

# Four Pillars of Walking with God

by Paul Washer

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It is a tremendous privilege for me to be here this morning. This is going to be kind of unusual. It's not going to be what you would consider probably a Sunday sermon. It's going to be more like discipleship. We're going to look at some very, very simple but very important and foundational truths that-- well, my purpose is this: I want to see you with more joy. I want to see you more greatly encouraged. Now, this is not going to be a sermon that kind of stirs the emotions so that you walk out here with some kind of spiritual high. But it's going to teach you a few things that if you will live by them, it will increase your joy. And increasing your joy, it will increase everything else good that the Lord has put in your life. I want you to be encouraged. So often I look at God's people - I'm talking about God's people; people who show the fruit of salvation in their life - and yet so often they seem so downcast, so tight in their heart, so trodden down. I don't want that. That's not God's will for you. God's will for you is to recognize all that He is, all that He has done, all that He will do. For you to recognize that, grasp it, and walk in the power of it.

Now I want to start off by saying something, that there are great biblical truths that are absolutely necessary to live by. But oftentimes, in the heart and mind of a believer, they become nothing more than clichés. Because we can say them, we can even know that they're true to some degree, but we really can't articulate them. We really don't know what they mean. And if we use them often enough, they'll end up in bittering our heart because we say things, and yet they seem to have no power to change us. Let me give you an example. You're downcast and trodden. And someone comes up to you and says, "You just need to trust in God." Yeah, but what do you mean? What does it really mean to trust in God? Or, "You just need to look to Christ." Where? Where do I look? What are you talking about? Or, "You just need to contemplate and meditate upon the gospel." Or, "You just need to savor and relish the gospel." Yes. But what does that mean? How do I do it? What are you really talking about? Or, "Hey, don't be downcast. The joy of the Lord is our strength." Yeah, I know. I read that in Nehemiah 2. But what does it mean? How can it really impact my life?

I was a brand new believer, well, probably about less than a year into the Christian faith. And I went to hear Leonard Ravenhill preach. But before he preached, a younger preacher got up and preached. And he preached about an hour and a half on how we all needed to walk in the Spirit. It was powerful. I mean, he was yelling at us, he was rebuking us, he was admonishing us to walk in the

Spirit. After the sermon, I went up to him and I said, "I really appreciate that sermon. It was really good. I really want to walk in the Spirit. I just have one problem: I don't have a clue what that means. What does it mean to walk in the Spirit?" He looked at me, got very serious, and then began to basically tell me off. But I was very fortunate, there was an older believer (a college student but at many more years in the faith. They were a senior, I think) who was standing behind me and put his hand on my shoulder and pushed me out of the way. And he walked up to that preacher and said, "Preacher, you didn't answer his question. You didn't tell him how to walk in the Spirit. You did not tell us how to do that in the sermon. You're not telling him how to do that now. Do you even know what it means to walk in the Spirit?" You want to ruin a lot of good sermons? Raise your hand and ask them what they're talking about.

The question is we hear all these great truths, but sometimes they just spin around in our heads. They spin around in our heads. You all know that there's a thing called Systematic Theology, right? Well, why is it called systematic theology? Because it's theology that's presented in a systematic way. Now why is that necessary? Because you and I, in our mind, we use categories. We do. We can't get away from it. We think, "This is a reality, and this is a reality, therefore this." Well, it's the same way sometimes when we study the Scriptures. How can I take all these truths that are swirling around and really put them in a category so that I can actually do something with them? Okay? Now I want to give you a statement that I wrote out in my mind at about 3:00 AM on Thanksgiving morning, because I couldn't sleep. And it's this: I want to talk about the four pillars, just four simple pillars of, well, you can call it the Christian life. You can talk about four pillars of walking with God, four pillars of being encouraged, four pillars leading to obedience, I don't care what you call it.

But here are four things that I want to give you: Knowledge of the truth. That's the first one. Knowledge of the truth. And we're going to go through these separately. But knowledge of the truth is the beginning. "You will know the truth" about everything, about everything in the Scriptures, about every aspect of the Christian life. It is important to know the truth. You must know truth and be able to discern the difference between truth and a lie. That's essential. And that's the first pillar, the first foundation. Knowledge of the truth apprehended by faith. It's not enough to know these things but to actually believe them, so that although they are unseen, they are still greater, they can become even greater realities than that which is seen. So it's knowledge of the truth, and then it is you believing that truth as opposed to believing a lie. Knowledge of the truth, faith in what is true, believing what is true, and, that, in the Christian life, will always lead to joy.

