

Keeping and Being Kept For Joy

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[0:00] I'd like you all to open up your Bibles. If you have a copy of the Scriptures with you, open up to the book of Jude, which is way at the back of your Bible, right before the book of Revelation.

It's easy to miss it. It's only one chapter, and so it may be only one or two pages in your Bible. It's only one page in my Bible, and so it's easy to miss. But turn all the way to the back, and if you hit Revelation, you've gone too far, and you need to flip towards the beginning and find Jude right there before the book of Revelation.

Now, you all know that normally, every week I come and I'm preaching through books of the Bible. Now, if you haven't been with us, then that's what we do here at Church of the Cross for the most part. We preach through different books of the Bible, and so we've been going through the book of Romans now for two years.

We started it two years ago this month. Now, we've taken the last few weeks off, and now we're going to continue to take some time off from the book of Romans in June and July this summer. And we're going to spend our time looking through the Scriptures and looking at these things that we often call spiritual disciplines.

We're going to look at all the things that God does to help us and to motivate us and to cause us to persevere in our faith. So for the next few weeks, we're going to be spending some time in Jude and in the other epistles of the New Testament, understanding, wrestling with, and being encouraged to continue the fight of faith and continue to walk faithfully with Christ.

[1:38] And this morning, we're going to be looking here in the book of Jude. We'll look at a few verses at the very beginning of the book, of the chapter, and a few verses at the very end of the book. And so I want to ask you guys, if you would, to stand as we read God's Word together.

The first four verses, and then we will jump down near the end of verse 17. Jude writes, Move down to verse 17.

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, In the last time there will be scoffers following their own ungodly passions.

It is these who cause divisions. Worldly people devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

And have mercy on those who doubt. Save others by snatching them out of the fire. To others show mercy with fear, hating even the garments stained by the flesh. 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, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time now and forever.

[3:38] Amen. Father, we give you thanks that you inspired through your Spirit, Jude, to write these words for us this morning. I pray that they would be an encouragement to us.

An encouragement never to give up the fight of faith, and never to quit running in the race for faithfulness to Jesus. We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.

You guys take a seat. Some of you may have heard of a famous Olympian by the name of Eric Liddell. He was a famous Scottish Olympian who competed in the 1924 Olympics.

If it sounds vaguely familiar to you, or if you're going, I have no idea who that is, maybe you've seen the movie. It came out a long time ago in 1981, Chariots of Fire. It was a movie based upon his time performing in the 1924 Olympics.

But what he first came to fame for in those Olympics is that when he found out that the races that he was to run in, a couple of the races he was supposed to run in, were going to be scheduled on a Sunday, he refused to run in those races.

[4:39] He wouldn't participate in those heats. And he was highly criticized at the time for doing that in a lot of the newspapers that circulated around at the time.

But he sort of redeemed himself because later on he went on to win the gold at those Olympics in another race that he was already scheduled to be in. And he's mostly famous for his ability to sort of defeat the odds.

And that's what, if you watch the movie Chariots of Fire, that's what much of the movie is centered on, is his ability to persevere, to endure, to not only literally run a race and defeat other people, but to be able to stay true to his own convictions, to deal with all the pressures that surround him, and to continue to focus and remain focused upon his goal there at the Olympics.

But the story of Eric Liddell is much better than just his experience at the Olympics. He was actually raised in China by missionary parents. And after the Olympics, when he had gained great fame in his homeland, he left there to go back to China to serve as a missionary in China and to preach the gospel and evangelize in many places throughout China.

Later on, a few years later though, World War II broke out. And of course, if you know some of the history, you know that the Japanese invaded the mainland of China and they imprisoned a lot of people and they imprisoned many of the missionaries and the missionaries' children.

[6:03] Some of them were able to escape. He was able to send his wife and his children back home before they reached their area. But he himself was captured and put in a camp along with a lot of other missionaries and some of the young children of some of the missionaries there.

And he spent his last few years in that camp, helping and encouraging others until he eventually died at the age of 43 of a brain tumor in that camp just only months before the war ended and they were released.

