

Session 5: The Joy Arising from Our Hope



QUESTION 1:

What images come to mind when you hear the word joy?

THE POINT

Suffering for Christ can
deepen our walk with Him.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

After a diving accident in 1967 left her a quadriplegic, Joni Eareckson Tada longed to be free from her suffering and walk again. After two years of intense rehab, she left the hospital in a wheelchair, still longing for a breakthrough. She eventually grew bitter and cried out for God to help her.

While reading the Gospel of Mark, Joni read where Jesus had been healing crowds of people, but then He went off to be alone and pray. When His disciples found Him the next morning, Jesus urged that they go elsewhere to preach—even though more people needed His healing touch (see Mark 1:33-38). Joni noted, “That’s when it hit me. ... It’s not that Jesus did not care about all those sick and diseased people, it’s just their problems weren’t His main focus. The gospel was. ... To me, physical healing had always been the big deal, but to God, my soul was a much bigger deal. And that’s when I began searching for a deeper healing, not just a physical healing.”¹

Joni had joy in her walk with Christ. No matter how much suffering we face, God can use it to deepen our walk with Him.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 PETER 4:1-2

¹ Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same understanding—because the one who suffers in the flesh is finished with sin— ² in order to live the remaining time in the flesh no longer for human desires, but for God’s will.

A turning point for Joni Eareckson Tada came when, in the face of suffering, she began to think like Christ. The Christian life is often portrayed in a positive light, to the exclusion of any trials, difficulties, or sacrifices. But the reality is that living for Christ can be hard. Our hope in Christ not only carries us through such circumstances, but gives us cause to rejoice and glory in Christ.

QUESTION 2:

What obstacles tend to keep us from thinking like Christ?

The Christian life isn’t a stroll through a grassy meadow; it is a battle. This life is all-out war with our enemy, Satan; and when faced with suffering, we must use the right weapon to fight these battles. We are to “arm” ourselves with Christ’s mindset. This is the only place in Scripture we find this Greek word which means to equip oneself with a weapon. The weapon is our understanding—our mindset and recognition—that Jesus has already suffered in the flesh. That realization is a weapon that equips us “to live the remaining time in the flesh.” Why in the world do we fight with this mindset? Think back to other passages of Scripture that teach about the war we are fighting.

- ▶ “Although we live in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh, since the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments and every proud thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).
- ▶ “Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand” (Ephesians 6:10-13).

We fight the battle first in the mind, not in the mere externals of our daily lives. God has equipped us with the mind of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 2:12-16). When we face suffering with the mind of Christ, we see it through the “wide-angle” lens of God’s will and not the shortsighted lens of our discomfort, pain, or fear. Jesus viewed His life and suffering on earth through the eyes of eternity; He knew more was at stake than the momentary pain and suffering of His death on a cross.

1 PETER 4:12-14

¹² Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you. ¹³ Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

Not only do we have a new mindset in Christ, but we also have cause to rejoice in our suffering. Peter knew his brothers and sisters in Christ would be tempted to respond in wonder and confusion when faced with adversity, just as we do today. So many times we gasp or scratch our heads when we hear of another believer's suffering, yet that response is quite contrary to what the apostle Peter outlined for us in his letter.

For those outside a relationship with Christ, rejoicing in suffering sounds ludicrous. The idea can be difficult even for us to comprehend, because we live in a world that rails against suffering. Anything out of joint or uncomfortable must be changed immediately to ease all discomfort. But for these first-century believers, the reality of suffering was a simple fact they accepted as part of the pattern for living out their faith in Christ.

was done them in being permitted to suffer for Christ's sake and thus endure the pains of the Lord Jesus after Him."²