The more you apprehend the truth about who God is, about what God has decreed, about what God has done, and what God will do: and with each one of those, I could end it "for you, for you, for you, for you." The more you grasp it and believe it, the greater your joy. And I cannot in any shape, form or fashion overemphasize the importance of joy. I think it is the thing that energizes the Christian. Joy. And then the last pillar is obedience. Now I'm going to talk about this later, but I want you to realize something. Joy comes before obedience rather than after. And if you don't understand that, you will really be messed up all your days. Joy is not the result of obedience. Joy is the result of what God has done. So now your joy is fixed on a fixed and stable source. When your joy is based on your performance, it's going to be up and down like the wind, up and down like the raging sea, double-minded, mutable, changing constantly. You see that.

Now we're going to look at each one of these now, each one of these pillars, and there's four of them. Again, knowledge of the truth, faith in the truth leading to joy, which leads to obedience. Now let's go. First of all, knowledge. Knowledge of what? And I want you to use this. You can use this as a pattern (I do) for reading the Scriptures. When I read the Scriptures, what am I looking for primarily? Well, let me digress a little bit. This is what I'm looking for primarily when I read the Scriptures: Who is God? Who is God? That's my number one question when I'm reading any passage of Scripture. What does it tell me about God? What does it tell me, not only about God, but about God for me? Yeah. And then what does it tell me about what God has decreed for me? What has He decreed about me, about my life? What has God done? What has He done in history, in the world, in the gospel? What has He done for me also? And then, finally, what will He do?

But now let's just look: Knowledge of who God is. That's the first thing I'm looking for when I'm studying the Scriptures. What does it tell me about God? Because if the Scriptures reveal to me this wonderful, wonderful, wonderful God, it has a way of increasing my joy when I know that this wonderful Being is in control of my life. Jeremiah says this, "Thus says the Lord, Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on the earth, for I delight in these things, declares the Lord."

Now, saint, I've talked enough to enough of you to know that many times when you study the attributes of God, it is not an encouragement to you, because you're studying the moral attributes of God without doing it in light of the gospel. So when you hear God is holy, holy, holy, you kind of cringe, because you look in the mirror and see your own life and you recognize, "I'm not really that holy." And so, instead of it leading to hymns of praise, you write a song like this: "You are holy,

and I am a worm. Step on me and watch me squirm." You do things like that. So you see, holiness is something to be afraid of - why? - because you see the reality of your sin but you're not looking at the gospel.

Holiness now, for you, is wonderful ! This God will never sin against me. He will never be common. He will never be profane. This God who is for me is holy. And then you hear about righteous - He doeth all things in a right manner. He is wrong in nothing. Now if I see that apart from the gospel, the only thing I can see is judgment. But if I see that in the gospel, I say this: "If God is for me, who can be against me? If God, not 25% for me, not 75% for me, not 99% for me; this holy, righteous God is 100% for me, and 100% of His holiness, and 100% of His righteousness, and 100% of His justice is for me. It's on my side." Do you see that? It's no longer against me. And so if I look at who God is in light of the gospel, then all these things that, when I was a sinner, were a terror to me, they're now a joy to me. I'm not afraid of them. Not because I look in the mirror deluded and see some perfect person who's not there. No, but because I know the gospel. Everything has changed.

When Paul says, his argument in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If any man be in Christ, he's a new creation. Old things pass away, new things have come." What is he saying? He's actually talking about probably the last chapters in Isaiah when it talks about a new heaven and a new earth. You're the beginning. Do you realize that? You are the beginning of a new heaven and a new earth. And Paul's saying, if you look at it in the context, he's basically saying this: "I look at Christ now completely different. And in the light of Christ, I look at everything else completely different. Who I am before God, my past, my present, my future, God's relationship with me, my relationship with God, it is completely changed." So now, in light of the gospel, I don't hide myself from the Bible. I don't sit there and go, "Oh, don't tell me He's holy. It scares me." It doesn't scare me anymore. Not at all. It's wonderful. Tell me more. Tell me more. Tell me more, please! Because this God who is holy and righteous and just and everything else is for me. Do you see that? Okay. The people from Georgia, say, "Amen" [laughter]. He's for me. Do you see that?

Now what else? Not only who is God, What has God decreed? I mean, before the foundation of the world, what did He write down with regard to what He's going to do with you? It's amazing! Whenever you hear the word "foreknowledge", realize that it also has within it God's sovereignty. But it also has this idea of His plan is not something He just threw together. This is, if we can say such a thing, this is taking the full force of all His mental faculty. This is He's thought about this. Not only did He choose you before the foundation of the world, before the foundation of the world He set forth a plan of what He's going to do with you. Just look for a minute at creation. Romans 8:21, "The creation itself also will be set free

from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God." Think about that. Everything in creation that moans and groans, along with my bones, everything in creation that gets old and tears down and breaks and is ruined and is dirty, it's all going to be set free. He decreed it! Not only set free, but turned over to the children of God. That's enough to make me greatly happy.