But what he's remembered for among those who were in the camp with him and those who served on the mission field with him is not his great athletic ability, but he's remembered for his perseverance in the faith.

He's known as one and he's remembered by them as one who never gave in to despair in the midst of those despairing times. He's known as one who never slacked up in his devotion to the Lord.

In fact, I read a story this week, an article that was written some years ago by a man who was a young child. He was the son of a missionary family and he was in the same camp as Eric Liddell.

[7:07] And he said one of the things that he remembers vividly was that every morning without fail, Eric Liddell would get up and he would spend an hour in prayer and reading his Bible and in encouraging another gentleman who was another leader among the group there in prayer and Bible study every morning before they began all the arduous tasks of being in the camp.

So that we would say that he was one who was able to persevere because he had a disciplined life. He was able to be successful in athletics, not just the Olympics, but he was a successful rugby player.

And in other sports, he was able to be successful because he was a disciplined person. And he was able to persevere in the faith and endure those circumstances because he remained disciplined in his faith.

In fact, he practiced what we sometimes call spiritual disciplines. Things like being devoted to reading your Bible on a regular basis or spending regular quality and quantity amounts of time in prayer.

We have these activities, we have these things that we pursue that we know are necessary in the Christian life, that we know we need to do like prayer, Bible study, coming together regularly in corporate worship and a host of other things that we will oftentimes label the spiritual disciplines.

[8:24] But if we're honest, most of us don't relate all that well to men like Eric Liddell. We look at him and we think, that's a hero of the faith. That's a man who was able to be more disciplined than I can be.

That's a man who was stronger in his faith. He was able to endure more than I think that I would be able to endure. But when we think that way, I think we have things backwards.

I don't think that he was able to spend regular time studying his Bible, regular time praying in the midst of those trying circumstances because he was so determined.

I think the reason that he was strengthened and the reason that he was determined and the reason that he persevered is because he was spending time in God's Word and in God's presence and practicing the spiritual disciplines.

The truth of the matter is all of us are tempted to be lazy in our faith at times. All of us are tempted to just sort of drift away from faithfulness to Christ.

[9:29] And it's at that point in time that we begin to realize that the Christian life is, in a very real sense, a race. It is a life of perseverance. It's not a sprint.

It's a marathon. We don't trust in Christ and then immediately God takes us to be home with him in heaven. No, we live for some time upon the earth and we are surrounded by temptations.

We are drawn away and pulled away. And so we need to know how can we effectively remain in the race or to switch up the metaphor as Paul often does, how can we fight?

How can we fight to remain faithful to Jesus when we are tempted by sin, when laziness pulls at us, and when just the busyness and the circumstances of life would have us relegate spiritual things to a small little corner of our lives rather than to occupy the whole of our lives?

How can we remain faithful in the kind of world and living the kind of lives that we live? How can we run the race? And the answer is that we must be devoted to these spiritual disciplines.

[10:38] We must be fixed upon the prize that lies in front of us and then with all that we have within us, run and race toward the prize.

That's not a metaphor that I'm injecting into this passage or that I'm drawing out of the air. It's one that you see used throughout the New Testament. It's one that we saw Ryan point to in Hebrews chapter 12 last night as he preached to us and explained to us what it means to run the race.

In fact, hold your place in Jude. I want you to look again at the passage that Ryan brought to us last week in the book of Hebrews chapter 12. I just want to read the first verse as a reminder of what the writer of Hebrews says.

He says, Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

We are to lay aside the weights. We are to put aside sin and we are to run the race with endurance. There is a race to be run and it requires endurance if we are going to run that race and remain in it.

[11:45] And the Apostle Paul says essentially the same thing throughout his letters. Turn back a few pages in your Bible if you want to. The words will be on the screen. But turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter 9.

The Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9:24, Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.

Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly. I do not box as one beating the air, but I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

He says you have to run and you have to fight. He himself is engaged in the race. He's running. He's fighting the fight of faith to remain faithful all the way to the end.