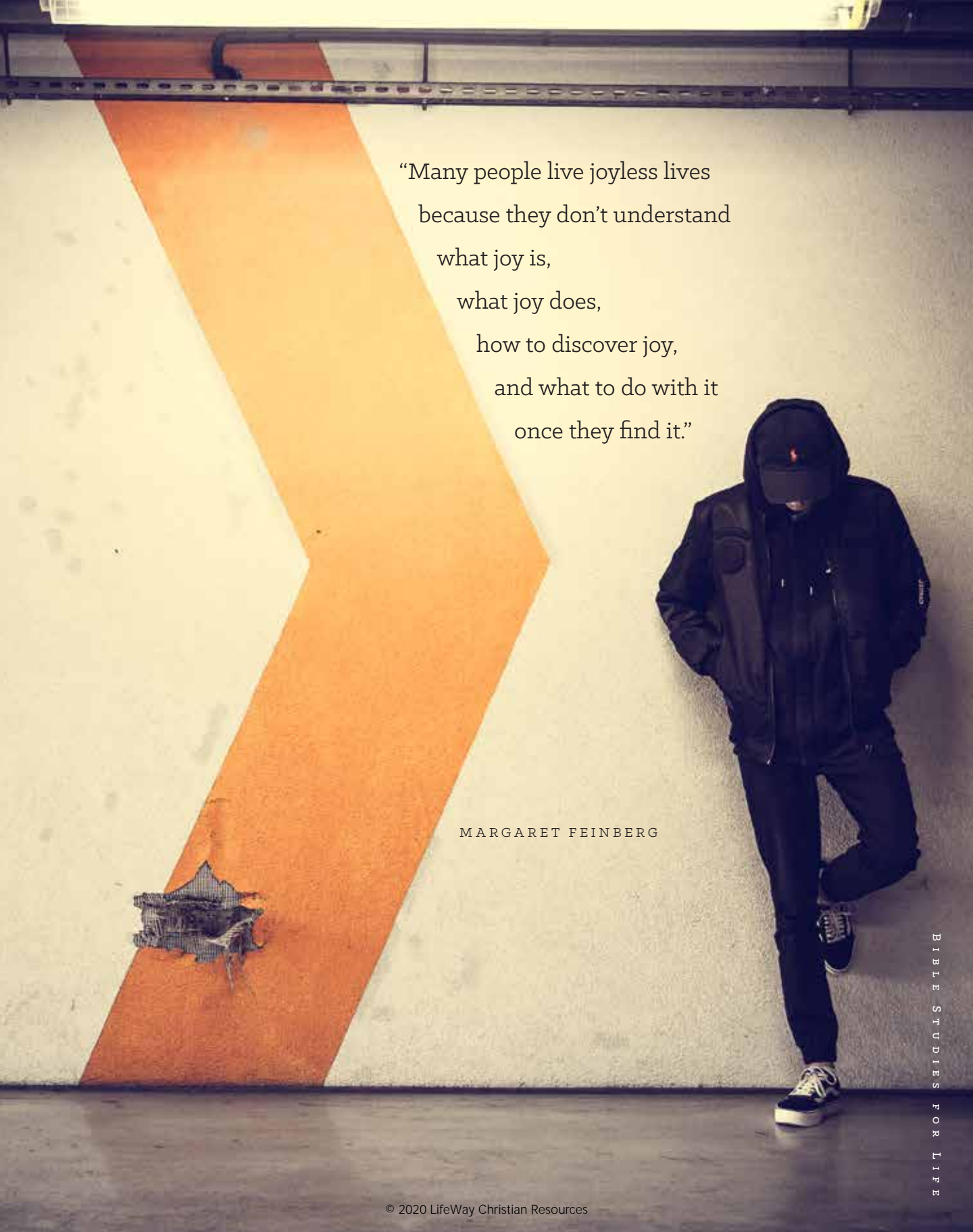
When we're identified with Him and share in His sufferings, we reveal His glory—and that's definitely cause for celebration. Such suffering also brings us great satisfaction. "You are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." The Greek language used the word for *blessed* to note a state of happiness, but the New Testament writers gave it a far deeper meaning. The circumstances of suffering are no cause for happiness, but the believer can experience something far richer and permanent: the favor of God, a sense of being fully satisfied. Spiros Zodhiates defined the Greek word *blessed* as "the state of the believer in Christ. The believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit because of Christ and as a result should be fully satisfied no matter the circumstances."³

Blessing and satisfaction come to us, not because of our circumstances but because God is with us—and no circumstance can change that!

QUESTION 3:

When have you experienced joy in the middle of suffering?

"Those first Christians trusted the sufferings of Christ and related their sufferings to His. ... Therefore, they rejoiced in the great honor that

A person wearing a dark hoodie and a baseball cap leans against a light-colored wall. The wall features a large, bright orange chevron graphic that points downwards. There is a hole in the paint on the orange section of the chevron. The person is wearing dark pants and sneakers. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

“Many people live joyless lives
because they don’t understand
what joy is,
what joy does,
how to discover joy,
and what to do with it
once they find it.”

MARGARET FEINBERG

1 PETER 4:15-19

¹⁵ Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a meddler. ¹⁶ But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in having that name. ¹⁷ For the time has come for judgment to begin with God's household, and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And if a righteous person is saved with difficulty, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? ¹⁹ So then, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator while doing what is good.

Peter included a word of clarification, noting that suffering in this context is for righteousness' sake. A person should not glory in the face of suffering that is a consequence of disobedience or a sinful lifestyle. Suffering for bad behavior is a cause for shame, but we have no shame when we suffer for following Christ.

Suffering is part of our refining process. Earlier, Peter had written: "You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6-7). When our faith is tested and proven genuine, Jesus is praised and honored.

QUESTION 4:

When has your faith grown after a period of suffering?

Suffering can quickly turn our focus inward. We can become absorbed in our own issues, and the object of our affection becomes self. This is a form of pride that robs us of the joy and contentment Jesus offers, even in the midst of

difficulty. But when we take on the mindset of Christ and rejoice that we get to share in His sufferings, the glory is immeasurable because it's the work of God alone. Who are we to boast of our strength when suffering can strip us down to the weakest and most vulnerable expression of ourselves? How can we point a finger of blame to the heavens when Jesus willingly suffered the most hideous, horrific, and humiliating death on a cross?

QUESTION 5:

How does God's faithfulness cause believers to rejoice even in difficult circumstances?

No one wants to suffer, but when you do, let God be brilliantly glorified through it. Don't waste what God wants to do in and through the painful places of your life. As you endure, let Him deepen your walk with Him. Let God mold you more and more into Christlikeness.

HOPE THROUGH TRIALS

Choose one letter from the word **“trial”** to describe a trial you have recently experienced.
Then choose one letter from the word **“hope”** to describe how you can experience hope despite the trial.

T R I A L

H O P E

LIVE IT OUT

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “Suffering ... is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master.”⁴ How will you let God deepen your walk with Him through suffering?

- ▶ **Rejoice in suffering.** Choose gratitude instead of complaint. Voice a prayer of thanks to the Lord no matter what you are currently facing. Make a list of ten things that have brought you joy today, and allow that practice to set the tone for a lifestyle of rejoicing in Christ.
- ▶ **Memorize Scripture.** To remind yourself to think with the mind of Christ, memorize 1 Peter 4:1-2: “Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same understanding—because the one who suffers in the flesh is finished with sin—in order to live the remaining time in the flesh no longer for human desires, but for God’s will.”
- ▶ **Listen to others.** Talk with other believers about their trials and suffering. Listen for the ways God has deepened their walk with Him because of what they have experienced. Offer prayer and encouragement as needed.

No matter how much suffering we face, God can use it to deepen our walk with Him. **Just think like Christ when life becomes hard.**

1. Joni Eareckson Tada, “A Deeper Healing,” <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/TM13-2/a-deeper-healing-joni-eareckson-tada>.
 2. A. W. Tozer, *Living as a Christian: Teachings from First Peter* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 191-192.
 3. Spiros Zodhiates, ed. *The Complete Word Dictionary New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 933-934.
 4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1979), 91.