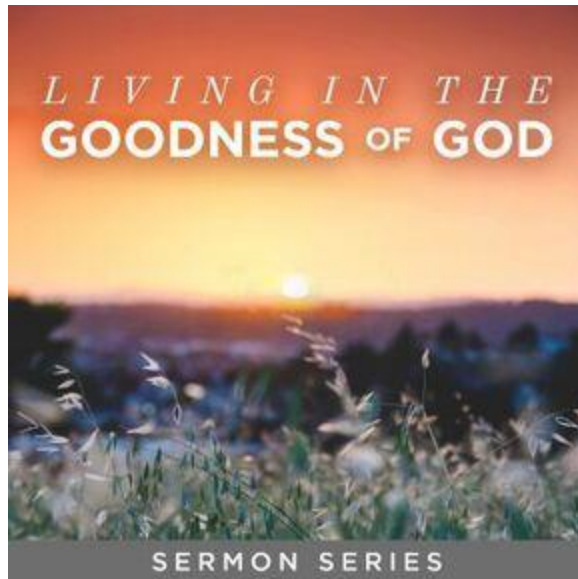


LIVING IN THE GOODNESS OF GOD

HOW DO I LET GOD MEET MY NEEDS? – PART 2
Matthew 6:24-35

Written by Pastor Steve Norman
April 18-24, 2021

Words of Encouragement Days 231-236



LIVING IN THE GOODNESS OF GOD

God's Favor - What is it and how to you get it?
Many men and women through the ages have been said to have God's favor. You, too, can have God's favor. This sermon series focuses on what it means to live in the goodness of God by trusting Him. Find the answer to worry, regret, indecision, emotional pain, and fear through the 12 expressions of God's goodness taught through the 23rd Psalm.

This Week's Memory Verse:

**"A psalm of David.
The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want."
Psalm 23:1**

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 231
FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - LOVE

"On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." Luke 10:25-28

REFLECT ON LOVE

WE have spent this whole week looking at love and what love really means. It's something that can easily be mistaken as predominantly romantic and most relevant on February 14th. As we have discovered, however, the Bible teaches us so much more about love. In today's passage, Jesus tells us to direct our love toward two things:

- 1) God
- 2) Our Neighbor

After giving this command, Jesus says in verse 28 "Do this and you will live." To live means to love and to love to the fullest - loving God and the people around us. In a world where hate between race, religion, and political opinions is so prevalent, the command from Jesus to love our neighbor is something we need to hold onto. It can be easy to show love to the people we like and get along with

well, but what about those who don't automatically fit into our circle or world - we are still called to love them, too.

REFLECT: How do you handle disagreements with others? Is your first response spoken with love and grace? If yes, keep doing what you're doing. If not, try to identify one step you can take to move toward responding in love and grace. Commit today to show others the love and grace of God through your words and actions.

TODAY'S PRAYER:

Father, Thank You for looking beyond my faults and for loving me unconditionally. Forgive me when I fail to love others in the same way. I want to love You with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind and to love my neighbor as myself. Give me eyes to see the needs of the difficult people in my life, and show me how to meet those needs in a way that pleases You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 232
FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - JOY

"I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in Him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13

JOY IN EVERY SEASON

WHEN you think of 'joy', what comes to mind? Happiness is often one of the first words. Joy is defined as "an emotion evoked by well being, success, or good fortune," and in other cases, it is "an expression of gladness or delight." This emotion is a byproduct of the Holy Spirit, which naturally produces fruits in our lives as we dwell in the Spirit.

In the world we live in today, which has been corrupted by selfish desires, death, and loss, biblical faith offers a unique perspective on joy. It's an attitude that we, as God's people, adopt not because of happy circumstances but because of the hopes we have through God's love and promise. Our natural, human inclination is to think that living through trials and negative circumstances would not be an occasion for joy. Choosing to respond to life's difficult situations with inner contentment and satisfaction does not seem to make sense. And why would it?

However, Paul wrote in Philippians that he chose joy in the Lord, which was a sign that Jesus' presence was with him, aspiring hope in the midst of his hardship. When we believe that Jesus' love has overcome death itself, joy becomes reasonable in the darkest of circumstances. This does not mean you ignore or suppress your sorrow. Paul often expressed his grief about missing loved ones and losing friends or his own freedom. He called this "being full

of sorrow and yet rejoicing". As he wrote those words, he acknowledged his pain but made a choice to trust Jesus that his loss would not be the final word. Joy does not mean forcing happiness during sad circumstances. However, joy comes during every season. Christian joy is a profound decision of faith and hope in the power of Jesus' own life and love. It is choosing to respond to these external circumstances with inner contentment and satisfaction in Christ because we know that God will use these experiences to accomplish His work in and through our lives. This joy is available to us. It is available to you today. Romans 15:13 encourages us to allow God to fill us with all joy and peace so we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. It all stems from the Spirit. If we allow the Spirit to reside in us, He will fill us with ALL joy.

