

Father, we thank you for the way that you so consistently show up and meet us in this place. Father, would we walk out of here knowing you better than we knew you when we walked? In Jesus, mighty name, we pray. Amen. All right, so we've been talking through this series called Weary Wanderers.

That's what I've been calling it. That's not what it's called. The word Weary Wanderers. And what it's about is we're looking at all the different reasons that we as a culture seem to be so exhausted and tired and just drained altogether. What is going on?

So before I prepared this sermon, I sent out a research question to a bunch of different people. You're probably one of the people who got it, actually. And the question was this. What are some dumb and oddly specific things that. That could totally ruin your day?

I got so many good answers, guys. It was awesome. I'm gonna have to compile them all into a sheet and send them out. I'll get that to you. I picked a few of my favorites, mostly that I found relatable one.

When you go to the grocery store and you get all of the ingredients for a meal that you're really excited to make, and then you go home and you start making it, and you realize you forgot the one essential thing you needed. So you have to stop and you have to go back and you gotta start over and reset. You have. Your day's over. Like, you might as well go to bed and try again for tomorrow.

It's done. The most relatable one I got was when you're driving to Indianapolis and this is your view.

Honestly, the worst. So why? I don't know. Whatever. We'll get into that later.

I like this one, too. When you go to a public bathroom and you wash your hands and you go to dry your hands, but the only option is an air dryer, and it's incredibly loud, and it doesn't actually do anything. So you walk out and your hands are wet and you have a migraine. Incredible. What a great feeling.

Yes. All things that could totally ruin my day. There's one answer I got that struck me because of how profoundly real and accurate it was to me. One person said this. When I do the thing that I told God I would never do again, what could ruin your day quite like that?

I broke a promise I made to God. Oh, my goodness. Today we're talking about joy, and it's important to differentiate what we're talking about and what we're not talking about. So you've probably thought about the difference between happiness and joy before, but today I want to take a moment to define what it is that we're actually talking about. Happiness we can think about as a state of emotional well being and contentment.

It's the absence of suffering. It's all circumstantial. Joy is a settled confidence in the goodness of God no matter what. That's actually Pastor David's definition, and I think it's dead on. And like faith or hope or love, joy is interesting because though it's not an emotion, it can definitely bleed into emotion.

There are some times you feel more loving than other times. Sometimes you feel more faithful than other times. Sometimes. Sometimes you feel more joyful than other times. But just because you don't feel joy in a given moment doesn't mean you don't have it.

Joy transcends circumstance. So to help you think about it scientifically, I believe this. It is entirely impossible to be stuck behind three semi trucks and experience happiness. It cannot be done. Impossible.

Why? Because that circumstance is horrible. But joy, you can experience that when you're on your way to Indianapolis stuck behind three semi trucks. Why? Because joy transcends circumstance.

Okay, that's cool. Not only can you experience it, though, here's the hard part. You're commanded to. You're actually supposed to have joy in that moment. It's an expectation for a follower of Christ to experience joy.

Look at these passages that command followers of Christ to have joy. James 1. He puts it this way. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds. Pure joy.

Not like partial, like kind of joyful. But there's some other stuff. No, it's pure joy. That's what he calls you to have. Okay, Philippians 4.

4. Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again. Rejoice always. Like all the time.

Like in every situation all the time. And full of joy. Not like quarter tank, like full. That's what we're talking about. Okay, not loving this.

First Peter 4. He says it probably the most directly. Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you as though something strange were happening to you. You. But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ.

You could very faithfully translate that. Fiery ordeals to say hell on earth. When you are walking through the flames, when you are at the peak of your suffering, what should you do? Rejoice. Some translations translate that.

Rejoice to just say, be glad. Okay, if you were my therapist and I said, I feel like I'm in hell right now, and you said, be glad, I'd fire you. I don't know if I have the power to fire you, but I'd find a new therapist. That's terrible advice. Why is Scripture telling us to do this?

It doesn't even seem reasonable. It seems therapeutically unhealthy, actually. I think, okay, as I've been putting together this sermon and thinking about joy, I learned something about myself, and that is that I have a natural distrust toward joyful people.

I don't trust them. Like, what are you hiding? You know, like, why are you. So what's going on here? Joyful people freak me out.

