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February 28, 2016

## ROMANS 12:12

Romans Series: How God Changes People

Would you join with me now in prayer together.

[PRAYER] Lord, we understand that you called disciples when you were here on earth to leave their nets and follow you, and that you call us disciples as we follow you, and we want to do that. Lord, we know that means sometimes we have to leave some things in order to be most effective in doing what you called us to do. So I ask that you would help each one of us to know what those things are that you'd have us to leave behind so that we can follow you. As disciples we need instruction, we need training, we need mentoring. So we thank you for the opportunity you've placed us in a church – a church where we can bump heads together, and rub shoulders together, and we can grow together, and understand what it means to follow you. This morning, Lord, we already spent some time worshiping you. We're going to come back and worship you later, but we want to spend some time now opening your word. As we do, we ask that you would be the teacher, that you would disciple each one of us in our hearts. Teach us what it means to follow you in a particular way from your word today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Would you please open your Bible with me to Romans 12:12.

Christians think differently than non-Christians. You're going to see that. You'll see that all over. You'll see that in school, students, you'll see it at work, you'll see it in your neighborhood, you'll see it in politics, you'll see it in our government. You'll see that Christians think differently than non-Christians.

In Romans 12 we have a list of twenty things (ten actions and ten reactions) that characterize Christians. Today we're going to look at three of the things that characterize Christians. Actually when you understand these three that are in verse 12 of Romans 12, it will help you to deal with stress situations more effectively. Christians deal with stress and challenges differently than non-Christians. It's powerful once we understand the way we think about this.

So look with me at this verse, Romans 12:12. It says these words: *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.* Three things that go together. In fact I would suggest that these three things form for us three circles and those circles all put together create for us this way of dealing with the challenges that we face. Now right in the center as they all overlap I would suggest that part is the place where faith is. As our faith works itself out in our lives then in chapter 12:12 it's telling us it's going to work it out in being *joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.* We're going to take apart those things and look at them.

Now some people have a misunderstanding about joy. So let's start by talking about that. There are some people who think that joy is a matter of personality, that some people have a personality that's just more bubbly and joyful, or that it's the result of circumstances. In fact I would suggest that humanists (those are people who aren't Christians who believe that just the human person is the ultimate authority) often believe that things are either innate or they come by the environment. So whether something is innate or caused by the environment is caused by how people think.

I'm going to suggest another thing today. I would suggest that many people are thinking that things are either going to come by...it's either fixed because it's part of who you are as you were born or because experiences made you that way.

So we have a personality. There are some people who are more joyous in their personality. But I would suggest that joy is bigger than that. In fact I would suggest that personality is always moderated by character. If a person has a personality that's outgoing, they can be in danger of being insensitive to other people, talking too much in solace. So they must have character that comes alongside of their personality to moderate it. That character is the character of sensitivity or graciousness or something else.

So personality is something that is present, but character comes along and moderates that. When we look at experience, experiences affect all of us. You and I have experiences that have adjusted who we are. Some of those are difficult experiences, traumatic things that have happened. It's only by God's grace that God uses those things to turn them into something good in our lives. So experience is transformed by God's grace. We as Christians do not believe in just nature or nurture or something that's innate or experience. We believe in God who's very much involved in that process, who moves us out of those and changes who we are.

So as we look at this today, we're going to see that this word, *be joyful in hope*, is not just personality or experience. It is a command. Which implies that it is a choice. You and I make a choice as to whether we're going to be joyful today or not.

In fact let me indicate here. Just go back to this whole study we're doing in the book of Romans is how God changes people. I want to suggest today that these three different circles or these three different statements that are in Romans 12:12 will help us identify more about who we are and how God wants to change us to be the kind of people that He wants us to be.

It is a command that He gives us when He says that we are to *be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer*. Those are commands. So when we look at Philippians 4:4 it says there in another passage the same thing, a command: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* So it is a command that God gives. It is a choice that we make. So we have to understand where does that joy come from and then how are we going to make a choice that is going to be this thing, this joyfulness that comes from inside of our heart and what we are.

1 Peter 4:13 even puts it in the context of difficult things that we experience. So we're not just being joyful when things are going well, but notice it says – *But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*

So even when bad things happen in our lives we're able to experience that joy in real ways. That joy is going to be a key component and we're going to talk more about what it means to be joyful in hope.

