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## Greater Joy

### Part 8 – Rejoice in the Lord Always

Adam Donyes

Good morning, Woodland Hills. I would say it's beginning to look a lot... except it really started three months ago; we live in Branson, right? So, who are we kidding? It's been looking a lot like Christmas here in Branson.

I have some accountability friends that would meet together almost every week at Chick-fil-A. My friend, Ron Handley, started a ministry called Character that Counts. He created these little cards, and they have different question on them. This is a list of questions that I would meet with my group of guys and we would ask these questions every week.

1. Have you spent daily time in the Word and in prayer?
2. Have you had any lustful or tempting thoughts or looked at any explicit material?
3. Have you been above reproach in all your finances and your financial dealings.
4. Have you spent quality time with your family and your relationships?
5. Have you given 100% in your job and in your school work?
6. Have you told any lies or painted yourself in a better picture to other people around you?
7. Have you shared the gospel with an unbeliever this week?
8. Have you taken care of your body through sleep and diet and physically working out and just taking care of the temple that God has given you.
9. Have you allowed any person or circumstance to rob you of your joy? I used to love that question because it's such a powerful question.
10. Have you lied on any of these other questions today, right?

The ninth one is have you allowed anyone or anything to rob you of your joy? So, the question I have for you guys this morning as we jump in to Philippians 4; 1-9, is what is robbing your joy? I don't think anything can rob your joy; I think you have to give them that joy depending on where your source of joy is coming from, and we're going to talk about that.

But I thought of some things I wanted to put up here on the screen that potentially might be robbing your joy like this image here (picture of the roundabout). That might rob your joy a little bit. I've been in Branson for almost 19 years and, true story, for the first time in 19 years, I was up in Columbia for an event. I was driving back on Friday at 5:00 going south on 65. That's something I have never done and probably something I will never do again if I'm honest. I couldn't believe how much traffic was coming into Branson on a Friday night.

So, the brilliant engineers of the Branson community decided hey why not, if the first we do when they get off the exit, we put a roundabout for all of our tourists that don't understand what a yield sign is. And, on top of that, let's put a huge Christmas display right in the middle of the roundabout so all the tourists want to stop and look at it in the middle of the roundabout. Like Ted said last week, tourists, we're glad you're here; just don't stay long, okay? Traffic might rob some of your joy. It can affect you. People honk, some people give you one-finger waves and different things throughout it.

Here's something else that might rob your joy, especially this time of season (picture of a crowded store with long lines). We're less than two weeks out, Mom and Dad. *Don't give me the stress and anxiety.* I know, I still haven't gone shopping. Well, it's too late now. If you haven't gone by now, I promise it's all gone. It's not going to get shipped to you in time. I know, I do not need to fuel your anxiety today. Some of you are already stressed out. It's less than two weeks away. It's crazy.

What is less than two weeks away? No, Jesus' birthday; that's what's less than two weeks away. Remember, that's what this is all about. This is all about Him. This whole season is about Him, not us. When we make it about us and when we turn it back to us, a lot of angst and anxiety is going to be fueled. But when we fix our eyes on Him – the author and perfector of our faith – during the season, like we should... Not just during December, but like Branson does; all eleven months of the years, it would be a lot better on our soul.

Here's another thing that might rob your joy. Technology, social media, right? Jumping on and reading stuff and doing all those things with the fear mongering and the toxicity and the venomous comments to other people. This is something I see robbing a lot of joy especially in the young people that I deal with on a consistent basis. I would just ask any of you, if you spend time on Fox News or news stations or Facebook or Twitter or Instagram... Any of those things. And after spending time in those arenas, you walk away less filled with joy, I don't know if those things are healthy for you. I don't know if they are helpful for your soul. Only you can answer that question. In spending time on social media, is it helpful or is it hurting. Is it robbing my joy?

Jesus is the ultimate source of joy, so he doesn't want you to be lacking in joy. As a matter of fact, it says in him, our joy will be complete. So, if your joy is not complete, there might be things robbing you of it.

Here's another one that really robs joy – comparison. Teddy Roosevelt said, "*Comparison is the thief of joy.*" I found out from my wife that all you ladies doll up and do all that, and it's not for us. It's not for guys. Guys, they don't care that you like what they're wearing or the boots they're wearing. It's for other girls that would be like, "Oh, I love your dress." "Oh, I love your shoes." "Oh, you look so awesome." But comparison honestly robs a lot of people's joy, not just ladies, but fellas too. Fellas start comparing each other to other fellas and their gifts and their strengths. God didn't create you to be someone else. He created you to be you. And when you walk in you and you be you, that's when your joy will be at its highest, being who God created you to be.