We see something similar in 1 Corinthians chapter 6. He says fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

[12:50] And then one other passage I want you to have sort of in the back of your minds as we talk about these things is what Paul has to say about the end of his life where he brings together these fighting and racing metaphors. In 2 Timothy chapter 4, he knows he's near the end of his life.

And he says to Timothy, I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. That ought to be our goal, to be able to say that at the end of our lives.

To be able to say, I've fought the fight of faith. I've run the race. And at the end of it all, I've kept the faith. I haven't walked away from Christ. I haven't repudiated the things that the Word of God teaches me.

But I've remained faithful to him, both in the way that I live and in the things that I believe and treasure and hang on to. I have indeed kept the faith. I've run. I've fought with all that I have.

But if we're going to do that, if you and I are going to be able to imitate the Apostle Paul, then we're going to have to imitate not only the end results, but we need to imitate the means that he uses to get there, which are the various spiritual disciplines that God provides for us and teaches us about in his Word.

[14:03] So before we move ahead, before we go anywhere, I want to make sure that you understand exactly what I mean when I talk about spiritual disciplines. I want you to understand what I mean by that term.

I take spiritual disciplines to be this. They are the God-given means, or you might say, the means of grace that God himself uses to cause us to persevere in trusting and treasuring Christ and all that he is for us.

So let me say that again. Spiritual disciplines are the means of grace that God uses to cause us to persevere, that is to endure, for entrusting and treasuring Jesus and all that he is for us.

So there are two main elements to that definition. There is our perseverance, and then there is God's means of grace. So that we might look at spiritual disciplines from one angle and say that they are something that God is doing in us and through us and for us.

When we read the word of God, God is doing something through that in us. He's the one transforming us through the power of the word. When we commune with Christ through prayer, God is transforming us and changing us as we spend time on our knees with him.

[15:27] So it's God's work. It really and truly is God at work. That's what the spiritual disciplines are. It's God's means of doing something in us and to us and for us.

But then on the other hand, we actually have to read our Bibles. We actually have to pray. We have to do something. We are actively engaged in these spiritual disciplines.

So it is God's grace. They are the means of grace. They're gracious. They come from God as a gift to us. But by them, he's causing us to persevere, to remain faithful, to endure all the way to the end, and very specifically to endure in trusting and treasuring Christ and all that he is for us.

And let me show you how I arrive at that kind of definition of spiritual disciplines from the book of Jude itself. There's a word that I want you to notice that occurs three different times in this short little letter that Jude has written.

And it's the word keep. We actually encounter two different words in Greek, but they mean essentially the same thing, and they're translated the same way into English. The first time that we really notice it is at the very beginning of the letter.

[16:42] Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James. Now he refers to the readers in three ways. To those who are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept. So there it is.

You might want to underline it. They are kept for or by Jesus Christ. So we are those who are kept. So that's God's work, right? God is keeping us. He's causing us to persevere.

That's what God does. That's his work. But then look down at the end of the letter. Verse 24, we're going to see it again. 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.

Once again, he keeps us. He keeps us from stumbling. So that's the negative aspect of it. That is, he keeps us from falling off the path of faith. He keeps us from falling fully and totally headlong into sin, into a sinful lifestyle.

He keeps us from repudiating the faith. He's doing that work of preventing us from stumbling. But then he's also aiming at something beyond just our not stumbling.

[17:46] He's aiming to do something positive. And that is to present us blameless before his presence. That's what he wants to do. He wants to keep us in this life from stumbling so that in the next life he may present us before himself blameless.

That's his work of keeping us. That's his sovereign work of keeping us. We sometimes use the term eternal security to describe God's work of keeping us in Christ.

We think of Jesus saying to his father that these are my sheep. They're in my hand and nobody can snatch them out of my hand. You've given them to me and nobody can snatch them out of my hand. We think of verses like that.

We think of Philippians 1.6 where we're told that God will complete the work that he has begun within us. God is sovereignly keeping us. He is powerfully holding us together.

So we don't look at those great heroes of the faith and think, wow, they were able to do it. We think, first of all, wow, God kept them faithful and kept them from stumbling in the midst of unimaginable circumstances.