Now, here's the deal. I've suddenly realized in conversations with other people, I'm not alone in that. Actually, a lot of us, when people are like, happy, go lucky. We're like, okay, what's going on there, buddy? All right?

And I think there's actually a good reason for this. Culturally, something's going on that's subliminal, but actually very important to name. What is it? As a culture, we've decided that we really, really, really value authenticity. Be yourself.

Be transparent. Be who you really are. Don't hide anything. And I think that's really good. We're coming out of an era of people just feeling like frauds and stuff, and we just don't want any more of that.

We just want people to be real. My generation came up with an app called Bereal. It didn't work. No one was actually real, but we had an app called Bereal. They tried, okay, we really want to be real.

That's a high premium. And at the same time, we've got these phones on us. And anytime any suffering or pain or injustice or violence or death or war happens around us in the world, what do you do? You get an automatic notification that keeps you up to date. So all day long, you're being filled with constant reminders of the wickedness, the evil, and the turmoil in this world.

It's constant. So then the question becomes, if I am going to be real. Because we've decided that's important. Be authentic, and you're going to live in a painful, horrible world. To be real means to be miserable, and we've conflated the two.

So if you are going to be yourself, you must be miserable. Now, let me illustrate this for you. You've probably

experienced this. Have you ever had someone ask you, how are you? And you say, I'm doing well, how are you?

And they say, no, no, no, no, no. How are you really? What are they asking? No, but like, what's wrong, though? Why?

Because it only seems real. If you tell me what's going wrong in your life. Tell me about your suffering, your misery, your pain. That's authentic. So what happens?

The inverse is true too. Now when we see people who are joyful, oh my gosh, that lady who posts pictures on Instagram with her family and they're all smiling. You're like, bunch of frauds. There's no way they're happy. There's no joy there.

So now we see people who are joyful and we don't trust them. We think they're hiding something. And here's what's happened. As a culture, we've gotten to this point where we say it is impossible to both be authentic, to be real, and to experience joy. Those two things are now mutually exclusive.

You must pick one. And if you're going to pick joy, you're going to have to be an escapist. You're just going to have to pretend like what's going on in the world isn't really happening. And if you're going to pick realism, you're just going to have to be miserable. Those are your options and the invitation in the Gospel.

The question of the gospel is, is it possible to. To both be entirely real and authentic and to experience joy that isn't fake? I'm sure you know the answer to this is yes. But you're probably kind of questioning how if you're anything like me, because what Peter isn't saying, when he says, you're going to go through these fiery ordeals, rejoice. He is not saying plaster a smile on your face and get through it and pretend like you're having a good time.

That's not what he's saying. He's saying, experience real joy. How in the world is that even possible? Well, if this were a TED Talk, I would now give you my five step program on how to find joy. But we're at church, so we're going to talk about Jesus.

Let's look at him for a second. Did you know Jesus was an incredibly joyful guy, full of joy? And I've often wondered what in the world motivated him to stay up on the cross. You remember the guy on the cross next to him said, you know, like, angels could just take you down if you want. Like, you don't have to stay up there.

He didn't have to. When he was up there enduring that pain. There was no reason for him to stay. Why did he. What motivated him to stay up there?

Did you know that it was joy. Joy kept him up there. Look at Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 2. This is what it says. For the joy set before him, Jesus.

He endured the cross scorning its shame, and he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Okay, how did Jesus endure the cross? He did it for the joy set before him. What is the joy set before him? Well, you might read that and think it's talking about sitting at the right hand of the throne of God.

Like maybe he was just so excited to finally get out of earth and go sit back with the Father again. But that can't be it. And I'll tell you why. Because he already had that before he descended, before he was human. He already was with the Father.

He already experienced perfect joy with him. He already had that. He gave it up and then he came back. So nothing changed there as a result of the cross. Jesus relationship with God was already set.

So what is the joy set before him? The question becomes, well, what did the cross change? The cross changed God's reconciliation with us. All of a sudden, humanity was welcomed into a relationship with him. Now, let me say this as clearly as I possibly can, because if you don't get this point, you're going to be lost for the rest of this sermon.

It's not going to make any sense to you, but you need to get it. What was the joy set before Christ that motivated him to endure the cross?