This is off the charts for me. Bad customer service. I just googled "bad customer service" and this image came up. I said obviously they don't know about Lamberts because that would be really good customer service if we were at Lamberts right there. But bad customer service robs my joy.

My wife and I had a night away planned at an unsaid hotel here in town. They also have a hotel in Springfield. Someone gave us a gift card for a night away. I couldn't order it online and just take care of it myself, which I would have preferred to do, but I couldn't, so I had to call. I said, "My wife and I would like to stay at your hotel in Branson. Can we get this booked for this night?" Everything was to be taken care of and we were set to go. So, we get a kid sitter. I'm excited to have a night away with my wife in this awesome hotel. The kids are taken care of. We get our little rollaway bags, and we roll up to the desk. We give them my driver's license, my name, and I have the gift card ready to go.

The guy behind the desk says, "Well, we actually booked your room in Springfield. I said, "I assure you I did not say Springfield; I said Branson." He says, "Well, we record all of our phone calls, so let me go back and listen to the phone call and see if you're correct." My wife and I sat out in the lobby for about 15 minutes. He comes back out to the lobby and says, "We listened to the phone call, and you were correct. Unfortunately, we don't have any more rooms available tonight."

I said, "Well, you have other establishments in this area; can you not put us in another room?" He says, "I can give you a supervisor to talk to. Here's the number." We had nowhere to go. He doesn't know I'm from in town, so for all he knows is I could have flown in to Branson with my wife and had nowhere to go." He said, "Well, you can drive an hour north to our place up there." I said, "No, I'm here in Branson; I don't want to drive an hour north."

My wife and I go to a restaurant. My joy is completely robbed. Fellas, think about it. I was planning on having a night with my wife away from kids. Your joy would be robbed to, I assure you, and we'll leave it at that.

So, I call the supervisor. I talked to the supervisor and the supervisor is not very customer service friendly. Now, I know the person who owns this establishment so, I said, "What would said person think if they knew how I was being treated right now?" To which she said, "If you want to talk to said person, go for it," and hung up. I'm sitting at dinner with my wife and the whole night is ruined, I'm out of it, I'm frustrated, I'm distracted, I have to go tell my kid sitter to get out because we don't need them at the house anymore.

Well, I did know said person, so I did what any reasonable person would do. I called the assistant of said person. Sure enough, I got a call the next Monday. "We are so sorry, Mr. Donyes. Can we put you in one of our nicest suites and can we cover your meal at one of our nice restaurants?" They rolled out the red carpet. Oh, the flesh in me wanted to be there when that young lady had the conversation with the authority. So, that could really rob my joy if I'm not careful. But I said to my wife, "Baby, I don't understand why some people are in customer service. I love that you're working. If you don't like customers, don't be in customer service. It's not rocket science, ladies and gentlemen. So, beware of what robs your joy.

As we've been talking about greater joy, this whole series is *Greater Joy*, 3 John 1: 4 says, ***I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*** There's no greater joy. I would agree with John there. I have no greater joy than to see the students that graduate our program that go

on and they are living for Jesus, they're focused on Jesus. John is also saying because that's where their greatest joy is going to come from when they're walking with Jesus.

I know Ted's heart. Ted has no greater joy than to see the people of Woodland Hills acting like, talking like, loving like, and walking with Jesus, which isn't the way the world responds. When we're walking in the truth, it looks radically different. And the greatest joy that we will have as people on earth is when we are truly walking with Jesus.

So, this whole series, *Greater Joy*, that's where the greatest joy comes from. Jesus is our ultimate source of joy. That's where the joy comes from. Now, we can believe the cultural lies and think that joy can come from other places, but it doesn't, and it never will. It might be a temporary happiness, but it's not joy, it's not the true source of joy.

As you know, Ted finished up Philippians 3 last weeks, which gets us into Philippians 4: 1 ***Therefore...*** Any time you see the word *therefore* in scripture, you have to ask what is the therefore there for. He's coming off the heels of everything he just said in Chapters 1-3. So, he's saying, Because of everything I've just told to the church at Philippi, therefore, right? ***...my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!*** I love what Paul is saying right here. He's saying stand firm. But you can't stand firm in sand. If you've ever been to the beach, you can't stand firm. You need to be on rock or cement or pavement to stand firm. The reality is when what you stand on collapses, it will quickly turn to sadness if it's not Jesus.

