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Bridgeway Community Church

Series: Summer Teaching Series 2023

June 25, 2023

## **SUMMER TEACHING SERIES 2023:**

### **“Who Stole My Joy?”**

JOY to the WORLD!

Today is June 25<sup>th</sup> and Christmas is exactly 6 months away... *And so today is your mid-year JOY check-up.* And I can't talk about JOY without talking about my BEST friend.

He is relentlessly committed to me. HE WON'T LEAVE ME, NOT EVEN FOR A SECOND. HE CAME WITH ME THIS MORNING. Do you have anybody in your life like that? That is so committed to you- that even when you are the WORST version of yourself...they refuse to stop loving you? They refuse to stop believing in you, they refuse to leave?

We all need a friend like that.

So I hope you don't mind if I talk about my best friend a lot today.. Because He is the SOURCE of my JOY. He is the source of every good gift in my life.

He is my Lord, My God, my Savior, My HOPE, My never-ending peace, My reason for living, My purpose, My source of life and breath, He is the deepest longing of my heart...He's everything to me.

**His name is Jesus.** Immanuel. God with us.

*He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:17 NIV)*

He is our strong tower, our safe place, our redeemer, Our Rescuer, our Creator, Our Closest Ally, Our greatest Advocate, He is our refuge and strength, He is an ever-present help in times of trouble. He is- as the prophet Isaiah wrote about him, 700-ish years before he came to earth -- *“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6 NIV)*

There is no one like Him. There is no one above him. There is no one who understands you better, no one who knows you better. And if you're looking for friends in HIGH places, you can't go any HIGHER than Him.

All power and authority in heaven and on earth is His.

He conquered sin and death – Our 2 greatest enemies as imperfect human beings. 2 things that will snuff out the life of every person on the planet- **but Jesus handled them for us.** He is our HERO! And when you put Him at the center of your life, and you make a real decision that you're gonna trust Him, and live for Him, you get your best life – for real... because now you're aligned with the ONE who made you. Now your story is in His hands.

When you DECIDE to be ALL IN with Jesus, you discover that HE has always been ALL IN with you. AND all that He has to offer, the fruits of His HOLY Spirit, dwell inside of you. These beautiful attributes of God's character, are given to us through our relationship with Jesus.

Paul writes about these fruits in **Galatians 5:22 (NIV)**... let's read them together:

- *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

How many of those fruits of God's spirit do we get when we come into relationship with Jesus? ALL 9 of them! These attributes of God- are now a part of your new nature and you can grow in them!

You see: God wants to be the center of your story -- so much so, that He gave us Himself. The power of God dwelling in us to help us be love in this world.

You were not supposed to figure it out alone, you were not made to just be tossed around by circumstances.

You were made for love – to be transformed into the image of God's Son, Jesus- who is LOVE.

And He will work through everything to make it happen.

God created you with a purpose, with great intention and attention –

Every detail about you.

You are part of a much bigger story than you can see right now... and SPOILER ALERT: *It's a happily ever after LOVE story!*

Don't you love those? This is why I love the Hallmark Channel. Especially at Christmas....

- *Christmas with a prince, Falling for Christmas, Switched for Christmas, The Noel Diary, The Cozy Christmas, The Holiday in the Wild*
- *Christmas Inheritance*
- *48 Christmas Wishes*
- *The Princess Switch, A Castle for Christmas, A Boyfriend for Christmas...*

We love these stories because we were made for battles and happy-endings.

A good story has ups-and-downs, and plot twists and villains, and battles and so many lessons and so much love along the way. A good story is always about transformation: people getting better... people getting healed and getting free.

This is what determines what I watch on TV. If there isn't someone I can root for, someone who is changing ... getting better, if there isn't some redemptive purpose being worked out, I am not interested.

*And yes I want that happy ending. Because I was made for it. And so were you. So where are you in your story? What chapter are you on? Do you like the chapter you're in right now?*

**I am on chapter 59...** And I am so grateful to have lived long enough to see God work miracles in my life. And I am still learning of HIS LOVE and HE is still working on me. And He's not done.

