of verses how Bible reading and prayer bring joy to our lives. Jeremiah 15 the Bible says *"Your words are what sustain me. They bring me great joy."* Then Jesus said this in John 16:24, *"Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."*

There are other ways to spend time with God, like fasting or singing to him or listening to his Word on the radio or TV or online. What all these things do is that they saturate your mind with God and that is a sure way of guarding your mind against the worries, the anxieties, the problems that come your way. They help you to focus on God. And they restore balance in your life.

6. That brings me to number six. The sixth way to restore your joy is real simple. Tell somebody about Jesus.

Tell someone about Jesus. Nothing will restore your joy faster than becoming concerned about the salvation of a friend. Because when you start being concerned about a friend who doesn't know the Lord yet, it makes you feel alive again. Especially if that friend responds to Jesus.

The Bible says that every time somebody accepts the Lord they throw a party in heaven. Did you know that? In Luke 15:7 *“There’s more joy in heaven over one sinner who changes his heart and life.”* The day you stepped across the line they threw a party in heaven for you. The angels were rejoicing in heaven over you. And the day you help somebody come to know the Lord there’s going to be a party in your heart. And you’re going to feel it and the joy comes back as you share with others.

Look for opportunities to share Jesus with others. Bring with you always a Gospel tract like this or a small booklet so that you can readily hand it to someone you encounter. Especially if that person is interested in spiritual things.

Invite people to come to church. I know some of you are good at that. And I’m happy, and I’m sure God is pleased, to see someone new in church. You know, some of your friends or relatives are just waiting for an invitation.

A couple of weeks ago, I started doing pre-marital counseling with a couple who plan to get married in a few months. They’re not from this church. In fact, they’re not Christians and they came to know us through our web site. They contacted our number and I got to know them and I sat down with them. Realizing they’re not Christians I started by making sure they hear about the good news of Jesus. I wasn’t sure of their reaction. They listened attentively and in the end, they accepted Jesus. Talk about a captive audience. But I believe in their sincerity. The girl even cried. It turned out she was looking for some comfort and hope because of some personal problems she was going through. In fact, they want to continue with a Bible study after our counseling. That brought joy to my heart.

But you say, “I need training. I’m scared to death. I don’t know what to say.” Well, we’ll train you. We’ll teach you. In the coming months or weeks, we’ll set up a training program that will help you to tell others about Jesus.

And this afternoon, there's an opportunity to tell others about Jesus in a friendly way. A few folks, like my family and Andrew's family will go to the back of this building where there are these families who gather for their sports activities in the school grounds. I think you notice them. They're there every Sunday. What we're going to do is to distribute some of the bread we have to these families. I'm sure they will flock to us. So, we'll give them the bread together with a card like this which says,...

Hopefully, these people will realize that God loves them and will feel that love and will move them to come to church and hear the good news. If not in this church, at least somewhere they'll be comfortable in.

Folks, we have the greatest message. We need to tell others about this message. The message that only Jesus can restore the joy in our hearts. He can do that because of his death on the cross. It caused God the Father great sorrow and grief to see his son Jesus shed his blood on the cross. For what? For the satisfaction of seeing people receive the joy of salvation.

If you're not a Christian, if you don't recall a time in your life when you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, I invite you to come to him this morning. Just come and admit that you're lost, that you have done things that are not right before God, and then ask for forgiveness. And God is faithful. He will forgive you and cleanse you. He says in his Word, *"Come now, let us settle the matter," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."* Isaiah 1:18 (NIV).