You. That was you. He is so overjoyed and delighted by you that he was able to endure the cross. That's what motivated him to do it. Now let's talk about what the cross is, because you might see this thing up behind me and just kind of have that picture in your head of what the cross is.

But that's not what he's talking about. It's not just that he was so motivated by the joy and delight that he has in you, at the potential to have a relationship with you again, that he was able to endure not just the cross, but everything that came with it. The cross is the pinnacle of every human nightmare you could dream up. It's public humiliation. It's all of the people you spent your whole life fighting to heal, to bring life to turning on you and killing you.

It's the most painful, physical, excruciating death you can possibly imagine. It's betrayal by a close friend. And not only that, man Worst of all, Jesus on the cross, he cries, father, Father, why have you forsaken me? Do you know what that means? Do you know what forsaken means?

That means God forgot about him. That's the same word. It means God forgot. Can you imagine? For a moment God puts you out of his mind.

He just pretends like you don't even exist. He forgets about you. That's what Christ endured. How was he able to endure it? He saw you and he was filled with so much joy that he said it was worth it.

In Hebrews 12, it says, not only was he filled with joy that it gave him the power to endure the cross. It says this. He scorned its shame. What does that mean? It was well worth it.

He was like, that's nothing. That suffering, that degree of suffering, well worth it to get to you. Oh, my goodness. And then he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, and there he sits now. So get this through your head because it's so important.

You've probably heard for your whole life that God loves you. And that's very, very, very true. But what I need you to hear today is not just that God loves you, but that he really, really likes you. He does. He enjoys you.

He delights in you. Look at this story from Matthew, chapter three. It's talking about Jesus baptism. And there's a voice from heaven that comes down when Jesus is baptized. And God the Father says this.

He says, this is my dearly loved son who brings me great joy. You may have heard it translated as, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I take great delight. It's the same thing. It's great joy. He brings him great joy.

Now why is that significant? Because when that happens in Matthew chapter 3, Jesus hasn't done anything yet. Nothing's happened. He hasn't healed a single person. If you read the book, all that's happened is there's a genealogy, and then Jesus is born, and then it's his baptism.

He hasn't done anything. He certainly hasn't died and risen from the dead yet. And yet, for some reason, without having done anything yet, Jesus already brings great joy to his Father. That's fascinating, because what that tells you about Jesus model for ministry is that it starts with God's delight. It doesn't end with it.

Jesus doesn't do everything. And then God looks back and says, oh, now I'm proud of you. Now I rejoice in you. Now you bring me delight. Now, not at all.

It starts with it. That's the starting block. And guess what? Because of Christ's work on the cross, the same is now true of you in the Gospel. Look at this.

Tim Keller says this in the Freedom of Self Forgetfulness, a really good book. If you haven't read it yet, he describes the gospel in this way. Do you realize that it is only in the Gospel of Jesus Christ that you get the verdict before you get the performance? The atheist might say that they get their self image from being a good person. They are a good person and they hope that eventually they'll get a verdict that confirms that they are a good person.

Performance leads to the verdict. If you're a Buddhist, performance leads to the verdict. If you're a Muslim, performance leads to the verdict. What that means is that all day long you, you are in the courtroom and all day long you are on trial. That's the problem.

And yet in Christianity, the opposite is true. The verdict leads to your performance.

We're thinking about what it is that's making us so weary. And a lot of our weariness comes when we get that all confused, when we think we have to fight to earn God's joy, when we feel like we have to make God like us.

I actually can't think of. I was trying to think of things that make me super exhausted. I don't know if you've ever been caught in a lie. I have. It's the worst feeling ever.

Now I want you to imagine for a moment that you're in a courtroom and you actually have committed murder. And you're guilty of it. And you know it, you did it. And all of the evidence is pointing to you. And everyone in the courtroom can see that it was you.

And you have a voice in your head saying, you know, you did that. And you have to sit there the whole time and try and convince yourself and everybody else that you didn't. No, I. No, no, no, that's not true. That's not true.

What could be more wearying and exhausting than spending all that time trying to prove something true that you know is a lie? Now here's what we do with God. We try to prove to God that he should enjoy us. But deep down we know that he shouldn't. There is no reason God should enjoy me.

