



Speaker: Ed Miller
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CHOOSE JOY (PART 2)

James 1:1-4

[PRAYER] Lord, we don't want this concept of joy to be academic, where we just come into church and learn about this three-letter word that we need to have as Christians. We want to be able to live it in our lives and we want to take it home and put it into practice. But it is hard, Lord, when we face trials of many kinds. But you say to have joy in the midst of trials, so we need to understand more of what that looks like. I pray that you'd help us each to walk away with something more today so that we can take your word and apply it to our lives in the midst of the specific challenges that we all face. Bless Ed as he teaches now. In Jesus' name, amen.

[Ed] So Pastor Scott gave us a great teaching last week, didn't he, on joy. I hope you all heard it. It was awesome. It was wonderful. I learned so many new things. As Scott said, he and I have been talking about this all over the place. What I'm going to do this morning is I'm going to let you in on my journey and my struggle. And yeah, I've been struggling. So I'm going to tell you about that with the hope that your seeing into my life will help you in your journey and in your struggle. I've been really dealing with this and trying to apply the scriptures to my life day by day. God is working in my heart. He is doing some really great stuff. He's been teaching me new things, taking me deep, deep down. I want to share that journey with you.

Before I start into the journey, this is Choose Joy: Part 2. That's what we're doing this morning. I've been preaching through the last few years in the book of James. We're going to go all the way back to the beginning of James this morning. We're going to go back to James 1 because that's where God is taking me back to James 1 and this concept of joy. So before I share more, let's read the scripture together. See it up on the screen.

Stand with me in honor of God's word as we have been doing. Let me read and then I'll pray.

James 1:1-3 – James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Let's pray once again.

[PRAYER] Lord, we want to understand this joy. Our day-to-day lives in our heart, we wrestle, we struggle, we suffer. So many challenges in our life today. Life is so complicated. We're so complicated. We want to understand this supernatural joy, something you've talked about here.

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Help us, Lord. Help us to grasp this and to really live it in the midst of whatever you take us through. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Have a seat.

Life is hard and life is complicated. Do you remember the graphic that Scott put up last week? He went into a bunch of different graphics about his life and the various aspects of his life and the complications. You're going to see the final product up on the screen there about Scott's complicated life. Our lives are all complicated, aren't they? Not only are circumstances of our life complicated and challenging, but we're complicated. We're complex people. We have physical, emotional, mental, psychological things going on all the time around us. We're trying to live and make sense of this all. We are complex people.

Well I'm a complex person as well. Just like you. It's been a hard winter for me. It's been a really hard winter. Maybe one of the hardest I've ever had. There's a number of reasons why it's been hard. Well first of all, in 2017 I pushed really hard. I worked really hard, I probably pushed too hard. I pushed really hard and I'm tired, I'm worn out. The other thing is in the winter I struggle with S.A.D. – seasonal affective disorder and it has some of the same affects as depression. I lack passion, I feel sluggish, not motivated. I easily get anxious, get fearful.

I'm laying my life out here before you this morning. I'm a very cerebral person in a lot of ways even though I live out of my emotions a lot. I think a lot. I get in my head and I think, "What is going on? What is this? This is not right. This is wrong. What is wrong with me?" Maybe you ask the same question. What is wrong with me? One of my big questions lately. What is wrong with me? Well the answer to that is complex as well. I want to try to talk you through some of the things I'm learning and dealing with in my life.

First of all, let's talk about some physical issues. There are some physical issues. We're going to get to some spiritual issues in my life as well. But there's some physical things going on. In the winter I don't get as much sun, I don't get as much vitamin D, a number of things, chemicals in my brain. The balance of chemicals is out of whack. It affects my mood. And because I live out of my emotions, my mood affects how I live life. So I struggle when this happens. I really struggle. There's a number of things I do to try to work on that. Some days it seems to work. Some days it doesn't seem to work.

Let me give you an example of what happens in my life. So a couple weeks ago we had the blessing of having our second grandchild, Nathan, be born. Now can you think of anything that would be much happier than that? That's happy. I was not happy. Intellectually I understood the joy of this, the beauty of it. My feelings would not cooperate. What is going on? Why can I not feel happy about this? I don't know. I still don't know. There's something with my brain. Something is going on. I don't quite know. If I talked to you about it I could tell you all the things that are good about what happened, why this is a wonderful thing. But somehow my emotions were not cooperating. Why? I don't know.

There's another thing I'm learning. On February 14, 2002, I had a major trauma. I broke my neck body surfing in Hawaii. We'll talk about body surfing later. But I broke my neck. It was a

trauma. God restored me. God healed me. You see. I'm standing here before you. I play tennis, I play golf, I wrestle, I do all kinds of things. Praise God. I focused a lot on that. But what I didn't focus on was what was going on emotionally. How was this affecting me emotionally? I never processed that.

Not unlike when you have some other difficult situation, you have to grieve a loss, you have to process that. You have to go through that. How does that affect me? I'm working with a counselor who's helping me to think about that. I'm still on the journey of processing that, but it's a posttraumatic stress thing. People who go to war, those of you who have been in the military, you know what I'm talking about. Some folks have horrible posttraumatic stress. Other kinds of difficult things, some kind of abuse that happens in your life, these things affect us and today they stay with us. Our body stores stress and stores trauma. It stores it and certain events tend to trigger that in our brain. It triggers it. It comes on you sometimes before you even know what's going on. I'm working on that as well, trying to understand that.

I had a marvelous and wonderful time with my wife, Joanne, yesterday sharing more about this, starting the process of processing that. Something is going on. My sleep, my diet, how much water I drink, how much exercise I get. All these things affect this. The activities, if I tend to be involved in things that are upbeat, I'm hopeful about, I focus on them. My mood seems to be better often, but sometimes not. What is going on? I'm trying to address all of those things. Working with a doctor as well to help with the balance, taking the medication, seeing what happens with that. That's one of the things that I'm working on.

But one of the things that I'm very aware of right now is that there is a spiritual battle going on. I think I'm a holistic person, so I want to address physical issues when they're physical. Its just like if you need a drink of water, you could pray, "God, restore or hydrate my body." But you could take a drink of water as well and that would deal with your issue. So I'm dealing with that physical stuff. But there is a spiritual thing going on. I've been agonizing over this. Lord, what is going on? What is happening?

Two weeks ago after the service was a real critical point for me. A brother and sister, Dan and Julie Cointot, prayed for me after the service. I shared what was going on. They prayed for me. And that was significant in my life. That started something really new for me that goes beyond the physical.

Let me tell you more about it. These are deep things. These are deep waters. What's happening is God is stopping me. I am getting perspective. He is slowing me down, He is stopping me because He wants to work on the inner core of my being. I'm humbled. I'm humbled. I've been a Christian for a long time. I've been serving the Lord a long time. How is it that I still have to work on this? Well, I'm like the rest of them. We're all in the same boat.

Tim Keller is a pastor in New York City at Redeemer Church. I often listen to his sermons. In one of my favorites, he asks this question: Do you know how long it takes to get the gospel deep down into every aspect of your being? Do you know how long it takes? It takes a lifetime. That's the answer. It takes a lifetime. I don't really like that. That's tough. I like to learn things, be done with it, and move on to the next thing. But this is a process. A daily, weekly, annual process of

getting the good news down into the depths of my being, and God saying to me, “I want to go deeper, Ed. There are nooks and crannies and crevices in your heart that I’m not in yet. I want to get there.” I’m starting to understand this and God is drawing me close.

I have had some of the sweetest times of fellowship with God in the last two weeks. I’ve been wrestling a lot also. I’ve been in pain a lot. But God is doing something really great.

So maybe you’re thinking, “Well how is this happening, Ed? What’s going on? What is God doing in this spiritual battle with you?” Well that’s where God took me back to James 1. *Consider it pure joy.* Let’s put the passage again in a different graphic. God took me to James 1.

It’s a very difficult time in the early church. They were struggling as well. I’ve preached on this before. You’ve probably heard it or maybe remember a little bit of this, but the church just scattered. The twelve tribes are scattered because of persecution. They’ve lost their homes, they lost a lot of things. They’re struggling in all kinds of ways. All kinds of trials going on for them. They’re probably asking a lot of the same questions that I’m asking. What is going on here?

Let’s look at it again. *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* Not lacking anything.

What is the message of James? What is his message to these scattered and harassed believers? *Consider it pure joy when you face these trials.* Consider it. Because God is working in you to bring you maturity. Completeness. God is working in your life.

I ask a question, as we did last week: What is joy and how does it connect to happiness? What are the differences there? Scott spoke to that very well. I’ve blurred the distinction, the difference between those things. I really have. I’ve blurred the distinction.

Now James doesn’t say that we are to feel pure joy. I just normally put those things together, I think. It’s not saying that we should feel pure joy. Sometimes we may feel it. Sometimes we may not. He says *consider it*. So that’s something of the act of the will. Consider it. *Consider it pure joy.* Ponder it. Think about it. It is pure joy.