"But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." I do believe that back in the '70s, there wasn't too much teaching (most of you weren't born in the '70s), but there wasn't too much teaching on eschatology. There was just a bunch of wrong teaching on eschatology. I want you to know that the study and what the Bible reveals about the last things is absolutely wonderful and motivating. It lets me know that there are great things in store for me. All the wonder and all the mystery, the knowledge of God in the fullest way possible. The knowledge of His creation. The knowledge of everything. I always get mad at those patriarchs who lived 900 years. I go, "God, why can't I live 900 years? After all, I really do want to know physics. I want to study this other thing too. There's so many things in life I want to know I can't know." One day, all of this is going to be set free from corruption, and I'm going to be basking in it, searching out the glory of God under every perfect stone.

He goes on. Not only what He's decreed for creation, but what He's decreed for God's people. For you. I know you look in the mirror of God's Word, and sometimes you're even disgusted with yourself. At least, I am. I have no hope. It brings no joy just looking in the mirror at myself. Listen to what He says, "For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope." Yes, I know that was stated to Israel through Jeremiah and it had to do with those in exile. But it applies to us. It applies to all of God's people. Do you honestly think He gave His only begotten Son and did all these things, so that the first time you see Him in Heaven He will have a scowl on His face because of all your failure? Did He really do all that so He could do that later? No! He's fixed it. He's fixed it all. He's made it all good, and that's why we have joy.

And here's something else you need to see. It isn't like, "Okay, I'm going to do certain things in this life and then my eternity is fixed when I get there after judgment. And who knows what's going to happen? I've done so bad." Did He really spill the blood of His Son so that you would live that way? Is that the great hope that He has given to even the weakest of His children? Absolutely not! The whole thing about this glory that God gets out of our salvation is that there's only one hero and it's God. No one else is a hero. Everyone else just fails. There's only one Covenant-Keeper. There's only one Servant of Yahweh. So when the Jehovah Witnesses come and visit my house, and they say, "We're Jehovah Witnesses," I

say, "No, you're not. He's only had one Witness and you're not it. It's His Son. It's His Son."

Just like I point out sometimes whenever I am in a discussion about literature, and I point out that the difference between Tolkien and C.S Lewis, and the Chronicles of Narnia and the Lord of the Rings is this: In the Lord of the Rings, there's all kinds of heroes. In the Chronicles of Narnia, everyone fails every time, and everything's a mess. And then Aslan shows up. That's Christianity. It's what He's decreed. You see, the whole idea of Him getting glory is He takes something like you were, something like I was - rejected, reprobate, wrong in absolutely everything - and He takes that, and by Himself He makes it glorious. You're a recipient. If there is one thing that will be written on our foreheads throughout all eternity, it will be "Recipient of Grace".

So we look at what He is, who He is. We look at what He's decreed. We look at what He's done. Why do we read the Old Testament? To see what He's done in history. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 15:4, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope." Many people read the Scriptures only walking away thinking they're a failure. They should walk away thinking, "Yeah, but God is a bigger Savior." He proved it every time, every time, every time, every time. He never failed. And therefore, even when my sin is pointed out, though sadness may be for a morn, for an evening, the sun rises because I know who He is. I know who He is. Unless you are a self-righteous pharisaical legalist, you can never have joy by looking at your own reflection in the mirror. Unless you're deluded. You have joy looking in the Scriptures to find God. Find out how wonderful He is throughout history. See the great sinners that He has saved throughout history.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, after reading the two-volume biography by Ian Murray, which I recommend to every believer. They're really big books but for once in your life, you got to read at least one or two big books. At the end, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, everybody who visited him, he only had one thing to say, "I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great Savior. I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great Savior." Now if you're a lost carnal church member, you'll latch on to that and use it as an excuse for sin. But if you're truly converted, you'll go, "This is wonderful. I want to be more holy." But now out of joy instead of fear.

What God has done in history; what God has done in the gospel. Listen to this: Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" He spared not His Son for you. He spared not His Son for you. Why would He make such a deposit? Why would He give such an expense? Why would He do it? So that He could

withhold favor from you? So that He could keep you looking at how bad you are? So that He could get you all in heaven and make you feel bad because all you've got is a little cabin over in a swamp somewhere? Is that why He did it? He did it in order to lavish grace upon His people. To take the smallest, tiniest, most awkward saint, and set them above seraphs. Do you see that? And this is where joy comes from. Who He is, what He's decreed, and what He has done, in history, in the gospel, but also in you, in you.

Sometimes believers, we really, really mess up, because we look at other believers and we can see they really have fruit and they really are believers. And we do not recognize how radical God has changed them. What a masterpiece they truly are compared to what they were. Listen, Romans 5:1 should be enough to make us dance. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Temporary peace? Peace dependent upon some performance? No. Peace. Peace. God's peace. Eternal peace. Immutable peace. Covenantal peace. He who does not lie has promised you peace, peace forever, peace always, peace now. You are justified. You have been legally declared right with Him. You have a perfect right-standing before Him. Even in your glorified body in heaven, you will not be more right with Him than you are now. And you've got to walk in that. Walk in what's unseen. Walk in the Word. Do you see that?

