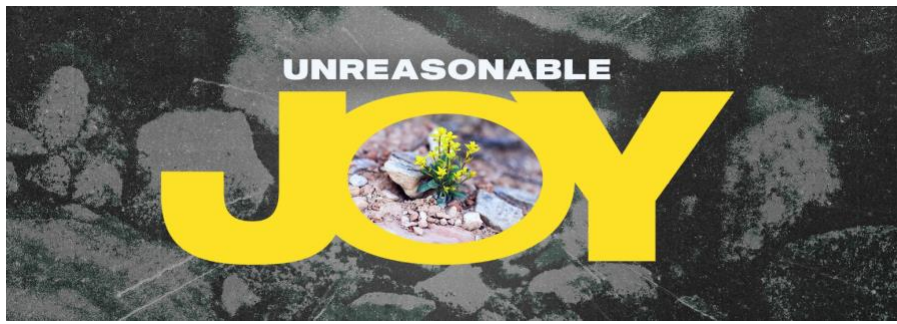




Unreasonable Joy: Zephaniah 3:9-20

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Group Leader Notes

Welcome to Global Awareness Week 2025! This summer, three Grace Chapel members traveled to Egypt for a conference in Arabic with Arabic-speaking believers in the Middle East. We listened to remarkable stories of challenges faced by Christians in the region. Despite the pressures and hardships, they experienced from their majority faith neighbors, the believers at this conference radiated a palpable, unreasonable, extraordinary joy that was contagious. It was a joy rooted deeply in faith and trust in God despite the suffering they were experiencing.

Our keynote speaker today is Dr. Eun Ah Cho, Associate Professor of Intercultural Studies and Dean of the Gordon Conwell Institute. Dr. Cho is from South Korea and has lived in Canada, Russia, and Kazakhstan. She speaks three languages (Korean, English, and Russian) and is also a scholar, creative leader, and poet. Today, she will explain how we, too, can experience unreasonable joy through the lens of the Incarnation (God became human in the form of Jesus Christ to live among us) and our deepest human desire (to be in relationship with God).

Questions: What do Christians believe and why? What difference does faith make in our lives, and how does it help us find meaning and navigate life's challenges?

Bottom Line: God's unreasonable joy is in us.

Take Home Message:

We are who we are because of the Unreasonable Joy God takes in us – a divine gift that sustains us through all circumstances, transforming our perspective and enabling us to find strength in Him alone. This unreasonable joy is not just a feeling but the essence of our relationship with God, manifesting His grace in every aspect of our lives.

Main Scripture Reading: Zephaniah 3:9-20

"Then I will purify the lips of the peoples,
that all of them may call on the name of
the Lord

and serve him shoulder to shoulder.

¹⁰ From beyond the rivers of Cush^[a]
my worshipers, my scattered people,
will bring me offerings.

¹¹ On that day you, Jerusalem, will not be

put to shame

for all the wrongs you have done to me,
because I will remove from you
your arrogant boasters.

Never again will you be haughty
on my holy hill.

¹² But I will leave within you
the meek and humble.

The remnant of Israel
 will trust in the name of the Lord.
¹³ They will do no wrong;
 they will tell no lies.
 A deceitful tongue
 will not be found in their mouths.
 They will eat and lie down
 and no one will make them afraid.”
¹⁴ Sing, Daughter Zion;
 shout aloud, Israel!
 Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
 Daughter Jerusalem!
¹⁵ The Lord has taken away your
 punishment,
 he has turned back your enemy.
 The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you;
 never again will you fear any harm.
¹⁶ On that day
 they will say to Jerusalem,
 “Do not fear, Zion;
 do not let your hands hang limp.
¹⁷ The Lord your God is with you,

the Mighty Warrior who saves.
 He will take great delight in you;
 in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
 but will rejoice over you with singing.”
¹⁸ “I will remove from you
 all who mourn over the loss of your
 appointed festivals,
 which is a burden and reproach for you.
¹⁹ At that time I will deal
 with all who oppressed you.
 I will rescue the lame;
 I will gather the exiles.
 I will give them praise and honor
 in every land where they have suffered
 shame.
²⁰ At that time I will gather you;
 at that time I will bring you home.
 I will give you honor and praise
 among all the peoples of the earth
 when I restore your fortunes ^[b]
 before your very eyes,”
 says the Lord.

Other Scripture References

Nehemiah 8:10

Hebrews 5:8

Psalms 116:3-6

Acts 14:22

Hebrews 12:2

John 15:9-11

Mark 14:33

1Corinthians 13:12

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Teaching Points:

- Though joy and suffering may appear to be opposing forces, they often interweave themselves into the fabric of our lives.
- Our struggles with suffering can deepen our understanding of God and strengthen our trust in Him.
- We live with many unanswered questions on earth, including the mystery of suffering, precisely because of our cognitive and perceptive limitations. We need not an exhaustive understanding of suffering but a higher perspective that allows us to see beyond our immediate circumstances.
- God allows us to be under great pressure, even far beyond our ability to endure, precisely because He desires us not to rely on ourselves but on Him.
- God’s ultimate purpose is not punishment but restoration. He actively works to restore, rebuild, and renew. His love persists through our forgetfulness, His patience endures through our wandering, and His grace transforms our impure lips into instruments of praise.

Group Discussion

Begin in prayer before reading and discussing the text.

1. Pastor Cho began with a personal story of her grandmother, a widow who raised seven children in poverty. Despite unimaginable hardship, she sang hymns of praise daily.

Ask your group for volunteers to share a personal story of how they (or someone they were close to) were able to keep their eyes focused on God during a time of suffering and despair. What was their secret? How did they do it?

2. 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 is often read at weddings. Read verse 12 together:
Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

What does this mean to you in the context of suffering and unanswered questions?

3. Pastor Cho shared a powerful metaphor from her grandmother: *If I were to put a thin piece of paper with the word "endurance" written on it into a big Kimchi jar every time I had to endure hardships, by now the big Kimchi jar would be overflowing with papers.*

What thoughts does this image bring to your mind?

4. To learn genuine reliance on God, we must encounter troubles; we must share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ. Even in these depths, we do not lose heart, for as Paul declares:

Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

This profound reality fuels Paul's thanksgiving to God. What fuels your thanksgiving to God?

5. Read Habakkuk 3:17-19 together:
Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to tread on the heights.

How do you feel after reading this passage? Although you may not have read this before, does this resonate with you?

Let's Pray

It is you, God, who created me; you who called me; and you who is sending me.

I am who I am by the grace of God.

Until I finish the race set before me, until my last breath, it is you who let me hold fast to the Cross. I am what I am by the grace of God.

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