But I want to look at the second one there for a minute because it talks about being *patient in affliction*. Let's just look at the words and what those words mean. The word *patient* in Greek is *hupomeno*, which is the idea of continuing to do good under pressure. Which is different than what most people think patient is. Because patience for many people is just enduring the pain until I can get over this and then I can do better. But the idea of *hupomeno* is to be able to live under the pressure and still do good while in the pressure instead of escaping from it.

That's the idea that's being used there. So despite the hardship, there's positive activity taking place. We're not just sitting there. We're not refraining from getting upset, but we're doing good in the midst of things because we have something going on. I'm suggesting the something going on inside of us is this faith that God has placed in the middle of these three words as He's helping us understand them.

Now what is the key to having this patience in affliction? I think the key is being joyful in hope. When we have this mindset of being joyful in hope then it changes us and it allows us to be patient and be able to do good, even under the pressure that we're experiencing in our lives.

You've been given today a prayer card. I want you to pull out the prayer card. You're going to use this today. In fact does everyone have a pen? Hold your hand up if you don't have a pen because Rob has pens and more prayer cards. So if you didn't get a prayer card, didn't pick one up, you need to raise your hand up. He's going to hand out prayer cards and pens. I don't know whether they want prayer cards or pens, but give them whatever they want. Okay?

Now I want you to think about a challenge you have in your life. When a person first comes to me for counseling and they're just upset, they don't know exactly what they want to do in their lives, I'll ask them this question: "Please tell me the top five stressors in your life right now. What's challenging you in your life right now?" We can all think of that. I can think of that, you can think of that. The things that are bothering us, the things that are challenges for us – what are they? I want you to think of those stressors. You'll be able to work through those and help make that happen. Alright?

So where it says "prayer request"... You don't have to put your name on this yet. You might later because you're going to be turning this in. So I want to say that because what you write down here is a challenge. You might choose what you want to say. You might choose the top stressor in your life and write that down. That's okay. But because you're turning it in, you might not feel comfortable doing that right now and that's okay too. Choose a challenge that you're experiencing right now because I want to make this applicable for our lives. I want to talk about being joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. So we're talking about prayer here today and I'd like you to think of some area, a stressor for you in your life, and I want you to write it on the "prayer request" line.

What's the challenge that you're facing? I'm going to pause for a moment while you think of something and write it down.

Alright. Now I want to show you how they're connected here because this will help you as you're working through the particular challenge that you're facing right now.

*Joyful in hope.* Think about the hardships that are experienced in life and if we can think about the joy or the hope that often pulls us through in the midst of this.

Think about the athlete. Why does she endure hardship in her training? Because it's the joyful hope of attaining victory.

Why did the pilgrims go through all the hardship to escape the persecution they had to come to a country where they can have religious freedom? They had hope that they'd be able to avoid that oppression and have that freedom.

Why does the college student study hard, stay up late at night, work hard on exams to get through difficult classes? Because there's this hope of a promising career.

Why did the early Christians hang in there even under immense persecution? Because they had this joyful hope of the inheritance in heaven that God would provide.

Now I would suggest that the hope provides us with the framework to think about our challenges that we face in our lives. It changes the way we think.

I'm going to give you an analogy to help you think about it. When you go into the kitchen you expect things to be hot. So you prepare yourself by having cooling racks and spatulas and oven mitts and so on. So you're ready for the heat that exists inside the kitchen.

This week I was cooking with my son, Ben. Actually he was cooking dinner and I offered to help him with the sweet potato fries. They were in the oven cooking because we don't fry them. We put them in the oven so we cook them more healthy. I went to check on the sweet potato fries. So I opened the oven to look at them and I got blasted with all of the heat and it fogged up my glasses so I couldn't see. My son's over here rolling laughing about the whole thing. Why is he laughing? Because I made this mistake again.

I'm going to learn. I don't think I'm going to do that again. You don't open the oven and stick your head in. You open it out, let the blast of heat out, then you come back and you look in the oven to see what's going on.

Now I would suggest there's a lot of people today when the heat happens in the challenges of life they stick their head in the oven. I would suggest that hope allows us to step back for a minute, gain the perspective we need in order to deal with the heat that exists there.

Young people, I want to give you a principle about life so you can understand this. I think this is going to help you for the rest of your life. Always be prepared for heat in the kitchen and always

be prepared for challenges in life. If you have the understanding that the kitchen is a place where hot things happen and you understand that life is a place where challenging things happen, then you'll be more effective in handling the challenges that you face.

But I think the problem is people don't realize that there's heat in the kitchen. They think all they do is go in the kitchen and have fun and eat. If you're thinking about life is all you do is you go in there and you have fun and eat then you're in danger because there's hot things in the kitchen.