So what is it? I still ask the question what is it? Scott said it’s something supernatural. It’s something, in a sense, somewhat unexplainable. What is it? Tim Keller, again, calls it mirth. A sense of well being. Mirth. I’d never really heard that word before. Mirth. A sense of well being. Some deep sense that things are well.

Let’s look. Scott took us to 1 Peter. Let’s get that passage there and look at it again. The passage in 1 Peter we looked at last week. Another thing about suffering and joy. *In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.*

Inexpressible and glorious. That sounds great, doesn't it? I want that. I want that. I want that inexpressible joy. Inexpressible joy. Just ponder that a minute.

So suffering grief, and experiencing joy. We can do both at the same time apparently. We can do both. Suffering grief certainly isn't a happy idea. I don't think anybody is happy when we suffer grief, but we can experience some kind of joy in the midst of that. Tim Keller calls it mirth, a sense of well being. I'm pursuing this. I'm pursuing this over these two weeks. I'm pursuing an understanding of this, but I'm still in process.

This Friday I had a breakthrough. This Friday I experienced this on a certain level. A storm was starting to rage. You remember Friday? A storm was raging and the kind of anxieties that I can think of when there's a storm rage and the winds blow... "Oh my goodness. A tree is going to fall and destroy my house (as it did to some folks). Or branches are going to come down and it's going to be awful, awful, awful." That's the self-talk that I get into. I took it to the Lord. "Lord, I want to experience your joy. Inexpressible, glorious in the midst of this." And you know? I felt this deep underlying sense of peace. Wow. Did it carry on yesterday? Somewhat. I have to work at it.

Here's how I'm working at it. And this is a lot what I talked with Dan and Julie. I'm following it up, reading a book called *Telling Yourself the Truth*. Turning away from lies and telling yourself the truth. I'm telling myself the truth. I'm standing on the truth. I'm repeating the truth. I'm journaling the truth. I'm doing everything possible to tell myself the truth. What kinds of truth am I telling myself? I have the only thing that really matters. I have Jesus. The condition of my inner life is the most important thing. I have Jesus. I don't need anything else.

God is working and He's using everything to bring us to maturity. Maturity means being complete and not lacking anything. *Not lacking anything*. I'll talk about that more in a minute.

Perfect love casts out fear. I'm safe in Jesus' arms. That's a big one for me. This post-traumatic stress. What happened is with my accident all of a sudden this is the first time in my life after this happened I'm just starting to understand this. The first time I ever felt this kind of anxiety it got into my being. I didn't feel safe anymore. What is going to happen to me now? What tree is going to fall on me? What car is going to hit me? What catastrophe is going to hit? Because it was a catastrophe and I forget how God rescued me out of it. I get connected to that trauma. I get connected to the trauma and I kind of stay there in the trauma. The solution is to have perfect love. I'm safe. That doesn't mean I'm not going to have trauma, but I'm safe in Jesus' arms. Jesus is going to be there.

Now let's look at this idea. Let's look at the James passage one more time. I have to focus on this idea of being complete, not lacking anything. Sometimes I've read this passage and I've thought, "You know, okay God wants to make me complete so He can use me, but He doesn't really care about me." I'm looking at this passage in a new way now. God wants me to be mature and complete, yes, so He can use me, but so I'm not lacking in anything. Not lacking in anything. In other words, He wants me to be fully mature, have the character I need, the space and the joy I need to face anything. Because ultimately I'm going to face death itself. We all are. We're going to face that. Am I going to have what I need to face that? Am I going to have it?

God's love is so great that we can want for nothing. He wants us to get to that point where we want for nothing. We're secure in His love and His perfecting work in us. It's normal because God regularly uses these trials and pain is normal for us to experience pain because God uses it. Now am I saying we should go looking for pain? No. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying go look for pain. But it's God's way of working. We shouldn't consider it outrageous. It's normal. It's the way God is going to work.

Here's the crux of the matter for me. Here's the real problem. It's a lie. Now we got to get into the lie that I believe. In my head I understand this. I understand and all that. I understand God loves me. I understand it in my heart. I'm not fully there. I'm just not. I believe a lie. And it's a lie that's extremely prevalent in our world today. It's all over the place. We're bombarded with it all over the place. Bombarded. I'm bombarded with this lie. Media, friends, TV. I'm bombarded with it. Internet, Facebook, social media. I'm bombarded with it. I don't realize how that affects me. It affects me deeply and I don't know it.