So, when what you're standing on controls your joy, it quickly turns to sadness upon collapse. So, anything other than Jesus. Notice I didn't say *if what you're standing on collapses*; I intentionally used the word *when* what you're standing on collapses. Because guess what? There is only one thing any of us in this room can stand on that won't collapse and it's Jesus and his truth and his Word. So, if you stand on anything else, hoping for it to bring you joy, when it collapses – and it will collapse – your joy will subside, and it will be quickly replaced with sadness. Sadness is okay. It's an emotion God has given us. It's not a sin to be sad. But to live in there and spiral in there... The spiral happens when that was our source of joy.

In Hebrews 13: 5, Jesus said, "***I'll never leave you nor forsake you.***" Insinuating that everything else in this world is going to. Everything else in this world, even your amazing spouse, will try to rob you of your joy at times. Presents will rob you of your joy. Gifts, promotion, work, jobs, friends, peers, parents. They will rob you of your joy. Kids will rob you of your joy. Everything will rob you of your joy at some point. And when that is where you get your ultimate source of joy, it is going to lead to a spiral if you don't put those feet on the foundation of Jesus and his word.

***2 I plead with Euodia, and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*** I don't know all of you in here and I don't know how you walked in here today, but I don't know if you you've heard of this thing called *the Book of Life*. I don't know how big it is and I don't know how small it is. But there is this Book of Life, and this Book of Life is going to have the names of every believer that

trusted in Jesus, that believed that Jesus walked this earth and lived the life that all of you should have lived, including me. He died the death that all of us deserve to die. He was crucified, buried, resurrected. The only one that ever defeated death and tasted it so you and I don't have to feel it's sting. He was ascended into heaven and he's sitting at the right hand of the throne of God, and he will come back. For those that truly trust that and believe that and believe that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior, and that he was born of a virgin... what we celebrate in two weeks. For those that truly believe that and know he is the only person that can take away our sins, your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

If you've never believed that, you'll show up, all of us one day in here will show up when we take our last breath. Death is undefeated. Well, almost undefeated. One person defeated it. We'll show up on that last day when we take our last breath and we will come before what is called the Bema Seat of Christ, the Judgement Seat of Christ. And we will meet our maker and there will be this huge book. And those that have trusted in Jesus Christ, their name will be in the Book of Life. Those that have never trusted in Him and put faith in Him, their name won't be in there. And it says they will be put to a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, where they'll be hot for a really long time. But those whose names are in the Book of Life and trusted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, they will enter into the presence of heaven.

So, Paul is saying, treat them well; their name is in the Book of Life. They follow and believe and trust in Jesus and that's why their name is in the Book of Life.

I love what R.C Sproul says about the book of life. "*When God writes our name in the Lamb's book of life, he doesn't do it with an eraser handy; he does it for eternity.*"

You've heard me say this, Woodland Hills. He didn't just save you; he's saving you. I didn't just need God on the day when I was a wretched 20-year-old college student. I need God every single day. I love the way Ted brags on Pat Kershaw and just how much she's still growing. She's not done. She knows until she takes her last breath, she still has purpose on this earth. She's still being sanctified. He keeps working it in you and through you. I'm still being sanctified. I was an idiot. I'm still an idiot; I'm just more of a sanctified idiot now. And he doesn't give up on you. It's not like "Okay, I've saved you. It's all you from here on out." No. I didn't need the gospel on the day I trusted Jesus; I need the gospel every single day of my life. I need to hear the good news every single day. When I remind myself of the good news, it limits the power of the enemy in my life and it stirs my joy. It illuminates the joy in my life.

**4 Rejoice...** This word means to just exude joy. Do people look at you as a Christian and say, "I'm not a Christian, but I can't explain those people that go to Woodland Hills. They just exude this joy. They're just so different in the way they treat people." It makes these atheists and agnostics scratch their heads because of the way you exude joy. Or... Do people look at you and say, "I'm not a Christian and those people that go to Woodland Hills, they validate the reason I'm not a Christian. They complain about all the same things. They whine about all the same things. They engage in all the same toxic conversations online. They look exactly like I do not believing in Jesus as they do believing in Jesus. There is no joy exuding from them, so why would I walk with Jesus? They have nothing that I don't have."

He's saying Rejoice, exude joy, give out joy ...*in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness...* Be reasonable in your conversations online. Be reasonable in your interactions with your former employees. Be reasonable. ...*be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything...* that's a buzz word today. It's a real thing. And it's not new. They year 2020 didn't bring anxiety. The pandemic didn't bring anxiety. Anxiety goes all the way back to scripture or else Jesus wouldn't have talked about it. He wouldn't have said, "Don't be anxious about tomorrow..." Peter wouldn't say, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." Anxiety has always existed, but I do know that anxiety has been heightened. Anxiety has been magnified in our culture and our world.