[19:00] God is at work. But God is at work to cause us to do something. He's causing us to persevere in the faith. He's keeping us from stumbling. He's causing us to remain faithful.

Here's the third occurrence of the word keep where we see that aspect of this understanding of spiritual disciplines. Verse 17 begins warning us about the false teachers. And then he comes down to verse 22.

And in contrast to these false teachers that Jude is dealing with throughout this letter, he says, But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God.

So there's our work. We are keeping ourselves in the love of God. God is keeping us. And at the same time, we are keeping ourselves in the love of God.

Now, you might ask, what does he mean by the love of God here? What does that mean? Does that mean that we should keep loving God? Does it mean that we should grow in our love for him? Is that what he's saying? I don't think that's what he's saying.

[20:03] I think the love of God here refers to God's love for us. And I say that because over and over, he refers to us in this letter as those who are beloved. Verse 1, we are beloved in God the Father.

Verse 3, he refers again to the beloved. And then in verse 17, he refers to us, but you must remember, beloved. Verse 20, but you beloved. So over and over, he refers to his readers as those who are in fact beloved of or by God himself.

So when he says now, keep yourselves in the love of God, I think he really means keep being among those who are specially, savingly, redeemingly loved by God himself, which I take to be another way of saying, remain a child of God.

God is our Father. And as our Father, he uniquely loves us in a way that he doesn't love the rest of the world. It is true that God loves the whole world.

There are several places in Scripture that we could go to find that. But it is also true that God loves his own people in a unique way. So much so that those who are outside of Christ, those who have not trusted in Jesus, really cannot truly call God their Father.

[21:14] It's only through faith in Christ that God actually becomes our Father. But then once he becomes our Father, we enter into a new kind of relationship with him. He becomes the one who loves us and nourishes us and protects us.

And even according to Hebrews 12, he is the one who disciplines us. Just as an earthly father disciplines their son, so God, our heavenly Father, disciplines us. That is, he keeps us from going ways that we shouldn't go.

Sometimes that requires harsh discipline, painful discipline. Other times it just requires a nudge or word of encouragement. But as our heavenly Father, he's disciplining us and loving us in a unique way that he doesn't do for the rest of the world.

So to keep yourself in the love of God is in some way to remain one of those who are receiving those special benefits from God himself as our Father.

So how can we conceive of that? I mean, can God possibly stop loving us as his children once we are his children? Well, no. So what precisely does Jude mean when he says, keep yourself in the love of God?

[22:25] What does he mean when he tells us we need to continue to be among those who are loved by God in this special way, who are called the beloved of the Father?

If you look up close to the beginning of Jude, he says in verse 3, he says, I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation. So Jude initially wanted to write this letter just to celebrate and rejoice in the salvation that he shared with the readers.

But he didn't do that. False teachers had come in. They had begun to teach false doctrine and try to draw people away after them. They had begun even to tempt people through their false doctrine to live ungodly lifestyles, to indulge in certain sinful behaviors that the Scriptures do not allow.

And so Jude says, I wanted to write to you just celebrating the common salvation that we share. But he says, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. So one aspect of what it means to remain in the love of God, to keep yourself in the love of God, is to be one who contends for the faith.

[23:41] Now the faith here is not our faith. It is the set of truths that we believe. The faith once for all delivered to the saints is the gospel message itself and all that surrounds it in the apostles' message and in the Scriptures.

It's that message that we are to cling to, to hang on to. We are to fight for it, to contend for it. And so one aspect of what it means to keep yourself in the love of God is that you cling to the truth.

You hang on to it. You don't let others water it down. You don't let others draw you away from the truth. You are hanging on to it, which is something that he also indicates near the end.

He says that we are to keep ourselves in the love of God. But how do we do that? How does that happen? He gives us three things in these two verses. Look again in verses 20 and 21.

He says, So there are three means by which we keep ourselves in the love of God.

[24:57] The first is we are building ourselves up on our most holy faith. I take that to be a reference to the same thing that he mentions at the beginning of this letter. That the truth that you have believed, the truth that you have staked your life upon, you must cling to it, fight for it, and build upon it now.

How are you going to keep yourself in the love of God? How are you going to prove yourself to be a genuine child of the Father? Well, the first thing that you are going to do is fight for the truth and build upon the truth.

So there is an aspect here that is doctrinal, that is in fact theological. I know that we live in a day and age where many people want to set theology aside.

They don't want to think very hard about what they believe. But Jude says that what we believe, the content of our beliefs is so important that you need to fight for it and you need to build your entire life upon it.

So to keep yourself in the love of God is to build upon the truth that you have learned with more truth. It is to build a life that is infused with and strengthened by the gospel message itself.

[26:15] But that's not the only means that he provides by which we keep ourselves in the love of God. He also says that we are to be praying in the Holy Spirit. So it's not merely a mental exercise.

It's not just taking a theology class and learning more information about the Bible. That's not what it is. We're going to spend a good amount of time talking about the spiritual discipline of Bible reading and Bible studying.

But we need to begin this series by acknowledging that while the truth and clinging to the truth and building on and with the truth is essential to persevering in the faith, gaining knowledge is not in and of itself enough to cause you to persevere in the faith.

It simply is not. If it were enough, then you would never have very knowledgeable pastors and theologians who fall into sin.

Right? If just knowing the truth were enough to keep you from stumbling, if just filling your head with knowledge of the Bible were enough, then you wouldn't have liberal theologians who know the truth and yet deny it.

[27 : 23] It's not enough just to know it. You must know it. It's necessary but not sufficient to keep you from stumbling. There is a spiritual element which Jude calls praying in the Holy Spirit or we might call it personal intimate communion with God Himself.

When we talk about praying in the Spirit, we get sidetracked sometimes. Oh, is that about speaking in tongues or something? It's not about that. It is about real intimate communion through the Spirit with God Himself.

Or as Paul tells us in Romans chapter 8, he says that when we're praying, there are times when we run out of words and the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings. And we saw as we studied through Romans 8 that that itself is not a reference to tongues or anything else like that.

It is the Holy Spirit within us just helping us to commune with God when we're out of words to say. And Jude says, not only do you need the truth, but you need an intimate relationship with God through the Spirit in order for you to fully enjoy the benefits promised and held out to you in the truth of the gospel.

So there is the truth that we fight for, that we build upon and we build with. And then there is intimate communion with God so that the truth is not dry and abstract.

[28 : 47] It's not merely in your head, but it works its way down into your heart. And that begins to change you. Once you begin to not only have the truth, but the truth through communion with God begins to soak down into your heart.

It begins to change you. It begins to change your heart. It begins to change your desires. So that ultimately, the third means by which we keep ourselves in the love of God, he says, is waiting.

Waiting, he says, for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. What is that? What is the mercy? What does Jude have in mind when he says we ought to wait?

So it's future, right? He has in mind we're waiting for something that is to come. So there's a future element here. We're waiting. This word waiting is used throughout the New Testament to describe various people looking to the future.

Those who are waiting for the kingdom of God. It's used several times. So it's future oriented. We're waiting. We're looking ahead to the future for something that is to come. But what is it?

[29 : 47] What is this mercy that leads to eternal life? What does it actually look like? What is the eternal life that we so crave and want to fully participate in?

Look down a couple of verses. As Jude shows us. He says that God's goal in keeping us is to keep us from stumbling, yes, but also to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.

So what is it that we're waiting for? What is the mercy that leads to eternal life? It is the presence of his glory. Being in the presence of his glory with great joy.

So that as the truth becomes not abstract, but through communion with God, it becomes personal. It becomes treasured to us.

It begins to change our hearts. And all of our hope now becomes fixed upon the joy of the glory of the presence of God.

[30 : 48] That really is what we're ultimately fighting for. Right? We're not fighting merely to avoid falling into sin. That's a key component, but that's not the main goal.