How about you?

See...how stories work...depending on the chapter you're in the story – you might not think it's a happy story with a good ending coming. You might not believe it is going anywhere. You might not know that there are really good things coming *for the main character* – YOU.

Because the story isn't over yet.

## **#1 -PUT UP PICTURE OF LITTLE TRACEY**

This picture was taken on November 19, 1966. I was two-and-a-half...And I was adorable.

I look at the little girl now and I have such compassion for her. She didn't know what was coming. She didn't know how her family would implode with multiple divorces, abuse, and other trauma...She didn't know that it wasn't her fault.

She didn't know how to love herself and she was really, really, hard on herself.

She didn't know that she'd struggle the way she did all the way through her teen years and into adulthood – looking for love in all the wrong places. She had some chapters in her story that she nearly didn't survive.

But God was still working. Tracey's Best Friend wouldn't leave.

The story wasn't over.

Your story isn't over.

God knows where you are in it right now.

He knows it has been hard...He knows what hurts you've endured.

But He has not checked-out. He's still working.

*I promised you we were gonna do a mid-year JOY Checkup. Because JOY isn't a seasonal fruit. It is an all-year round, in every season possibility and it's not as elusive as it feels.*

## I. JOY CHECK-UP

You were given a balloon this morning. Everyone hold your balloon up...I want to you blow up your balloon—don't tie it off. Just hold on to it.

As you blow up your balloon, I want you to imagine that it contains JOY.

Joy given to you as a fruit of God's Spirit.

Oxford dictionary says joy is a feeling of great happiness or delight. But it's so much more. Joyce Meyers says: "Joy is a deep internal confidence that God has everything under control."

**Here is my definition:** *Joy is the feeling of delight in a NOW moment, the anticipation of Good in a future moment, and the constant state of being and foundation I stand on in every moment, because my very being has been irreversibly wrapped in Christ.*

Now just look at all of your joy in that little balloon. I want you to think about the chapter of life that you're in right now... and ask the question, WHAT HAS BEEN STEALING my Joy?

### Question:

**If God has given me His Spirit and JOY is one of those fruits that should be in my life...where is it?**

I made a list of joy-stealers. *When you hear one of these that has been robbing you of your joy, let some air out of your balloon....*

- Comparison...Anybody feel ok about life until you start comparing yourself to someone else? Why is everyone obviously more rich, beautiful, talented, have better marriages, cooler hobbies, cuter pets, more obedient kids, than me? COMPARISON is a joy stealer.
- Very closely related to that one- we have ENVY, jealousy, discontentment, self-pity, and self-centeredness= all of these are connected...
- Unforgiveness...
- Loss, grief...
- Change...
- Suffering-physical and emotional...
- Busy-ness, hurry, exhaustion, isolation, disconnection, loneliness, procrastination, incongruency, worry, fear, anxiety, greed, drug or alcohol abuse, grumbling and complaining, other people grumbling and complaining, other people...
- Hunger, hanger, traffic on I95 and 695, and I-70, the news...politics
- Pandemics...

Anybody got any air left in your balloon?

There are so many hard things that we're dealing with out there in the world, how do we keep our balloons full? How do we LIVE this life for JESUS...and keep growing our JOY? How do we get through this part of our story?

Well, there are some things about JOY that we need to know. As the 70's band Boston once said... *"It's more than a feeling."*

## II. FOUR THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT JOY

Here are 4 things I want you to know about JOY...

1. **JOY is the surest indicator of the Presence of God.**
2. **Joy is always connected to a right relationship with God.**
3. **JOY is not optional for a follower of Jesus.**
4. **JOY SHAPES MY PERSPECTIVE on everything.**

So the first one...

## 1. JOY is the surest indicator of the Presence of God.

When the angel of the Lord announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds he said:

*“...Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11 NLT)*

In **Matthew 2:9-10**, the wise men were told about the savior that was born and they set out to see him and were overwhelmed with joy...