We have to set our mindset in a certain way so that we're prepared for the challenges that will come into our lives. That's how we will be able to maintain joy. You expect things to be hot; you're ready for them in the kitchen. I would suggest we can do the same thing in our lives as challenges are faced because life is like a kitchen. It has hot things. Don't stick your head in the oven.

Now I would suggest that my goal today, and I think God's goal in this particular passage that we're looking at, is to change what we believe. Because even a small adjustment in our beliefs can make a big difference in the way that we live. It can have profound effects on our daily interaction if we understand the right kind of things and we believe the right kind of things. It means we have to have a mindset about life. Christians have a mindset about life. It's that we're all growing in our faith and we're all growing to have this kind of a mindset that helps us to think rightly about challenges that we face.

Imagine this scenario: A young adult having a really bad day. He goes to class that's important to him, the teacher's handing the midterms back, and on his he gets a C+, and he is very disappointed. That evening as he's going back to his car, he finds out he has a parking ticket on his car. So he calls his best friend to talk about it and gets brushed off by the best friend.

Now a person with a weak mindset is going to say things like this: "I feel like a reject. I'm a total failure. I'm an idiot. I'm a loser. I'm worthless and dumb. Everyone's better than me. I'm slime." In other words, they take what's happened and they start interpreting it in a way that affects them because they're not ready for the challenges of life. They start thinking things about themselves that are wrong and unhelpful, I would suggest even ungodly. They say things to themselves like, "I'm pitiful. I have no life. Somebody upstairs doesn't like me. The world is out to get me. Somebody is out to destroy me. Nobody loves me. Everybody hates me. Life is unfair and all efforts are useless. Life stinks. I'm stupid. Nothing else ever good happens to me. I'm the most unlucky person on earth." Excuse me? I mean was this death and destruction? Or just a grade and a ticket and getting brushed off by a friend?

See, I intentionally made the grade a C+, not an F; and a midterm instead of a final; a parking ticket, not an automobile accident; and sort of brushed off instead of being rejected completely.

See, the weak mindset of a person often causes them to start thinking in such a negative way that no wonder they lose their joy! Because they don't have the perspective that God would have us to have about hope and what He's doing in given situations in our lives.

I would suggest that we want to have a biblical mindset that might say “I need to try harder in class,” “I need to be more careful when parking the car,” and “I wonder if my friend had a bad day.” I think it’s very important how we think about the challenges of life. The three things that we have in this particular passage in Romans 12 help us move us forward in a good way.

Even the world has proverbs. These aren’t proverbs from the Bible but proverbs from the world that indicate moving on in challenging situations. For example, “nothing ventured, nothing gained” is a proverb from the world; not from the Bible. It’s from the world encouraging you to go forward. “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” Hang in there is the idea. “Rome wasn’t built in a day.”

But for the person with a weak mindset, they say different things. Instead of saying “nothing ventured, nothing gained,” they said, “nothing ventured, nothing lost.” So they don’t want to venture anything. They’re afraid they might lose what they already have. Or “if at first you don’t succeed, you probably don’t have the ability.” Or “if Rome wasn’t built in a day, maybe it wasn’t meant to be.”

So even people in the world have this idea of moving forward. But Christians have a greater opportunity to think greatly about stress, challenges in their life because God has given us this mindset that we can have that will help us to move forward.

Now the key to joy is hope. That hope is going to drive us forward and it’s going to help us. In order for us to understand this (I want you to catch this progression that takes place), when we look at joy, I want you to see biblically how joy is formed inside of the Christian’s heart and where it comes from.

Joy. We have a passage, a command in Philippians 4:4. *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* So if you’re writing the word *joy*, I would suggest that’s the command. But it isn’t left alone. We see in Romans 12:12 that joy comes from hope. So these boxes, one larger underneath the next, help us provide this foundation for the joy that God wants us to have and this hope is going to provide that for us here in what we’re seeing in this particular diagram.

But the next verse I want to show you illustrates that faith provides the basis for hope. The passage says, *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.* So Hebrews 11:1 talks about this joy not coming just from hope, but hope coming from faith.

Again, we saw in our diagram that faith was in the center, and I think that’s the core of who we are and that God wants to do things outside of that. But where does that faith come from? It comes from the word of God. That’s why I want you to see Romans 10:17, which says, *Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*

So it’s very important for us to understand where that comes from because I would suggest that this is another good principle we want to understand about the stressors in our lives. If people do not read the word then their faith is weak, their hope is shallow, and their joy is minimal. God

wants us to have that joy in our life, He wants us to have that hope, as we're seeing in this passage today, but it comes from a particular thing. It comes from a process that takes place inside of our lives.