And you see this all the time. Maybe you do all these good religious things. You're at church right now. Good job. Maybe you pray, maybe you fast once in a while.

Maybe you read scripture. Wow, you're so devout. I don't know. I'm really proud of you and you're like God, you should enjoy me. You see how faithful I am.

And then all of a sudden something happens where your true colors come out and you're exposed and all of a sudden you see some wickedness and your ego comes out. You're selfish, you're manipulative, you lie, you're hurtful. And it becomes clear to you, man, God, you should not like me, and you know it. And that voice in your head is saying, there's no reason God should enjoy me. Can't he see who I really am?

And what do you do? You bury it. And you start fighting again. And you go, all right, I'm going to get back into the Bible. I'm going to get back into prayer.

I going to get super religious again. And then finally God might believe that I'm worth enjoying. I'm going to prove to him that I am worth enjoying. Guess what? You're not.

And neither am I. There is no reason that God should enjoy you. Not at all. There's no reason he should take great delight in you. Me neither.

But guess what? That's the gospel message. There is no reason at all that God should love any one of us. But he does. And if you want rest from your weariness, it begins by admitting that.

That there is nothing I can do to earn or deserve God's joy in me. But guess what? Somehow I just have it. So what kills the weariness when we let go? Because our joy dies when we think that God's joy must be earned.

Okay, but surely God doesn't, like, enjoy me all the time, right? Like, what about those moments when my true colors really do come out and my evil is on display? There's no way he likes me when I'm in the middle of sinning. Yes, he does. Yeah, he really does.

And let me tell you why God doesn't experience your life the way that you do. You go through time and you have these peaks and these valleys and you've got these moments when you're a really good Christian. You have these moments when you're a really bad Christian. And it just keeps going, right? God doesn't experience your life that way.

He's not bound by time. Right. He is just as present with you now as he is currently with your past self and your future self. And he sees your whole life as a whole. What does that mean for you?

It means that it is impossible. Impossible to disappoint God. Why? Because disappointment in and of itself, by its nature, presupposes an element of surprise. That God could somehow have an expectation for you and think you're going to do this thing and you blow it.

And he's like, what? Are you kidding me? How did you do this? You can't do it. You can't catch God off guard.

You can't disappoint him. It can't be done. You know what you can do? You can grieve him. That's certainly true.

You see that all over scripture. When you do sin and when you do things that are wrong, you hurt him. You hurt his feelings. Like you just hurt him. You hurt your relationship with him.

But guess what? You can't disappoint him. You can't make him enjoy you any less. That can't happen. Here's the truth.

You just simply don't have the power to steal the joy, the pleasure and the delight that God has in you because it's not dependent on you. Unless you want to argue that you're stronger than God, in which case, good luck.

So, Darren, are you saying that if God enjoys me no matter what I do, I can just go do whatever I want? I can just go nuts, go wild? Of course not. What in the world that'd be like if you came up to me after service and you said, darren, I think that girl over there, I think she likes you. And I was like, oh, my gosh, that's awesome.

I'm gonna go burn her house down. Okay, sure. Why in the world would you do that? That doesn't make any sense. Who responds to someone enjoying them with some kind of desire to hurt them?

That doesn't make any sense at all. Why do we do that with God? Oh, if I can't screw it up with God, I can just go do whatever I want. I can go hurt him. I can smack him across the face.

I can try to burn his house down. Like, no. Why in the world would you want to do that? Now, here's maybe one reason why. If you feel like God enjoying you isn't dependent on you and therefore you can do whatever you want, what that tells me is you just don't value God all that much.

If that girl has feelings for me and I go burn her house down, clearly I just don't care about her. She's not all that important to me. That might be true of you with God. If you're just going to use all of this as a scapegoat to go do whatever you want, that just tells me you don't care about him much at all, yet you still can't hurt how much he enjoys you.

Okay, so God enjoys me. That doesn't give me the license to do whatever I want. But there's nothing I can do to screw up the joy that God has in me, huh? So how do I experience joy? Joy is a fruit of the Spirit.

You know that when you see it in Galatians, you see it listed. It's one of the fruit of the Spirit. Now, that's very important because that means it's not a fruit of you, it's not yours. It's a fruit of his. It's a fruit of the Spirit.