Mary, Elizabeth, the shepherds, the angels, Simeon, and Anna all of them were overjoyed at the birth of Jesus.

Even John the Baptist leapt with joy in his mother Elizabeth’s womb, at the presence of Jesus-who was in Mary’s womb:

*“But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” (Luke 1:43-44 NIV)*

Our God is the most joyful being in the universe. And Jesus...is the most joyful person that ever lived. And He has given us HIS JOY!

So... JOY is the surest indicator of the Presence of God.

## 2. Joy is always connected to a right relationship with God.

That means, thinking about Him the right way. If you have a wrong view of what God is like, it is going to jack up your joy. AW TOZER said the way we think about God is the most important thing about us. So what is your view of God?

Way back in the Garden of Eden, Satan got into Eve’s head about her view of God.

And he got her to question what God said and his motives towards her and he planted this idea in her mind, that God was withholding good things from her.

If we believe that God is actually holding out on us... we are saying, “God, you are not good and You are not trustworthy.”

“I can’t surrender my life to you because you’re gonna let me down. I have to figure it all out. I have to manage everything. I have to secure what I want out of life because you’re not coming through for me.”

There is no joy living like that and you need to get to know who God really is. If we don’t believe God is who He says He is, it will directly affect our joy. Because we will see everything that happens in this world that we don’t like, as pointless...and a justifiable reason to be afraid, sad, anxious and miserable.

*So... Joy is always connected to a right relationship with God.*

### **3. Joy is not optional for a follower of Jesus.**

JOY- is a defining characteristic of God. And it’s His JOY that He deposits in us. It’s not my own joy that I had to somehow come up with, it’s nothing I can manufacture on my own, -No, it’s Jesus’ JOY that I have in me. And His joy is constant and strong... it doesn’t go up and down because of my circumstances. I may not always feel happy but I can always have JOY.

In **John 15:10-11 (NIV)**, Jesus said:

*“If you keep my commands, you will **remain** in my love, just as I have 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**.”*

The source of our JOY is Jesus. He is the supplier. We are the recipients. And all I have to do is to stay connected to Him and His joy flows in me. This is such a relief! I mean...friends I am tired of having to produce, produce, produce. I am tired of feeling like there is more stuff I need to do, to take care of, and figure out. I’m tired of feeling like it’s all up to me to be spiritually mature and grow those fruits of the Spirit and I’ve got to WORK harder so I can be a better Jesus person. NO!

JOY isn’t something we have to earn. It is something to receive and nourish as we allow Jesus to live through us.

*So... JOY is NOT Optional for a follower of Jesus.*

Here’s the last one...

#### 4. JOY SHAPES MY PERSPECTIVE on everything.

Because I am LOVED by God, I know that He is working out ALL THINGS for my good and that gives me joy. So while I may be in a part of my story that doesn't feel so good –

I can still have JOY because of what God is accomplishing in this part of my story.

**James 1:2-5 (NIV):**

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. <sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*

When things get hard, when we go through trials and suffering, we may feel like our joy has been taken away, but it hasn't...

GOD IS WORKING. HE is producing in you, PERSEVERANCE. He is drawing you closer, inviting you to TRUST HIM MORE and more.

Because when you trust HIM more, YOUR joy gets stronger.

JOY and Trust are connected.

Remember JOY isn't just feeling good in the present moment, cuz sometimes the present moment – sucks. It's also about what God is working out in us. It's about anticipating GOOD in future moments. That GOOD that He's working out is a done deal... It's a sure thing because of Jesus and He will not leave that GOOD work He's doing unfinished.

I have a friend going through chemo right now and she has suffered so much.

But she is so focused on her future joy, she is being held by the promises of God and it gives her this radiant JOY that is gritty, strong, and steadfast.

It would be easy to think, hers is a sad story because of this chapter she's in right now, but the story isn't over... She's in a hard place. BUT this is not where she will stay. Her future is secure.

Is yours?

*Listen... for all of us with empty balloons I have good news.*

*We can fill this balloon back up. Remember God didn't take our JOY away.. We just need to think about some things differently.*



*And to think differently- we may need to ACT differently...*

### III. FIVE THINGS TO “THINK” AND “DO”

Here are 5 tangible things to think about and to do... to fill up that balloon-

they have helped me and I hope they can help you too – if you are just not feeling the JOY right now.

#### **1. Let go of your plan and Follow the spirit**

Last year, Gary and I went to St. Michael’s on the eastern shore.

We had a fun weekend planned and it started with kayaking on the Miles River. When we were done, Gary was loading the **kayaks** back up on our car, and this lovely elderly lady came over and started chatting away with us. “Where are you from? How long are you here? Where did you go kayaking? I know of some great places to go... what are your names? What do you both do?”

She was so delightful... we fell in love with her. She said stop by my house later and we can get to know one another.

Her name was Mary-Lou MacAllister. And we googled her and found out this woman was a force for good in the community...She started an after school tutoring program to help under-resourced students who. She wanted all the kids to have a safe space to go swimming so she spearheaded a fundraising initiative to have a public community pool built.

She was 94 years old and full of life. She gave us her address- total strangers that she just met... So we stopped by later that evening. She came to the door in her nightgown and said, I’m all ready for bed. Come back tomorrow night at 5 and we’ll have drinks. You can bet we put that on our agenda for the next day.

So the next morning, we had made plans to take our bikes on the Oxford- Bellevue ferry, that goes from St Michaels to Oxford across the Tred-Avon river.

#### **PUT UP PIC#2 -Tracey on the ferry**

You can bring your bikes right up onto the ferry – so we enjoyed a 15 minute ride across and then explored Oxford on our bikes all day, had a lovely lunch, it was perfect... *until* we came back to catch the ferry. There was a chain across the ramp and a sign that said: “Ferry closed for the rest of the day, Engine problems.”

How are we going to get across the river?

One option: a 30-mile bike ride back to St. Michaels... We were not prepared for that...and it would take hours, and we'd miss our special date with Mary-Lou.

So while I started to pray and unravel a little, Gary walked over to the yacht club right on the water next to the ferry. He meets a guy named Jay and tells Jay our predicament, asking if he had any suggestions. Jay says... Well you can take my Subaru and drive back over, get your car and come back here for your bikes. And Jay hands Gary his car keys. A total stranger gave us the keys to his car.

What? We were about to go with this plan, when Jay says... I have another idea...

And he walks Gary up the pier to a guy working on his boat. GK was his name. Jay tells GK what happened and GK says. "I'll take you over."

### **PUT UP PIC #3- GK on his boat**

He proceeds to load our bikes onto his boat and takes us across the river.

Another total stranger... being outrageously generous and kind... He refused to take any money...

We were blown away...and we made it to Mary Lou's place in time for our date. We told her of our adventure and she knew Jay and GK...

Of course she did.

It became apparent that God was gloriously disrupting our weekend plans. *So we loosen our grip, and follow the Spirit.*

### **PUT UP PIC #3B—Mary-Lou with Tracey and Gary**

We ended the weekend not by hanging out by the pool like I planned... but by going to church with Mary-Lou. God had a much better plan.

## **2. Cheer other people on.**

A sure way to get your joy back is to look for the people around you who could use a little cheer. Who could use somebody in their corner, rooting them on.

Last week, Pastor Gary shared his story about being an amazing college tennis player (and he still is by the way!) But his family system was broken, and his dad never showed up to one of his games.

Well, last year Gary's 50+ tennis league had the opportunity to go to nationals – an incredible opportunity! Of course, I went with him to cheer him on. We had family and friends texting him and cheering him on. And after the championship, he said to our family: "Thank you all for being here to cheer me on... It healed me."

We can be part of God's healing work in people's lives!

#### **PUT UP PIC #4- Gary's tennis team**

### **3. Remember to have Fun!**

Look for ways to make people smile.