II Corinthians 5:21, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." The righteousness of God. I believe it was brother Jeff Shawver that said today that not even the angels are holy in His sight. Somebody prayed that. When it says that heaven is not even clean, it doesn't mean that heaven is dirty, and it doesn't mean that angels are sinful. What it means is that in comparison to God's holiness. And also, God's holiness is inherent while all other holiness is derived. It flows from Him. But you have been given here, in Christ, the righteousness of God. , "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called the children of God; and such we are."

I can use Jesus's Sermon on the Mount here when we get to the point of "if you being evil". Remember the times Jesus said that? "If you being evil can do this for your children." Even in my child (any one of them), their worst moment of disobedience (and I can say this with a good conscience)-- In their worst moment of disobedience, I would die for them a torturous death. And if I being evil can say that, how much more does God love me, does God love you?

Pastor Anthony is constantly correcting us on low views of God. But here's a problem: A lot of you, when you hear "low views of God", you're only thinking, "What he's telling me is that God is big, and God is holy, and God is just." No. Low views of God's love also. Do you realize that? You talk about all the superficial

Christians and superficial churches, and how they have a low view of God's holiness and a low view of God's justice. Let me ask you a question. Do you have a low view of God's love? Because if you're walking in condemnation as a believer, if your life is based on your performance, and your joy is based on what you do, guess what? You have a low view of God. It's not just with regard to holiness or righteousness. It's with regard to His love. Don't! You see, if you've entered into the kingdom, you have finally walked through a door into a world that is hard to believe. His love is so great and so unconditional that at times you want to correct Him. You want to even rebuke Him, "Lord, this is wrong. You shouldn't love me this way."

At that poem Michael Card wrote many years ago about Gomer. Let's see: "The kindness of a father, the passion of a child, the gentleness of a loving friend, an understanding smile. All of this and so much more, you lavished on a faithless whore. I've never seen love like this before. Hosea, you're a fool." That His love is so great. You're just like that. I'm just like that. "No, Lord, you don't know what I am." "Yes I do, before the foundation of the world. The problem is, Paul, you don't know what I paid. You don't know who I am." So don't run around here just because you understand something of holiness and think you got a high view of God. Do you have a high view of God's love? So high that people would almost think that your gospel is antinomianism? Because if your gospel is not accused of antinomianism ever, then you're probably preaching legalism, because Paul's gospel was accused of antinomianism in Romans, the last part of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6.

Now, again, the regenerate heart hears these things and wants to follow God's law. The unregenerate, religious person hears these things and wants to run from God's law because they hate it. Now let's go on. Not only who God is, what God has decreed, what God has done in history, in the gospel, and in you; but what God will do. This is something that I, as a Christian of over 30 years, if there's any truth that I have to remind myself of, it's this one more than any other truth. People will say, "This is the only life you get. You can't hit replay. You can't hit replay. This is the only life you get." That's true. But this is not as good as it gets. What is waiting for us, future grace. , "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered into the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." And don't you, don't you dare! because I will come down there and I will whip you. Don't you say, "Ah, there's the key - for those who love Him. And I don't love Him perfectly." Will you just stop it? Stop it. Stop doing that! He doesn't love you because your love is perfect.

The tautology that we have in Deuteronomy 7, where basically it's set before Israel, "Israel, why do I love you? Okay, I'll give you the answer. Israel, I love



you because I love you." And what He's saying is, "It came from Me. It was my decision. I elected it. I decided it. I set my love on you. There it is. My love did not begin with you. It doesn't stand with you. It won't end with you. It began with Me, stands with Me, ends with Me. I love you." "But I don't deserve it." Would you shut up?!

See, Jamie, you don't have to be cultured or intelligent to preach here. I'm evidence. Quit it. There's a funny thing on YouTube my wife showed me the other day. And she loves it because the person comes into this counselor, and they tell all the problems. And the counselor says, "Well, I can answer this in two words. Stop it. Stop it." Ephesians 2:6-7, "And raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in Heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come," What? So that in the ages to come, you can have a little cabin on a hillside somewhere? No. "So that in the ages to come, He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus." God has saved you in order to demonstrate to all creation, including principalities, powers, mights, and dominions, how good He is. That's why He saved you. And that's why He chose you. Not many noble. Not many wise. Not the big ones. Not the smart ones. Why did He choose the base ones, the weak ones, the ones that are not? Why? So that He could show how good He is. Lavishing the greatest blessings, turning over the inheritance of his own Son to the worst humanity has to offer.

Imagine if someone was getting bad press, a billionaire was getting bad press that he wasn't charitable. And so he just picks you and says, "I'm going to use you for a special purpose. I'm going to lavish all my wealth upon you, so that every time someone looks at you, they understand how charitable, how good, how loving and kind I am." How many of you would sign up for that? That's what God has done. Let me put it this way, that when you walk in to glory, it will be an object lesson for all creation, even creation that we don't even know or understand. And they will look at what you were, and what you are, what God has done, the grace He has poured out on you. And they will worship God in a way they could have never worshiped him before, if he had not done this good thing for you. But then it doesn't stop there. If we could say that there is chronology, or day after day in Heaven, if we could say such a thing so that our mind can comprehend it, every day, God would increase the grace and lavish more and more upon you each day, so that each day, all of creation will look at you and have a greater vision of how God is, and worship Him to a greater degree.

Folks! That's a great future! This is absolutely wonderful. It's wonderful. Sometimes when I'm working on a book on the gospel and I'll come in the office, and they'll say, "What did you study yesterday?" "He's wonderful. He's wonderful."

It doesn't matter what language I know, there's no word. It makes me so mad. What's waiting you is so wonderful. The One waiting you, His name is Wonderful.

Now what must you do? Here's what you do. First of all, why do we study Scripture? We study Scripture to know His will, but that's another sermon. But I'm talking about you and your joy and your encouragement. Why do we study Scripture? To know who He is. And the more we know about who He is, the greater our joy if we see Him in light of the gospel, or our relationship with Him in the light of the gospel. What He's decreed for you. This is amazing. Tell me more. I want to know. What is it? I know some of you people are so spiritual that that really doesn't matter. But to me, it really matters. I'm excited like a kid at Christmas. I want to know what's coming. This is so good. What has He decreed? What has He done? I'm free. I really am free. I don't have to move a quarter of an inch to the left or the right to be any more loved of God. I don't have to do anything, do anything less, do anything more. I am loved of God, and He has decreed all these things for me. He's done all these things for me. He will do so much more for me and for you, that eye cannot even grasp it, mind cannot comprehend it. Do you see that?

Now what must we do? We must have faith. We must read the Word and believe it, believe what God says, not what you think. I'm so tired of your false humility getting in the way. It's not about what you think about yourself. It's what you think about God. And stop believing lies that rob you and kill your joy. Believe what God has said about Himself. Now what is faith? Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. Now how is that kind of statement any different from me jumping off this roof because I think I'm Peter Pan? How can you actually have assurance for something you hope for? You just hope for it. How can you have assurance that it's really going to happen? How can you have convictions that something you've never seen actually exists? How? Because God has said it! Because God has said it in His Word. And you see, this is why faith is impossible apart from God's Word. And that is why faith is strengthened by God's Word. Now see, I just can't tell you you need to get into God's Word, because you'll get into God's Word and come out miserable because you're not understanding things properly. You have to get into God's Word in light of what God's done in the gospel for you. Then you get in there, and it's wonderful. It's wonderful.

And you start searching out all these things, and you believe them. The greatest illustration of faith, other than our Lord in Gethsemane, the greatest illustration of faith is Abraham in Romans 4. It says, "Without becoming weak in faith, he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead, since he was about 100 years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb." He contemplated it. And it says, "Yet with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in

faith, giving glory to God." How do we give glory to God? By believing Him. You want to start a fight? Call somebody a liar. You want to honor somebody? Believe them. Believe them. And moping around with all your humility and self affliction, beating yourself and everything else, that doesn't glorify anybody. It really doesn't. Maybe yourself. "But grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised He was able also to perform." It's believing in the faithfulness of God. How do you have faith? You have faith because you believe God is faithful, and God is powerful, able to do everything He promised. He's never failed. I don't know if you've realized that or not. Never. He will not fail with you.

Something that has been said by Martyn Lloyd-Jones, has been said by many nouthetic counselors, has been said by many pastors, is this: "You need to preach the Scriptures to your heart and stop letting your heart preach to you." You need to preach the Scriptures to your mind and stop letting the vain thoughts of your mind preach to you. You just need to stop it. How does Satan kill? He doesn't run around with a machete. He lies. That's how he killed Adam, and Eve, and everyone else he's ever killed. He lies. How do you walk with joy? You believe what God said and not what the enemy said. You believe it. You believe it. But you're renewing your mind in the Word of God to such a degree that what God says becomes a greater reality to you than what you see in the mirror or what you see around you. Preach the Scriptures to your heart. Tell your heart to shut up. That's why if I go to a church and the preacher says, "Today, I'm just going to share from what's in my heart," I walk out. I don't care what's in his heart. I don't want to know what's in his heart. I want to know what God has said.

Now joy. Joy. Where does joy come from? From most people I talk to, whether they admit it or not, their joy comes from their performance. And that's why their joy is never strong, unless they're deluded, self-righteous, and pharisaical. Listen, I'm not teaching antinomianism here. I have been devoted to Christ, I have suffered for Christ, I've risked my life for Christ, and I've lost much for Christ. With my own life and with a clear conscience, I can say that. I'm not teaching antinomianism or that obedience is not important. I'm just telling you that joy does not come from obedience. After 30-some years in the Scriptures, I ought to understand that. Joy comes, not from my performance, but God's. And that joy of God's perfect, impeccable performance, that joy is what energizes obedience. Basking in who God is and what He's done for you, and how GOOD it is. I mean, this is good! THAT produces obedience.

Joy. I don't even know how to define that word, except with some other words: Assurance. Confidence. Hope. Gladness of heart. Gladness of heart. Merriment of heart. But stronger than that: Confidence. Assurance. Peace. Now I've written here: "When all that God is, all that God has done, and all that God will do is

apprehended by you, is comprehended by you, is believed by you, it will produce a joy in you that is independent from everything but God." Your joy will not depend on circumstances. Your joy will not depend on performance. Your joy will depend on an immutable God, who does all things perfectly. Do you see that? And that's where it must be. That's where it must come from. It must come from Him. Listen, Nehemiah 8:10, "Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." What does that mean? It's joy that comes from God. And I know what your brain is doing: "Yeah, it comes from God if you're obedient." No. It comes from who God is, what God has decreed, what He's done, what He will do. You grasp that, and it leads to joy.

Now another thing that I've written down here, "If our joy is the result of faith in who God is and precedes obedience, then our joy will not be based on our performance but on God's." You see the difference? Most people, in their categories, their joy comes after their performance and is based upon it. Now we all know that sin will bring sadness. I'm not saying it will not. And that obedience will bring joy. I'm not saying it does not. But what you have to understand is, the whole of who you are and the great foundation of your joy must be His performance and not yours; who He is, and not who you are.

Now I'm going to close by saying this. We'll talk for a moment about obedience. Joy energizes obedience. It strengthens us that we might be obedient. It encourages us. It's amazing, you can take a guy, an athlete, and he's training super super hard. And every day, he's getting more down because he seems to be making less progress. He gets to the point where he doesn't think he's making any progress. He's not getting any faster. He's not getting any stronger. His joy is being robbed. And what happens? He just wants to give up. "It's no use. Why go on? Why try?" And then somebody just walks by and goes, "Man, I've been noticing you lately. Man, you're a lot faster off the line. Man, the other day when you flipped that guy, that was amazing. You're getting a lot stronger. Before, your weakness was in your legs, but now, man, you're moving it." And what does he do? He hits the gym the next day, invigorated, doesn't he?

Now I'm going to teach you how this comes from knowing God's promises. But let me just stop here. I was at a place that had cable last year, two years ago, and I turned on the TV, and there was Joel Osteen. And I listened to his sermon, and I was very convicted. Just let that sink in for a moment. I do believe that the things he was saying were out of context and wrong because when he talked about all the great things that God had in store for the people, they were more material - houses, success, jobs, and all this. Where I was greatly rebuked was this: He was greatly encouraging with all his heart. He really was. He was encouraging people in the things of God, all that God had for them. But he was wrong about what was

important. Totally wrong. But I asked myself, how encouraging am I? How it is such a blessing to me when someone comes up to me and encourages me. I mean, says, "Man, you're doing well. Man, that was great. You're progressing." How it just jump-starts me. And I have found out it jump-starts everyone else. To be encouraged, to encourage people by pointing out - are you ready for this? - the good in them. Yeah, that's biblical. God has worked good in His people. Paul was convinced of the goodness of the people he was writing to. God's done something wonderful in you. I can see good things in you.

Look at the church in Corinth. They're having trouble with comprehending the resurrection. Some of them are denying physical resurrection. Every sort of other thing going on. But how does Paul start that letter in 1st Corinthians? Talking about all the good that he saw in them. All that the Lord had done. I just don't think, by and large, as the people of God, at least for myself, I don't do that enough. "Wow! Brother, sister, that was amazing. I'm so proud of God's grace in you. So happy. Keep going. Press on. Go on." To our children. A lot of times, the only time parents talk to their children is to tell them what they've done wrong. To encourage them, "Man, you're making progress. You're doing well. Keep going."