The joy that you're invited to have is not your own joy. It's not something you conjure up. It's actually his joy. It belongs to him. It's his fruit.

So how do you experience joy? Well, if it's a fruit of the Spirit, you seek the Spirit, right? The funny thing about joy is if you seek it, you'll never find. Won't happen. It's a fruit of the Spirit.

So what do you do? You seek him first. You seek Christ. Seek first the kingdom of God, and all else will be added to you. Look at him.

Seek him. And fruit, this joy, this peace, all of it, it just kind of comes naturally. Pastor David likes to talk about how we're all like trees, and the Psalms do too. It's really funny. But we're compared to trees all the time.

Now, what is a tree's only job? It actually only has one job in and of itself, and that's to put itself in more and more position to receive the sunlight. That's all it does because everything else happens externally to it and just kind of grows within itself naturally. The only thing it actively does is move into more and more position to receive more and more sunlight, so. So it can grow more and more fruit.

What is your job as a Christian? To put yourself in a position to receive what God has for you more and more and more. And as you seek him and he is your priority, all of this other stuff, this fruit, gets added to you. Joy comes as a result of seeking him. And you'll be in trouble if God becomes a means to an end.

If you say, I want joy, but I will use God to get it. Lord, I'll follow you if you make me happy, if you bring me joy, then I'll do it. You'll never find it. But if God is the ends you have in mind, if he's what you really want, you will find joy. It's there.

Have you ever liked somebody Maybe you remember, like middle school, high school, like first crush, remember liking them? You ever been liked by somebody? That's a good feeling. Feels good to be liked. Have you ever had both happen at the same time?

That's crazy. Wow, what a time. Something fun happens at the very beginning of relationships. And if you're in a very healthy relationship, it sustains for a long time. That's this.

When you're with someone who enjoys you and whom you enjoy, everything becomes enjoyable. You can be walking around Walmart, looking at the shelves, and you're just delighted to be at Walmart. Why? Because the person who enjoys you and who you enjoy is with you. Walmart's fun.

How did we do that? It's a miracle. It can happen. We made Walmart fun. You can be stuck behind three semi trucks on your way to Indianapolis, but if that person is with you, oh my goodness, you might not even notice that there's three semi trucks in front of you because you're so overwhelmed with the joy that you find in that person.

That's beautiful. That's what we're called to. But if you watch relationships go for a long time, you've probably experienced this too. Sometimes what can happen is these relationships can grow stale and they can grow weary. And maybe you've experienced this feeling and it's a scary feeling.

I don't think they enjoy me like they used to. I don't think they get as much delight in me as they used to. I don't think they like me like they used to. And this distance starts growing and this panic sets in because you're starting to wonder, am I going to lose them? What do I need to do?

How do I get them back? And all of a sudden you start performing and you start doing all of these things to try and prove to them once again that you're enjoyable. Please enjoy me again. Look, I can take you on a good date. I can do this or that or whatever.

And all of a sudden you're motivated. Instead of pure joy, because of your delight in them, you're now motivated by fear to get that joy back. What have you done? You flipped the verdict and the performance again, right? Keep them straight.

The verdict is set. It leads to your performance. When you get anxious, when you get filled with fear, when the starts pouring in on you, you flip them. When you get scared that you're going to lose them, you flip them. You do not have to fear losing God's delight in you.

Why? It's not dependent on you. You can't mess it up. You don't have to sit here and panic and stir and try to get God to

like you. You never do because it was never dependent on you in the first place.

You can't make him like you any less, and you can't make him like you anymore. He just is fully delighted in you at all times.

Some of you are going to walk out of here and pretty quickly face some form of hell on earth. I don't know what that's going to look like. It might be more subtle. You might get in your car and put on a playlist you really like, but it only plays the songs on it you're not in the mood for. I'd say that's a form of hell.

You might be cut off in the parking lot trying to get out of here by, you know, three semi trucks. If someone's driving semi trucks to church, you can stop, by the way, maybe you'll go pick up your child from the children's ministry, and they'll be kicking and screaming and crying, and it's going to embarrass you, and you're going to be uncomfortable, and you're going to be like, oh, my goodness, you're just going to want to get out of here. Maybe you're going to go out to the Hub afterward and you're going to endure some awkward tension you have with someone else in this congregation, and it's just going to be like that. Oh, that painful weirdness that, what do I do?