If your only goal is, I don't want to do these things. I don't want to participate in these kinds of behaviors. Then you would have made a very good Pharisee in the days of Jesus.

Because the Pharisees were experts at avoiding the external behaviors that the scriptures condemn. They were experts at it. They had constructed rules around their rules to prevent them from ever possibly violating the external commandments of God.

And yet Jesus says, you neglect the weightier things of the law. You don't show mercy. You don't love. It's as if Jesus is echoing the prophets.

When God speaks to the prophets and says, I'm tired of your festivals. I'm tired of your Sabbaths. I'm tired of your sacrifices. All things that he commanded them to do. He says, I'm just weary with them.

[31:54] I'm tired of them because you honor me with your lips, but your hearts are so far from me. Our goal is never conformity to an external set of standards of behavior.

No, it goes beyond that. Our goal is to experience the joy of the glory of the presence of God. What are we persevering for?

What are we running towards? What are we fighting for? We're fighting for ever increasing joy in the presence of God. Experienced ultimately in the life to come, but filtering through our time in the word and communion with God so that we actually get to experience it in the here and now.

God's work is to keep us and cause us to persevere. Our work is to keep ourselves to fight the fight of faith.

But you need to know what God is keeping you for so that you know what you're fighting for. You're fighting for everlasting joy in the presence of God.

[33:03] Experienced, yes, now to a certain degree in this life. Our goal in this life ought to be to experience as much of joy in God's presence as we can now, knowing that ultimately we will be freed from all the things that encumber us to fully experience his joy, the glory of knowing him.

Now we can very easily begin to kind of use language like that as kind of a secret Christian code to communicate things that don't make sense to anybody else.

And ultimately, if we're honest, don't really fit with our own experiences. So many times when we run across language like this in the Bible, looking ahead to joy, the glory of the joy, we read that language and we convince ourselves that the Bible is setting up some sort of special spiritual category with the word joy that's not really connected to how we feel now here in this life.

So that over and over, I've heard various writers, Christian writers, make the distinction between happiness and joy. And they will say things like, you need to pursue joy, but we're not to seek after happiness.

That's not what we're supposed to be about as Christians. Or I've heard the slogan, God cares more about your holiness than he does about your happiness. But when you read the Bible itself, when you really begin to filter through everything that you believe through the message of the Scriptures, you will find that the writers of Scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament, they don't make that kind of a distinction.

[34:41] In fact, they use the same words interchangeably back and forth for pleasure, delight, rejoicing, joy, enjoyment, and happiness. All of those various words and the various Greek and Hebrew words that are used for those are used interchangeably throughout the Bible.

There is no distinction made in the Bible between happiness and joy. It's not a real distinction. Joy is happiness. So that we really are talking about how your heart responds to God and to the things of God when we talk about joy.

That's what we're talking about. We are talking about happiness in God through Jesus Christ. That's what we're being urged to aim at.

Not some spiritual category that transcends happiness here. No, it's the same thing, but in greater measure in the age to come. It's the same thing that we are to aim at now in this life.

Genuine happiness. Genuine rejoicing at the things of God. But you have to fight for that. You have to labor for that.

[35:52] If you want lasting, true happiness in Christ, you're going to have to fight. That's why we're tempted to make the distinction between happiness and joy.

Because there are easier paths to lesser experiences of happiness in this world. Fleeting, temporary, but easy.

Sin will provide you with all sorts of temporary joys. It really will. Sin will provide you with all sorts of shallow experiences of happiness. And the reason that you're drawn to those is because you are created for joy.

You are created for happiness. But it is a happiness, it is a joy in the glory of God and His presence. And so you'll never be satisfied with those things.

And in this life, entangled as we are in the world, and weighed down as we are by our own sinful natures, the only way to transcend being satisfied by lesser pleasures to the ultimate pleasure of joy in His presence is indeed to fight.

[37:01] To fight fully. There's the danger sometimes when I talk about these sorts of things, when I preach on joy or happiness in God, there's the danger of some people thinking, well then, if you think life, if you think the Christian life is all about joy in God and experiencing the happiness of His presence, you don't know what it means to struggle with depression.