REFLECT: Think about a time in your life when you experienced great joy. Take time today to write about it in your journal, and thank God for giving you that memory of joy.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I praise You for these lessons on strength and joy and for Paul's faithful life-witness left behind for me to learn from. You command me to be joyful always, but You do not expect me to be able to figure out how to attain or retain that joy myself. Instead, You gave Your Son, Jesus, to light the way to a joy-filled life. Through His earthly footsteps, I can study the example He left for me to follow. Thank You for Your word that reminds me "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." (2 Timothy 3:16) May Your Holy Spirit help me to understand Your word and will for my life. Fill my heart with sustaining joy and the strength to hold onto it no matter what happens in my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 233
FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - JOY

"Sing to the Lord, all you godly ones! Praise His holy name. For His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime! Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning." Psalm 30:4-5

THE SUN WILL SHINE ON YOU AGAIN

CAPTAIN Sir Tom Moore died recently at the age of 100 after having raised over 32 million pounds for the UK's National Health Service during the coronavirus pandemic. He has been hailed as a national treasure and an inspiration to many. During an interview regarding the pandemic, he assured listeners that we will get through this and that, "the sun will shine on you again and the clouds will go away." But I wonder, does it feel like that is the case as you read this today?

So often the darkness of today can rob us of knowing any real sense of joy. No matter who you are - whether good, bad, Christian or not - you will experience cloudy days when anything remotely happy seems a long way off. Christians are not given special immunity to escape the painful experiences of this life, so how can we claim to have joy even when life is hard? For Christians, real joy is deeper than temporary happiness. Being happy is often conditional on circumstances, people, and mood, whereas joy is a characteristic developed inside a person. One is controlled by the outside forces of the world we live in and the other by the Spirit of God living inside a person.

The psalmist wrote "weeping may last through the night, but joy comes in the morning." One of the great reasons we can be a people of joy is because we know what the morning looks like. We know that God is good and no

matter what happens in this world, He is still in control and has a master plan to renew all things. His anger is momentary compared to His favor. He brings His love and light into even the darkest of realities, and we see that most clearly on the cross. This does not mean we belittle or ignore the sadness and loss we experience now, but it does mean we have our hope fixed on something much stronger and eternal. The best is always yet to come for those who follow Jesus.

REFLECT: Today, take time to pray that God would reveal the joy of the morning to you, the kind of joy where God's love outlasts even the most tragic night. May this truth flow from within you so that you might be known as a person of joy and, like Captain Sir Tom Moore, may you indeed know that "the sun will shine on you again."

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You that You are in charge of my days. You know my frame (Psalm 136) and just how much weight I am able to carry (1 Peter 5:7, Matthew 11:28). Thank You for lifting my burden when it gets too heavy to carry. I know that every good and perfect gift comes from You (James 1:17). You know some days and even some seasons can feel heavier than others. Thank You for Your joy in the midst of the good and troubling times. Thank You that even in the midst of weeping, You give the promise that joy comes in the morning (Psalm 30:5). Help me to trust You enough to believe Your promise that, because of You, I can experience joy today and in the days ahead! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 234

FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - JOY

"Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing." James 1:2-4

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

"I can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, this is it, all my life I've suffered, but this is too much." These are the words one person reiterated with their friends, family, and church group during the most horrific event in their life. Depression, anxiety, and fear had infiltrated the core of this person's being and they were broken. Their body eventually caved in as they suffered a nervous breakdown. There were parallels to this person's story and Job in the Bible, as both shared a great suffering and loss. This person went on to state that, "My church community would attempt to comfort me with hope, and yet I'd find the pain silencing their words. I was desperate. I just wanted the pain to stop. I realized happiness was just a reactive emotion that was short-lived and I needed more."

When we read the verses in James 1, It is often challenging to hear what James was trying to communicate, and we can be left wondering what state of mind he was in when he wrote these words. Surely, he must realize that suffering and pain have no relationship with joy. Are we expected to keep a tally of each time we suffer and go through the torturous process of reminding ourselves of each scar as we hope to find joy? Or are we missing something?

Hindsight is a great educator. The darkest hours are often when our greatest lessons are taught. When we shift our focus away

from the suffering itself to fix our eyes completely on Jesus, a mindset change occurs. God promises to be with us and carry us through our suffering. Although knowing this does not necessarily negate the physical and mental suffering, we are able to see His face and watch as God pulls us through the storm. The joy we experience by remaining steadfast in our knowledge that our salvation lies with Jesus and that He alone is our strength, comfort, and joy can alleviate suffering no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in.