You might find yourself getting into an accident. You might find yourself getting hurt. You might even lose someone you love dearly. There's no way to know. Suffering finds us.

It always does. When you walk into the next fiery ordeal, you may not be happy, but it is entirely possible, and not only possible, commanded and expected, that you have the joy of the Lord. How is that even possible? The joy of the Lord is unshakable. Why?

It's not dependent on you. It's dependent on Him. And he in and of himself is unshakable. Okay, so the joy of the Lord is unshakable. Joy is a fruit of the spirit.

That means it's not yours, it's His. That means when you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior and the Holy Spirit comes and lives inside of you, the joy you experience is not yours, it's His Now. What does that mean? It's not dependent on anything but him and he's not changing. That's the joy you are invited to join in on.

That's the joy he has for you guess what that also means? It means the joy you have is not even dependent on you. Not at all. It's entirely dependent on him. You can screw up all day long.

You can't mess up your own joy. Why? Because it's not yours, it's his, and it's not dependent on you. That's the kind of joy that leads Paul to be able to say, the troubles we face here, they're just light and momentary compared to the glory I get to see in Christ. Oh, my goodness.

This is all just light and momentary. Now, we looked at this passage earlier, but I want to zoom out and look at it in its full context. So you can see this. This is Hebrews 12, 2, 3. And it says this.

Let us run with perseverance, the race marked out for us. If you've ever run a race, you know that it's just chronic suffering. It's just pain, okay? And that's the picture he has for life, okay? When you're running through life, it's just pain.

Just keep running with perseverance. Just keep going. It's marked out for you, okay? What do I do? Fixing our eyes on Jesus.

Look at him. Look at him. Fix your eyes on him. He's the pioneer, the founder, the starting place and the perfecter. The guy who did it absolutely right.

He's the pioneer and the perfecter of faith for the joy set before Him. That's you. For you, he endured the cross, the pinnacle of human nightmare. He did it for you. He endured it.

He scorned its shame. He considered it nothing. And then he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. And he sits

there today in power. So what?

Consider him. Think about Him. Meditate on Him. Talk to Him. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners.

Why? So that you will not grow weary and lose heart. How do I hold on to this joy when life is so wearying? Look at him. Talk to him.

Don't focus on your joy. Focus on Him. Look at him. Look at the joy he has in you. So much so that it endured.

It empowered him to endure pain we will never have to endure we can't even imagine. The Westminster Catechism asks the question, what is the chief end of humanity? The question there is basically, why do human beings exist at all? Why are we even here? And the answer it gives is this.

To glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Some commentators translate it to say, to glorify God by enjoying him forever. And I think that's dead on. I'll Tell you why. Imagine your own funeral for a moment.

What can bring more glory to a person than just people coming up from near them from their whole life, coming on stage and talking and pouring out about how much they enjoyed you. They just loved being around you. They took great delight in your presence. They enjoyed you. Oh, my gosh.

And how dishonoring to have the opposite to be at your funeral. And people are coming up like man. They. They were a burden on me. I didn't enjoy them at all.

They're a piece of work. Which is your view of God? Is God a burden to you? Is he heavy to you? Does he make your life more difficult?

Or is God someone that you deeply enjoy? Because let me tell you, if the mission of your life is to bring glory to God, there's no better way to do it than by enjoying Him. There's no better way to bring glory to the Lord than by delighting in Him. And guess what? Because the Lord takes great delight in you, because he enjoys you, because he likes you, and because it's not dependent on you, guess what?

You are now invited to enjoy him too. You can. Because he enjoys you, because he finds joy in you, you can enjoy Him. Would you pray with me?

Father, we thank you for the fact that you are so consistent, so stable, so faithful, so reliable. You don't change. Everything around us just seems like chaos. But Father, you pursue us and you keep after us and you don't let us go, even though we don't deserve it at all. There's no reason you should enjoy us the way that you do.

There's no reason you should take delight in us the way that you do. But for some reason, you do anyway. And all we can do is surrender. So, Father, we surrender everything we have and everything that we are to you entirely. And it's in Jesus' mighty name, we pray this.