As a matter of fact, I spend 240 days a year with 13 – 20-year-olds. And in 2015, I got a call from a lady named Kylie Cross. She writes for World Magazine. She wanted to interview me because she knows I spend a lot of time with young people. She wanted to know if I had seen a rise in anxiety, depression, and suicide. I said, "absolutely." She goes, "Why do you think that is" I go, "Phone. Social media." She says, "But there's no research supporting this. There's no proof that this is what's going on." I said, "I know, but it's coming." She said, "Your pretty adamant about this." I go, "Yeah, and you want to know why? It's because we are not meant to find our identity and our worth and our value in a phone. We are meant to find our identity and our worth and our value in His Word. Because this (His Word) tells you who you are and whose you are.

Look what happened. In 2018, Bloomberg comes out with a research article. "Depression is affecting more young people than ever." That was May 14, 2018. CBS News Health – "Gen Z and Millennials are the loneliest generation in the history of humanity" – May 3, 2018. January 5, 2018, from Vogue – Millennials are the most anxious generation in history.

So, in 2013 when Instagram, snap, TikTok, Facebook and all those things started popping off like crazy and really grabbing hold of our young people, we saw a synonymous rise with all this social media, its users, and everything else in our culture and our society with the rise of anxiety, depression, medication, and suicide. I'll tell you why, and I'm not a rocket scientist. This (his Word) tells you who you are and whose you are. And it fuels joy, contentment, happiness, true love, true everything that you'll ever have. The device lies to you all the time. That's why I love what my friend, Steve, Farrar said, "*Spend time reading and receiving the truth every day because the world will only lie to you the rest of it.*"

So, what do we do with this anxiety? How do we handle this angst? It's real. It's doesn't just go away. People really struggle with it. People near and dear to me really struggle with it. It's okay. Let's not act like it's not there. Let's love people through it.

Look what it says in Philippians 4: 6, ...*but in every situation...* Which includes anxiety. ...*by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* So, I would suggest, from the scripture, that rather than continually fueling our anxiety by running to things that fuel it, change it with prayer. What if we started praying about things and stopped complaining about things? Praying is much more productive than complaining. And God honoring. What about that person you're complaining about, your in-law that you have to spend Christmas with? What if you prayed about them? What if, instead of complaining about that drive you have to make to another country called Texas, you prayed about that trip you have to make to Texas. What if instead of complaining about how fast this little preacher talks,

you actually prayed about how fast I talk. Or the waiter or waitress. You don't know what kind of bad day they are going through. I promise you at some point today, you're going to complain about something. It's imbedded in our society. It's imbedded in our culture. It's a part of our DNA. It's in the fabric of what we've allowed social media and reviews and everything to become.

In Philippians 2: 4, two chapters ago, Paul said, "Do all things without complaining or arguing." Complaining robs your joy. And thankfulness and prayer is the antidote to complaint. So, if you want to stir your heart's affection toward joy, start praying for people rather than complaining about everything. I'm not saying things might not be hard and I'm not saying things might not be difficult. I do know in my 20 plus years of walking with Jesus, prayer has always, ten out of ten times, been more productive than complaining about someone or something.

So, I don't know where you're at, but I do know how big our God is. I do know that he hears our prayers. And I do know that you praying to him is going to help solve the problem much better than you complaining to him. Knowing the boss's assistant might help too, but that's not always the case.

**7 And the peace of God...** Do you know what one of Jesus' names is? It's the Prince of Peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace and the ultimate source of our joy. **...which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** Do you know what's really encouraging about this verse? And I need it sometimes in my life? He sees you. I don't know how all of you walked in here this morning or online, but he sees you. He sees you when you're hurt. He sees you when you're in pain. He sees you in your anxiety. He sees you in your difficult relationship. He sees you in your difficult job. He sees you when things don't go your way. He sees you in your loneliness. He wants you to hear today that he sees you; you're not alone. He sees you; the scripture tells you that. He sees you and he loves you and he has a plan for your life. I don't know who in here needs to hear that today, but I want you to know what. He sees you. He hasn't left you. He hasn't abandoned you. He hasn't left it up to you. He's with you until you take your last breath.

**8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.** Ladies and gentlemen, what this does not say is whatever is Fox News, whatever is Facebook, whatever is TikTok. That's not what it says. It doesn't tell you to think about those things. As a matter of fact, our thoughts are really powerful. Why would Paul be so adamant about our thoughts. It's because he knows our thoughts impact our joy. He knows our thoughts impact our life. **9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.**

So, how do you stop living in fear. How do you stop living in angst? How do you stop driving anxiety? Here's a great cartoon to answer your question right here. "*What can we do to stop living in fear? (click) Turn the TV off.*

Does your phone rob your joy? Then stop spending so much time on your phone. Does television rob your joy? Do certain conversations with certain people rob your joy? Well, politely start distancing

yourself from that person. If it's not helping you, why do you keep running to it.? I'm telling you this because I care about your soul and the joy in your life.

The last couple of year, I kind of coined this phrase. *What you think about is what care about. What you care about is what you chase. What you chase is ultimately what you become.*

Our thoughts are driven by the things we listen to and the things we watch. Why do you think companies spend millions of dollars on music ads? The State Farm jingle... It's because it gets stuck in our head. And when it gets stuck in our head, it controls our thoughts. And what you think about is what care about. What you care about is what you chase. What you chase is ultimately what you become.

That's why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11: 1 – ***Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.***

It's the same with images. The things we see on TV and billboards, you would never have seen on billboards in 1970. They know that those things draw you in and get you to think about those things. It's why the industry is so powerful. Because if they can control your thoughts, they can control the way you spend your money, they can control the way the direction of your life is going. And Paul knew this. Paul knew how powerful thoughts were because he not only says it to the church at Philippi, but he also says it to the church at Colossae. He says, "Set your mind on things above, not on things that are on this earth." You set your mind on things on this earth and watch what happens to your joy. If you set your eyes on the author and perfector of our faith, who is also the Prince of Peace, watch what happens to your joy.

He says it again at the Church at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 10 – ***For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.*** So, his suggestion was don't try not to think about something by not thinking about it; you'll just think about it more. But he's saying replace that thought that drives your anxiety or robs your joy with things of Christ. Replace that thought with things that stir your heart's affections for Jesus.

Paul says it again to Romans. ***Don't conform to the patters of the world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*** Romans 12: 2

Moses said it in Deuteronomy 11: 18 – 19 - ***18 Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*** They knew how powerful thoughts were and that's why Paul is saying whatever is God-honoring, think about these things. The more you dwell on thoughts that aren't God-honoring, it won't help you.

So, here's the question I leave with all of you. What stirs your heart's affections for Jesus? What places can you run to and be in that will help you continually think about things of heaven?

For my wife, it's a nice hot cup on the beach, or in a beautiful scenery, and her Bible. For me, it's natural creation, places where man has never touched. I know it's crazy; I want to go to Antarctica. I know it's cold there, but man hasn't messed it up. I love seeing things that God has created that man hasn't messed up.

So, Christmas is coming up. I'm flying out Tuesday to Las Vegas. That sounds great, right. Preacher in Vegas. We have a basketball event out there so I'm going to be at the Tarkanian Classic from Tuesday to Friday. My wife and my boys are meeting me out there. Instead of getting a little puddle jumper from Vegas, we're driving. My boys were like, "Oh, what? We're driving? Why are we driving. Let's just get on a plane. I'm entitled. Let's do this." I said, "No, we're renting a car and driving. We're driving through the Mojave dessert. Do you want to know why? As a kid, I drove through the Mojave Desert and that's what we're doing." What's in the Mojave Desert? Nothing. Just cactus, dessert, and snakes. That's it. And that's what we're doing.

My wife will tell you that I told her... Disneyland is going to be great and whatever else we do is going to be great. I'm seriously so excited about the drive with a seven and a nine-year-old, for three and a half hours, across the Mojave Desert. We're going to turn on worship music and we're going to drive through that dessert and see what untouched creation looks like. There are not a lot of people that live in the Mojave Desert. And it's beautiful because it's God's and that really stirs my heart's affection for Jesus. That really stirs my joy.

What stirs your heart's affections for Jesus? What places do you enter into that bring you to that place of joy? I would encourage you to keep running back to those places. Be reminded that this Christmas season isn't about us. It isn't about relatives. It isn't about people. It's about Jesus. Think about the joy you have to exude towards others as you gather with family and friends these holidays.

Father God, thank you so much for this church family and its leadership and these people. And thank you that we are celebrating a virgin birth in less than two weeks.

We pray, Lord, that you be with this group. We pray if anybody is wrestling with anxiety or depression, they know that our prayer team is here. Our prayer team is here, today, right now ready to meet with them up front and love on them and pray for them.

God, be with our thoughts. Guard our minds. Guard our actions. May you keep your hand upon this place. We want to praise you and thank you for the way you have blessed this place abundantly more than we could have ever asked or imaged. We give you all the honor and glory in Jesus' name, amen.