Listen to Hebrews 12:2 about joy energizing: "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross." It motivated Him. It moved Him. Joy that would come after the darkness of that morning. The joy that would come. It invigorates. It energizes. Derek Kidder writes this, based on his Old Testament commentary. When Nehemiah says the joy of the Lord is our strength, he says, "Such a joy is invigorating, not escapist or evanescent." Now listen, Charles Simeon, who, if you can get a hold of his commentaries, please do. His expository outlines. They're absolutely wonderful. But he wrote extensively on this issue, and I want to read him so you realize I'm just not making something up. He said, "Two things about Joy. First, joy disposes for action. It makes us ready for action. Fear and sorrow depress and overwhelm the soul." Am I talking to anyone here? "Fear and sorrow depress and overwhelm the soul. They innervate and benumb. They make numb all our faculties. They keep us from attending to any encouraging considerations. They disable us from extending relief to others. They indispose us for the most necessary duties. We cannot pray, or speak, or do anything with pleasure. But on the contrary, a joyous frame of mind exhilarates the soul."

Now you can be a pie-in-the-sky person that says, "Everything's going horrible. Stick a cherry in your cap or whatever and sunflower in your pocket or something, and just keep walking." That's not what I'm talking about. It's stop looking at those things, and see them in the light of who God is, what God has decreed, what God has done, what God will do for you. He says, "That such a joy

exhilarates the soul. David well knew the effect it would produce, and everyone may safely adopt his resolution." And listen to what he says in Psalms 119:32, "I will run the way of thy commandments when Thou shalt enlarge my heart." Has your heart ever been enlarged with joy? I can see this so clearly because I'm such a weak person. What you think is so important. I can walk into the office and someone will say, "Man, they're killing you on the internet right now. They're attacking you. There's a guy that's just tearing you apart." And I go to my office just, you know, want to die. And then someone will walk in and go, "Yeah, Paul, they're really tearing you up. You, MacArthur, and Piper, and Sproul." I go, "Okay. It's not for something crazy I did. I'm okay now." Just the change of the news, how it changes my disposition and exhilarates me. When I hear the first news, I can't even work. I'm just sitting there numb. When I hear the second news, I'm ready to go again. Do you see how much we are affected by what we think, what we believe?

Now he says this: "Secondly, joy qualifies for suffering. When the spirit is oppressed, the smallest trial is a burden. In those seasons, we are apt to fret and murmur, both against God and man. We consider our trials as the effects of divine wrath or overlooking God." That I'm suffering because of either God's wrath or He's looked upon something that I've done. "We consider trials as the effect of divine wrath or overlooking God. We vent our indignation against the instruments He uses. But when the soul is joyous, afflictions appear light. How little did Paul and Silas regard their imprisonment! How willing was Paul to lay down his very life for Christ! This accords with the experience of every true Christian."

I am so sick and tired of people thinking that Paul was willing to lay down his life because he was just so much more spiritual than the rest of us. Stop it. Stop deifying men. He was willing to lay down his life because he caught a glimpse of all the things that have been given to us fully in Scripture: Who God is; what God has decreed; what God has done; what God will do. And that's why you need to get in the Scripture. You need to get in the Scripture and ask those questions.

Now, finally, obedience. And it's really quick. Obedience is founded upon faith. You need to understand that. If something is set for me to do, and it's something that, maybe, goes against the world, goes against the grain, goes against my personality; and the Scriptures say, "Do this," and the devil and the world say, "Don't do that. Do this." You can't separate obedience from faith, do you realize that? In what way? Obedience occurs because I believe that God is right. That what He's telling me is right and it's the best for me. Whereas, this, I believe, is a lie. Do you see that? So it's by faith. I do it because I believe that God tells the truth. Disobedience begins with doubting God. "Has God said?"

Another thing. Obedience is energized by joy. I've already said that. Man, when my heart is joyful, I mean, really joyful, you can't contain me. I'm ready to go

fight hell with a water pistol. I'm willing to do anything. Obedience is not a burden but the way of security and peace and joy. It's like a circle. Why does obedience bring joy? Now listen to me, young people especially. Why does obedience come from joy and bring joy? I am 54 years old, and I've learned a lot. But if there's one thing I've learned, it's that the judgment of men is not to be trusted. My own judgment is not to be trusted. Now that means if what the Scriptures say is true, everything that I do in life has great importance, will impact eternity. So this life of mine, as small and everything as it is, this life of mine, every moment of it is important. How fearful and insecure I would be if I had no map, if I had no compass, if I didn't know how to walk, what to do, if I didn't know what destroys and what gives life. I mean, really, how terrible that would be, knowing that this life matters and I have not the judgment to walk in it. I have no security. I have no peace. I have nothing. I'm like, "Cut the rope, let the ship just be tossed about on the sea." I don't have anything to hold on to. But if the commandments of God are a light unto my feet, if they're a path well-trodden by countless saints, who at the end affirm that every commandment is true and good and holy and just, boy, what a confidence that gives me.