Now I want to show you a couple biblical illustrations about this. In Hebrews 10 we have these words. I want you to see how suffering and joy and hope all go together here.

He says in Hebrews 10:34 – *You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.*

So the writer to the Hebrews is tying this together for the people who are reading and he's saying the suffering that you're experiencing is not some odd surprise that's out there. But because of this joyful acceptance inside of your heart you are able to deal with things like confiscation of property, being in prison. Those are bad things that are going on. So the writer is tying those things together in that passage that all three of these are important to develop this mindset that's going to help us to move forward.

There's another passage the apostle Peter was writing to the churches and he writes it this way. He says, *So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead.* You could put that in a placard in your home to remind you that joy is ahead. It's like you're sailing this ship and there out in the distance where you're going to get to, there's joy there. That's the idea here. *So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while.* 1 Peter 1:6.

There's a hope. That's the point that we're looking at there and we need to understand that. Christians have a mindset, and so Paul, in his writing to us in Romans 12, is helping to flesh out what that mindset looks like. I need to grow in this joyful hope, this patience in the midst of affliction, and this fervency in prayer. That's God's design for every one of us.

Spiritual maturity in part can be evaluated by a person's ability to deal with challenges in life. We all face them. But how do we face them? I don't think we face them by just brushing them off. Christians are able to face them by dealing with joy with hope, by patient in affliction, and being faithful in prayer. We address them head-on. We meet those challenges because we understand the hope that God has called us to.

In fact I would suggest another principle about stress that we gain from this passage is this one. If we spent more time contemplating the hope we have as Christians, joy would automatically follow the hope that God has given us in specific areas of our life.

I would suggest that this explains why some Christians don't remain steadfast in their walk with the Lord, especially when things get rough in their lives. They don't have joyful hope. Why not? Because I think sometimes our minds are preoccupied with worldly things. So it's very important for us to regularly be getting back into God's word that helps foster and build this faith that He wants us to have so that we can have the hope that then produces the joy, as we see in the passage.

We've talked about two of the different phrases in Romans 12:12 – *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction*. But a key ingredient that makes this all work is the *being faithful in prayer*. Because God has given to us in prayer a way to come into His presence to have access to His grace. God has His grace waiting there.

It's like a spigot ready to be pouring out His grace. We receive the grace from Him by praying and saying, "God, I want to stand under the spigot. Would you turn it on for me now?" So just like in the shower when the water comes over us to clean us all up. I mean I love showers. I like long showers. I just enjoy them because it refreshes me. I suggest we all want to stand under this spigot of God's grace and experience the long shower of who He is. That's going to come through this faithful prayer.

This idea of being prayerful, faithful in prayer, has this idea of bringing the challenges that we face, the afflictions of our lives to God on a regular basis. It's a command that's given to us.

There's another passage that says the same kind of thing, putting them together. It says, *Rejoice always, pray continually*. This is the verse that when I memorized this in the King James Version, it's *pray without ceasing*. It was a little confusing to me at first because that seems really hard, praying without ceasing. It says *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*.

What does it mean to pray without ceasing? When I got so many things to do, how can I do that? When I'm fighting the battle of life, what does that look like for me to pray without ceasing? I would suggest that there's a mindset that we have that's always open to the spigot of God's grace that's continually crying out to the Lord in our lives regularly in the midst of the battle that enables us to experience the joy, the hope, the patience, and so on that are mentioned in this passage.

In fact I want to show you a verse in the Old Testament. This is a verse that is just hidden away in a passage of scripture that's talking about three of the tribes of Israel. These tribes went into battle. The Bible tells us that there were 446,740 soldiers within these three tribes who were great with the sword and the shield. In other words these are people like you and me. They knew how to solve problems. They knew how to go into life, manage their schedule, their to-do list. They could handle life challenges and they could do it well. But they won the battle, it says in this verse.

Let's read the verse here. It says in 1 Chronicles 5:20 – *They were helped in fighting these bad guys, and God delivered the Hagrites and all their allies into their hands, because they cried out to him during the battle*.

That's what I like about this verse. It was during the challenges of getting the kids ready to get them out the door. It was during the challenge of getting into class and getting all the assignments done. It was the challenge of maneuvering through traffic that they cried out to the Lord during the battle. And *He answered their prayers, because they trusted in him*.