Here's the lie: If God loved me, He should take this away from me. He shouldn't let me have to deal with that. That's one of the hardest issues for a lot of people considering Christ. It's the problem with suffering. It's the problem with pain. If God is really loving, why doesn't He take pain away? Why doesn't He take hunger away? Why doesn't He take away relational problems? Why doesn't He take racism away? Why doesn't He take injustice away? Why doesn't He take it away? That's another discussion to go fully into the depth of that, but there's a lie that I believe that God doesn't love me. If God loves me, He'd take away my pain.

Connected with it is being uncomfortable is terrible. It's just terrible. I shouldn't have to deal with these things. Pain is terrible. Suffering is terrible. Well you know it's not fun. But it's not terrible. It's not nearly as terrible as I think. God does love me because He uses pain to make me lacking in nothing. Lacking in nothing.

I'm referring a lot to Tim Keller. Tim Keller says we're conditioned to look at our circumstances as a measure of our life. We're conditioned. I've had to admit that. Okay, Lord. I'm conditioned. In my heart I believe this lie. I'm conditioned to look at my circumstances. The money that I have, the house that I have, the things that I have, the people that I have, the feelings that I have. I'm conditioned.

So I fear. I get fearful. When things don't look good, when things don't look right. Things are going to cause me pain. I don't like pain. I don't like it. I don't like anxiety. I don't like it. I'm conditioned. I believe a lie.

This week I called my orthopedic practice to cancel an appointment and then they had a message going there. The message was this (you may have heard it): Life isn't made for pain; it's for living. Life is made for living, not for pain. I understand that in a certain way. Again, we don't look for pain. We don't seek it out. But really the message there is we shouldn't have pain. It's the worst thing in the world. Pain is the worst thing in the world.

Well if we take Jesus' word seriously, it's not the worst thing in the world. In fact it's good. God's going to use it to shape and mold us. He's going to use this suffering. I don't think we go looking for it, but we embrace it. I'm starting to embrace it. I'm starting. I'm on the path. I'm not there. Okay? I am not there. I'm starting to embrace it. I need to repent. I need to repent of believing this lie and turn to the truth and keep telling myself this truth. I need to rejoice in the Lord always. I need to consider it pure joy. I need to seek out that joy. Joy that God can provide. Supernatural sense of well being. Seek it out. So I'm doing a lot of therapy.

James 4:7 says this: *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* I did that this morning as I was preparing. I plan to do that every morning now. To consciously submit myself to God, tell myself the truth, and resist the devil, and trust that he will flee from me. I'm actively challenging my misbeliefs and resisting the devil.

You remember the other diagram that Scott put up? The three doors? We're going to show the three doors here again. Remember these three doors? Door #1 was frustrated. Door #2 was overwhelmed. Door #3 was joyful. Remember that? That stuck with me.

One of my mottos on my good days and my bad days has been "choose joy." Choose joy. It's an act of the will, but it's also something supernatural that happens. I don't understand. In the midst of all these other things I'm dealing with, choose joy. Sometimes my heart chooses to ruminate on these other things. The frustrations, the overwhelmed, "oh it's so hard," rather than focusing on joy. Choose joy. Choose it! Submit myself to God, resist the devil, and believe he's going to flee from me.

So there's two things I'm doing. I'm resisting the devil, I'm telling myself the truth, I'm choosing joy. At the same time, I'm also revisiting this trauma in my life, dealing with the physical aspects that are going on and trusting that the two of those things God will use to bring new depth. The key is new depth. Getting the gospel down into every crevice of my being. That's what God is trying to do. That is what God is trying to do.

What is He doing in your life? What's He doing in your life? Your story is different than my story. You may connect to it. I hope it's helpful to connect to my story. You may have some of these depressed issues. You may have some of these fears and anxieties. You may have other things that are going on in your life. But Jesus knows them and He wants to work through them. In the midst of them He wants to work to bring you to completeness, lacking in nothing, and be able to say, "It is well with my soul. It is well with my soul because Jesus loves me. Nothing can take that away. There's no fear. My Daddy is Jesus. He loves me deeply and cares about me more than I could ever imagine."

We sung about grace, didn't we. Isn't that so wonderful? Grace is so wonderful that it can permeate everything. Brothers and sisters, let's embrace that grace in a new way. Let's turn away from the lies. What lies do you believe? Do you believe the same lies I believe? Life shouldn't be full of pain. It should be full of other things – happiness, joy.

[PRAYER] So Lord, we cry out to you for help.