I have a wife. Of all the things, what could be more tremendous than to be entrusted with a wife? If I did not know how to do that, if there was no omnipotent, omniscient God, telling me, "Walk this way," I would be terrified. Because I tell young men whenever I'm counseling in marriage, "Everything your body tells you to do, do not do it." Submit to the law of God. Know how to walk with this woman. My children. My own life. Everything. The way I work. Everything. I wouldn't know what to do. I can't trust me, I'm most certainly not going to trust you. I need something greater and higher. I'm not wandering aimlessly, but there's purpose.

### **Conclusion**

What is the source of this knowledge and this faith that leads to joy and energizes obedience? What's the source of it? Now if you're expecting something magical here, you're not going to find it. Number one, renewing our mind in the Word. The Word is the only source of this true knowledge. But getting into the Word, not like just a road map to life, or principles upon which you can build some security, getting in the Word with the primary endeavor to know who God is, know what God has decreed, know what God has done, and what He will do with you. Also, cultivating our relationship with God and drawing upon strength through prayer. All the Bible study in the world without prayer is not going to be that helpful, I'm sorry. And I know your flesh hates praying as much as mine does sometimes, but know this: And true Fellowship with God's people. When Romans 12:1-2 tells us to renew our mind, so many people automatically go to, "Well, that's

talking about Scripture." Well, Scripture's not mentioned there. I believe that renewing your mind is done primarily through the Scriptures, but it's renewing your mind through prayer. It's renewing your mind through conversation, godly conversation, godly fellowship, through worship and music and everything around us, while we should be very careful about our environment, our atmosphere.

But please, saints, please. I'm begging you. Look, don't live this life, don't continue on-- If I could give you anything, if I could pray one thing for you, I mean, above everything else. If you're truly a child of God, if I could give you one gift, it would be that you would comprehend something of His love for you. It'd be that. Really. I'm tired of seeing you tired. I'm tired of seeing me tired. I mean, if you just grasp that one thing. He loves me immutably.

I'll end with an illustration. I promise I'll end. When I was in Peru, my first years as a single missionary, practically from the moment I was converted-- This is going to sound all psychobabble. I don't care, it's true. But when I was in school, I was never in the inner circle. Not the best athlete, not the best this, not the best that. And I determined that when I became a Christian-- yeah, it was fleshly. You can do your diagnosis but please do it at home. Right now, just listen. I determined that would not happen to me in my Christian life. I determined that there wouldn't be this idea of there's Spurgeon and Martyn Lloyd-Jones and all the inner circle, the guys that God really loves; and I'm outside somewhere. I determined that would not happen. And I worked 18 hours a day for years. And If I had a chance to go get martyred, I tried to do it. Until the point where-- I weigh like 225 right now. I weighed about 169 pounds. And I killed myself. I killed myself.

And one day, on the third floor of this old building, where we took care of street kids and we had our church during the war in Peru. It was all bombed out and everything else. And I slept in a little room on the third floor. I was going up the last little flight of stairs, and I collapsed. And I said this, I cried out, I screamed it, "I don't want to go to hell because I am afraid of hell. I don't want to go to heaven because I'm ashamed. Just put me somewhere. Just put me somewhere." It was at that moment that-- it was just a work of the Lord. Scripture started coming to mind, different things. I realized how fleshly everything had been, how wrong I was. But here's the thing: I recognized God loved me, loved me. That I didn't have to move to the left or the right. That was the thing I thought that day. I was sitting on the steps and I was looking at myself. And I realized, "I don't have to move a quarter of an inch to the left or a quarter of an inch to the right. I don't have to be a great missionary. I don't have to die as a martyr. I don't have to be a great preacher. I don't have to do anything because it is all in God. It's God. It's in God. He did it all. He made the decision. He carries it through. He brings it to its end. I am Loved!" What a wonderful release! That it's just Him. It's Him.



I'll take a Puritan statement and modernize it. For every one glance you take at yourself in the mirror, take ten long looks at God and His love. You're loved. You see, this is the terrible thing about being a preacher. I'm trying to tell you something. I'm trying to get something through your thick head. And is this: GOD REALLY, REALLY, REALLY DOES LOVE YOU, immutably so, perfectly so. And it is all founded upon Him, His person, His decrees, His work through Christ on your behalf. All of it. It's done. It's done. You've got to walk in that. You've got to keep yourselves in the love of God. You've got to keep thinking it, believing it, walking in it, talking it, fighting to believe it if necessary. Believe it. You're loved. And if you're here today and you're not a Christian, and all those things I said about the holiness of God being a wonderful joy to the believer, it's a terror to you. It's a terror. The only way it changes is in Christ. Come to Christ. And some of you who are so storm-tossed, believers, you're so storm-tossed and afflicted. Oh, that God would use what's said here today to prove to your heart and your mind that you are deeply and dearly loved.

Let's pray. Father God, please, please, please, break through, Lord, every wall, that we would all have a greater and firmer grasp on your settled, royal, covenantal love. In Jesus' name, Amen.