You don't know what it means to fight against your own body as it makes war against you, and the chemicals in your own system and in your own brain that make it difficult for you to feel that and sense that.

Some would say, I'm at a distinct disadvantage because it's hard for me to even experience happiness in the simple things of this life.

How am I supposed to experience it in Christ Himself? I'm at a disadvantage. To which I would say just the opposite. I think those who struggle with, whether we label it as depression or as the Puritans would often call it, melancholy.

They weren't unaware, okay? Christians of the past weren't unaware of these types of things. They were fully aware of the struggles that we face in our lives. They just use different language.

[38:18] I think that those who struggle with that in some ways are at an advantage because they already know and have already had to train themselves that real happiness and real joy, not just faking it on the surface for everyone else, is a fight.

And they've already learned that it takes discipline to fight for happiness. It takes discipline to fight for joy. And we need to look at those who sometimes struggle for the simple pleasures and have learned to fight for pleasure.

Sometimes we need to look to them and say, how do I fight better? How can I get better at fighting for real, everlasting joy in the presence of God?

And the answer is, you use the means that God himself has provided. You use the spiritual disciplines that he himself has put in place to help us to treasure Christ more.

In fact, three of the means that we see here listed in this verse that we looked at are, in fact, spiritual disciplines. Building yourself up in your most holy faith, being rooted and grounded and building upon and with the truth.

[39 : 28] That is, spending time in the Word of God is a spiritual discipline. Prayer is a spiritual discipline. So to commune with God on a regular basis is a discipline that we take so that we might increase our joy in Him.

He's doing a work, He really is, so that we don't need to despair when we think, oh man, now it sounds like a lot of work. No, these are the means that He has provided, which means that He's working through them and in them to cause us to persevere.

The means of discipline that God provides, the means of grace, the spiritual disciplines that He's given us, that we're going to be considering throughout the summer, they aim at one simple thing.

Not a transformation of your behavior, but a transformation of your desires. Not a reprogramming of your outward activities, but a changing of your heart.

Everything that we will look at, every spiritual discipline that we will consider, we will ask one simple question of it. How does it help us in the fight for joy in the presence of God?

[40 : 47] How does it do that? And the ultimate answer is that God is using it to change us. I think of Philippians 2, 12 and 13, where we are commanded to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

And then He tells us, because God is at work in you. What is He doing in us? What is He doing? How is He changing us?

He says two things, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. God is doing something. He's doing a work as we work.

As we pursue spiritual disciplines in and through those, He's doing something in us. He's changing our wills. He's changing our hearts, which results in changing our work and our outward behavior and activities.

So that you begin very simply. You begin to pray. You begin to read God's word. You begin to regularly participate in corporate worship and a few other spiritual disciplines that we're going to talk about and think about together.

[41 : 54] You begin to do those things. And God uses those things to transform your heart so that you develop a new taste for joy in His presence and you develop an ever-increasing, stronger desire for joy in His presence.

I tell people all the time, the secret to defeating those besetting sins that always, always come up, the secret is not to erect more walls in your life.

The secret is not to try to build a stronger barrier around yourself. No. The secret is to have your desires transformed and changed by God Himself.

We don't need new behavior. We need new hearts. So it may be that you struggle on a regular daily basis. You may really fight against lust.

It may be secretly behind the scenes tearing you apart. You may find it very difficult to avoid watching certain channels at certain times of the evening.

[43 : 00] You may find it very, very difficult to avoid going to certain websites or reading certain types of materials that provoke lust within you. And you've tried. You've tried to put up all kinds of walls around your life.

And yet, because you're building the wall, you know where all the secret entrances are in the hatchways. You know how to get around the wall. And you think, it's not working. I'm trying to change my behavior and it's not working. And the reason is because you need a superior pleasure.

You need something that provides more happiness. Than the lust that would draw you in. You need better pleasures to fight stronger temptations.

And the spiritual disciplines are designed to help us to fight for new hearts and renewed hearts that seek after better pleasures. Let's pray.