Further on in the passage it says *the battle belonged to the Lord*. Wow. This is where we get the hope, you see. Because the daily challenges that we face, that you and I face, hopefully the one that's written on your paper, the challenge belongs to the Lord. He allows you to be part of the solution as He's working this out inside of your life.

Again, let's go back to our circles. I want to talk to you about this faithfulness in prayer for a moment. Because most of us, if we pray, pray individually. We come to the Lord on our own, by ourselves. I think that's good. This praying without ceasing idea means that we're always open to praying before the Lord.

But I want to talk to you for a moment about group prayer because there's power in group prayer. There's power when people come together and pray for each other. When someone else prays for you good things happen. I can't explain it. It's God's idea. He's the one who said *where two or three on earth agree about anything you pray for will be done for you by my Father in heaven*. I think it's fascinating. He's saying when you got a group of people coming, you've got specific power that exists there. Strategic. The power of group prayer.

I want to think about it because this morning I want to pray for you and I want to invite you to be prayed for regarding the challenges that you're facing that you've written on your piece of paper, to have someone else actually pray for you regarding that thing that you're wrestling with. Because that's where the power comes from in our lives.

Paul knew this. That's why he says in 2 Corinthians 1:8-11...long passage. Let me just read it to you. It says, *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia*. It could have been the province of Robbinsville. It could have been the province of my home. It could have been anywhere. *We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure*. Do you ever feel that way? The pressures that exist are greater than your *ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself*. *Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God* (that's where our hope is. That's what we're waiting on. We're waiting on the Lord in the midst of the challenges), *who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers*.

Do you see how this is going to take place? The prayers that take place among God's people help us to deal with the pressure that we experience that feels overwhelming. Paul is saying God is going to deliver us, helped along by your prayers. *Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many*.

There is power in group prayer. There is power when someone prays for you in your life. To get through what you're going through, you need to get as much support and encouragement as you can. I'd recruit people to pray for you. Now those of you who are in small groups here at Calvary Chapel Living Hope are in a situation where people are praying for you and you know that. Some of you share testimonies that people have walked part of your life with you under pressure because of the prayers of those people that are praying for you. There's that strength that comes.

There's additional power available to you today by asking someone to pray for you and asking God to work in that particular area of your life. You need that prayer and I need that prayer. That's what God has called us to.

In fact here's another principle. If you're not praying with others then you're missing out on a key benefit of the Christian life. Support for stress. God wants us to be praying for each other. He wants us to understand what that looks like, and He offers that as a vehicle for us to come into His presence with someone else. Because sometimes when we rely on someone else, it's their faith that's greater than my faith that allows me to rest on that person's faith so that I can come into God's presence and receive His grace. That's the beauty of this.

I believe that's what God wants to do in our lives. He wants us to understand what that looks like and to be able to experience His power in a special way.

So I'm going to ask you to do this today. Take out your little card. Now I want you to decide whether you're going to put your name on it. I want you to put your prayer request in. If you want someone to follow up with you, that's fine. I'll be happy to follow up with you. I'm going to read these if you turn them in here. I'm going to ask you to do something with this card in just a moment.

In a few minutes we're going to sing a song and it's going to be a quieter song. In fact I've asked them to turn the volume down a little bit so we can hear up here as we're going to pray for people. I'm asking you to come up here and pray with the people that are here. There's men up here, women up here, there's going to be a young person up to pray for people, and we're here to pray for you. Bring your card up here and we're going to pray for you this morning briefly and ask God to work in your life. Okay?

If you feel uncomfortable coming up here and having somebody pray for you like that, then there's some buckets up here. Just put your card in the bucket. I'll take all of those and I'll pray for them myself in the course of this week. Alright?

Let's pray together and then we're going to stand and sing a song. During that song I'm going to invite you to come up for prayer. Alright? Let's pray.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we believe that your word is true. We believe that you want us to be hopeful and that you've given us the things in our hearts that we can rely on. This joy that we experience is not based on our emotion or it's not just based on experiences we have to get high spiritually. This is a joy that comes deep within our hearts. But Lord, there are afflictions that get in our way and being patient and doing the right thing and hanging in there in the midst of those is often a challenge. We know that we need power in order to do that. So we come before you as weak people today asking that you would empower us to do what's right, you'd empower us with your strength. We're going to come in prayer asking you to do that in each of our lives. Work in these next few minutes, Lord, by revealing your power and providing that for each of us. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.