Fun is an under-rated spiritual discipline. We are to live as children of light.

**Proverbs 17:22 (NIV)** says, *"A cheerful heart is good medicine."*

Last Halloween, was a dreary night.... We decided to have some fun and we created a new holiday- REVERSE HALLOWEEN. Regular Halloween you go to peoples' door to get candy, and say, "Trick or treat!" Well we went door-to-door GIVING OUT candy, saying, "Pick-A-Treat!"

Not only was it a lot of fun, but we got to know and bond with our neighbors.

#### **PUT UP PIC#5- GARY AND TRACEY IN COSTUMES**

### **4. Find YOUR good works!**

**Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)** says, *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

Pay attention to the wording, especially the "for us" at the end. Good works are waiting for you! Works that are particular to you, and specially designed for you to complete.

My friends are missionaries in Mexico and they shared that their young worship leader, Josa, had his guitar stolen. He didn't have the resources to get a new one and my friends reached out to see if I could help.

Gary and I prayed and decided we would make our anniversary gift to each other be a guitar for Josa. So I was making a plan to find a good used guitar.

The next day, I had an appointment in Westminster. I got to my appointment, and before I went in, I randomly posted on FB that it was sleeting in Westminster. I never post where I am... I was just amazed by the sudden winter weather. Then I posted about wanting to find a guitar for a young worship leader whose guitar was stolen. I asked my FB friends to private message me if anyone had one they were selling.

Then I went into my appointment and 1 hour later came back to my car to find a private message on my phone.

#### **PUT UP PIC#6- Rod and Sherrie with guitar**

Meet Rod and Sherrie. Rod said, Are you still in Westminster? I have a guitar if you want to pick it up.

The guitar belonged to his dad who passed away a few years ago, and he wanted it to go to someone that would use it to worship the Lord. When Rod heard Josa's story, he knew this guitar was meant for him. He refused to take any money from me, and gave me the guitar along with the case and a beautiful strap inside. I gave the guitar to my friend Frank, who headed to Mexico the next day to see his family and present the guitar to Josa.

#### **PUT UP PIC#7 -FRANK and JOSA**

#### **PUT UP PIC#8- JOSA with guitar**

The pictures say it all... Look at how God provides!

So....

- 1. Let go of your plan and Follow the spirit***
- 2. Cheer other people on***
- 3. Remember to have fun***
- 4. Find YOUR good works***

And now #5, and I'll close with this one...

## 5. WORSHIP JESUS

*“Put on a garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isaiah 61:3 ESV)*

*“Sing and make music to the Lord!” (Psalm 27:6 NIV)*

*“My heart leaps for joy and with my song I will praise him” (Psalm 28:7 NIV)*

Worship God!

Invite Jesus into your life.

Maybe you don't have JOY in your life because you don't know my best friend... the source of JOY, Jesus Christ. Will you trust him with the story of your life? It's not over yet. The best is yet to come. THE BEST is YET To COME.

Suffering is part of the package of being a human but Jesus didn't exempt himself from it. He took it on. You can trust Him to write your story.

The victory has been won over sin and suffering and death...by our Savior Jesus, when He gave his life on the cross and then 3 days later, he rose from the grave.

Our Joy is guaranteed, it's not flimsy... It's a promise that ALL is WELL and ALL WILL BE WELL. God is in charge of this story.

Circumstances feel like they are out of control, BUT GOD knows what's up and He is still 100 percent HIMSELF. Because Jesus has rescued us, secured our salvation on the cross, purchased our freedom and our future for us; that means for all of eternity, we are BLESSED.

No good thing does God withhold from those whose walk is blameless.

His LOVE AND MERCY endure forever.

HE will NEVER leave you or forsake you.

He is WITH YOU in all the chapters and nothing happens to you that doesn't pass through his hands first.

*He works all things together for GOOD, for those who love him and who are called according to His purposes. (Romans 8:28 NIV)*

Will you trust him with the story of your life? It's not over yet. The best is yet to come.

THE BEST is YET to COME!