REFLECT: What are some names for God you find in scripture? What promises of God do you find in scripture? These names and promises do not change when we face challenges. God remains who His word says He is and He will keep every promise. Write a list of at least 10 promises God makes so you can read them when your next challenging time comes.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, You remind me over and over in Your Word that You are always with me. You tell me not to fear, and You draw me close into Your presence. You're the only place I can find refuge in the storms that surround me, and You're the only place I can find peace and strength. So I ask You for Your words of truth and power to strengthen me in my innermost being. Thank You for Your goodness, thank You that You know the way I am to take, and You have a plan. I look to You today; it's Your face I seek. Thank you, Lord, for Your Word that says You give me the power to come out of this trial "as gold." Thank You that the storm will not last forever, but I am only passing through. Thank You that nothing takes You by surprise, and You know my journey better than I know it myself. As I face each challenge, use it to build endurance and spiritual muscle in me, and help me to choose Your joy today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 235

FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - JOY

"So Jesus told them this parable: 'If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep." In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!'" Luke 15:3-7

SUPERNATURAL JOY

PASTOR and author, Max Lucado, shares this story about joy:

"On my 18th birthday, I was shopping with a friend and we stopped at this outdoor open mic spot in the middle of town. This guy requested someone play 'I Want it That Way' by the backstreet boys because it was his favorite song. When it got to the chorus, he got up and at the top of his lungs started singing. He danced, did a backflip, and sang even louder. He didn't seem to mind much that people were watching because he was having a great time. This man had deep joy."

Sometimes joy is hard. On the days when it is cold and gloomy, when things aren't going according to plan, or you are overwhelmed by life, joy feels like it is too far out of reach. Sometimes joy is hard to see and even harder to find. If you are there, you aren't alone.

But there is an indescribable joy that comes when you know that Jesus loves you, died for you, and has saved you so that you may have eternal life in Him. There is joy in the good

news of the Gospel. There is joy in knowing the stone that was rolled away on that third day, there is joy in the One who defeated death after giving His life as a ransom for us. Joy has a name and it's Jesus. When you experience the love of Christ, you will know true joy, a joy that will make you want to dance like you don't care who's watching and sing until your throat is sore. This is a joy that can't be bought at a store or found in a pot at the end of a rainbow. It's a joy that only comes from God, and it really is the best feeling in the world.

Can you feel it bubbling up inside of you as that huge smile appears on your face when you hear that Jesus LOVES you, and not only that, He likes you, too. You bring Him so much joy, and when you receive Jesus' love for yourself, the joy in heaven is unmatched. The party of all parties is thrown when you know you are loved by Jesus.

REFLECT: Take your journal and write about the last time you helped someone celebrate something good that was happening in their life? Perhaps it was a birthday party, anniversary, shower, holiday, or maybe just a time to get together. Now consider the good emotions and expressions shared at that event and use them to write about what it feels like to know Jesus celebrates you in much the same way.

TODAY'S PRAYER:

Father, Thank You that when joy feels far away, what You did for me on the cross is a reminder of the greatest joy ever, for it restored my relationship with you. Thank You for loving me. Holy Spirit, I ask that you would multiply Your fruit of joy in my life. Lord, help me today to choose joy as I delight in You and Your goodness to me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 236
FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - JOY

“Let the sea and everything in it shout His praise! Let the fields and their crops burst out with joy! Let the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for He is coming to judge the earth. Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! His faithful love endures forever.” 1 Chronicles 16:32-34

HIS JOY IS OUR STRENGTH

ONE of my favorite songs growing up was a song by Chris Tomlin, a classic - *Forever*. Now, if you've heard this song, you know that it edifies the Lord and His love which endures forever. Today's passage speaks about the same love as it relates the joy and rejoicing in our hearts to the everlasting love that God has for us.

Joy may, at times, be overlooked because of how often we feel it, how common it is for us to be surrounded by it. Or maybe it's not something we think of as a fruit of the Holy Spirit because its qualities are different from that of love or kindness or peace. Sometimes we can underestimate the power of joy, believing it's an add-on extra instead of something fundamental to our being able to flourish.

The Bible explains that "the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Nehemiah 8:10) It sustains us through hardship and is a light to those around us. Isaiah 35:10 states, "...and those the Lord has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away." There are times when joy may not be commonly experienced. However, when we accept the Lord Jesus Christ as our savior, and are reminded of who He is, we will continue to "give thanks to the Lord"

and know that "His love endures forever." (1Chronicles 16:34)

REFLECT: God delights to give us His joy. Take your journal and write a list of 10 things that fill your life with joy. Thank God for each one, pausing as you do to feel His joy fill your soul. Then go out this day filled with the strength His joy gives to you.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You for giving me Your joy as strength to handle what today will bring. I realize I may, at times, focus on what I don't have instead of all the many blessings You have given me. Forgive me for when I allow this to happen. I want to express gratitude to You every day. Thank You for saving me, forgiving me and providing for my needs each day. Fill me this day, I ask, with a renewed sense of Your joy which will be my strength. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve