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1 THESSALONIANS 5:16

Series: Real Christians in Challenging Times

I'm sure that you, like me, struggle with the verse that says – *Rejoice always*. That's our verse today. It's a two-word verse. I'd say stand with me as we read the scriptures, but by the time you stood up I'd be done and you'd have to sit down. So *rejoice always*. That's the verse that we're looking at in 1 Thessalonians 5:16.

Now you do have your little workbook there. If you don't have one of these, they're at the back. You can pick one up. These workbooks. Or if you're online and you don't have one, you'd like one, just let me know. I will mail it to you so you have it. Here's where you can take notes. You can also use it as a spiritual journal during your time when you're studying 1 Thessalonians with us at the barn.

So I'm thinking *rejoice always*. Okay, I got that. I understand that. But what does it mean? How do you do that? What are the benefits of rejoicing in fact? So I googled this "what are the benefits of rejoicing," thinking I'm going to come across a Bible search of some kind that says here's the benefits of joy. But instead I come to Healthline, which is a health services site, and it says this: "The benefits of feeling more joy." I'm going let me pause here for a minute. This is kind of cool. Because I know that as Christians we are characterized by joy. Here Healthline is telling us how important joy is. And this is what they said. Here's the benefits of feeling more joy from Healthline. This is from the world's perspective. "It promotes a healthier lifestyle. It boosts the immune system. It fights stress and pain. It supports longevity." I'm thinking that's cool! I like that!

But then as I read the rest of the article, and if you do the search like I did (you'll find it if you want to read it), their solution for finding joy is to go after pleasure. In other words find pleasurable things that make you happy. Enjoy those and then this enjoyment is going to help you to have all of these good things. I'm thinking whoa, whoa, whoa. There's more here to this concept of joy. As Christians we understand that there's more to joy.

In fact you've heard the idea that joy is something deep within and happiness is more circumstantial, things that are going on out there. Because the word happiness comes from the word happenings. The things that are happening out there. If things are happening good then you can experience pleasure and therefore joy. If happenings aren't good then you aren't very happy. But joy is something deeper. We know that. That's what we've talked about.

In fact as we look at this verse (let me take you to the verse itself) I decided to look at the Greek word itself. That's what you're seeing on the screen here. The Greek word for joy is *chara*. You

can write that in your little notebook. Draw a line under *rejoice*. This is the noun form. It is *chara*. The Greek word for *grace* is the word *charis*. *Chara* and *charis*. They are related words, which makes this really interesting.

So as I kept reading the definition of joy in the New Testament Greek, this is what it means. I copied this straight out of the dictionary because I was so impressed with it. It says: “*Chara* – joy: The awareness of God’s grace, favor, joy. Grace recognized” is what he’s saying. As soon as I saw that I said there’s the key. The key to understanding joy is going to be there. If I can have grace recognized in my life then that’s not dependent on whether things are good or bad. I can experience God’s grace at any point and then I can experience joy. So I’m going, yes, I want this. This is valuable, this is good. I need this. Okay, what’s that going to look like?

Now this joy in this passage is also in the fruit of the Spirit. So I go, “Yes!” Because you know I’m doing this study on the fruit of the Spirit, all the different parts, the nine of them. This gives me number five, which is joy. So I was trying to ponder what are some things that make up joy so I could show it to you. This is my circle. Part of my study. This is my kind of conclusion of what the Bible says about joy in three different parts. Understand grace, seek grace everywhere, and embrace grace now. So obviously joy is all about grace coming from that definition of what joy is all about. So please consider that.

I want to explore this because I think this is going to be helpful. I think if you get this one idea, it’s going to change your countenance. It’s going to change your disposition in life. This is one of those things that characterizes the Christian. Just like all of the words that we’ve talked about in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22, just like all of those things, we are seeing these things that characterize who we are as Christians.

Let’s talk about this and understand what is grace first in order to understand. See, here’s the thing. If you pursue pleasure, you will not get there. You will not find joy. But if you pursue grace and understand it, you can experience this joy.

So we have to digress theologically for a moment and understand what grace really is. So do this with me. I want to talk to you about grace and I want to divide grace into two parts. The first part of grace that we see in the Bible is salvation grace. Salvation is this experience you have with God where you embrace Him in your life and He changes you. That’s grace. Grace has the idea of being a gift. That’s what grace means. So Ephesians 2:8-9 is our key verse. It says this: *For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves; it is a gift of God.* So salvation is a gift and it’s this grace gift. If you can meditate on this idea of your personal salvation, Jesus saved you, then it can produce joy inside of your heart.

Now I find it fascinating to hear how people come to Christ and why. What is their motivation? Some people come to Christ because their heart is like swiss cheese with all kinds of holes in their love needs. They just need more love and they’re trying to find it here, find it there, and they’re not getting what they need in their relationship with this person or that person. Because there’s no one person who can meet all of our love needs. Only God can do that. So when a person realizes that and then accepts Jesus Christ into their life, love fills in all of the swiss

cheese inside of our hearts with His grace and that grace fills us up with His love. That becomes this motivation for someone just to trust God because of the love.

Some people just feel like they messed up in life. They want a second chance. They want a new life. So they come to this idea of salvation and they say, "I need something different than what I've...I really messed up my life. I am dirty. I need to have a new life." So God allows this person to stand under the shower of His grace and the grace just floods over this person and removes the dirt he has, the uncleanness and give them a new life.

There's some people who come to the Lord, I'm sure, because they are just so angry and they've been hurt deeply. They know they have to forgive, but this is impossible to forgive this person or these people who have hurt them so much in life. And they just know they've come to the end of their rope, so to speak, and they cannot do this. And they realize they need something more. So they say, "God, I need you," and so God says, "okay, I'm going to give you the grace that you need to release the pain, to turn the pain into ministry, and bring forgiveness and healing inside of your heart."

Salvation then becomes that experience for that person that does that and it so powerful. This is God's grace experienced through salvation. Some people I think come to Christ because their life is just meaningless. They need more meaning. They look at life and they go, "I get up in the morning, I go to bed at night, but in the middle of all of that I don't really have purpose and meaning." And God says, "Okay. Get saved." So when you accept Jesus Christ into your life, He provides you with a flashlight for life. Grace becomes that flashlight. It gives you purpose and meaning. He moves you in that direction that's so powerful. There's some people who just experience their weakness so much that they need the strength that God provides that He gives.

Are you seeing how big salvation is? Because if you understand how big salvation is that brings joy to your heart to recognize that God takes care of the past and He takes care of the future, you don't have to live with fear about the future. You can live in the present and experience joy right now in your life. That's God's grace in saving grace. When you experience that grace of God through salvation it generates joy inside of you. You start to experience that in new ways than you ever before. No matter what goes on. Whether you have good things or bad things going on. God's saving grace has changed you. You are becoming a different person. God is doing something big. That's saving grace.

Well if we're going to understand grace, we have to go to another part of grace and that's what I'm going to call the daily energy grace. Now the reason I call it daily energy grace is because this is the grace we need to live every day. It's a different kind of grace than the salvation grace, although it starts there. The daily energy grace is this "I need it every hour, I need it every minute." It's this grace that fills me up today so that I can do what I need to do.

The verse that helps us understand this is the one in 2 Corinthians 12:8-9 where Paul is saying God, I have this problem. I want to get rid of this problem. He calls it a thorn in the flesh. And so it says – *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you."* In other words what he's saying is no, I'm not going to take it away. Do you ever come to the Lord and you say, "God, would you take away this problem?" We don't

know whether this is a physical ailment that he had, whether this is a relationship problem that he has. We don't know whether this is an emotional challenge he's experiencing, but God said no to his request. But He said my grace is going to carry you through. When we get to know this grace, it helps us to be able to live every moment of every day. This is most obvious when you come to a place in your life where you have a physical challenge of some kind.

So Maryann attends the church here. She's attending virtually. She's listening now. Were we able to get her back on, Jim? Is she listening through your phone there? Alright maybe it was someone else who had Maryann on this morning. Maybe Jenny had her on. So Maryann, I hope you're listening to this! Because we've talked about this. God gives you grace every day. Every swallow. Maryann has a hard time swallowing. We're praying for her regularly. And so she has a hard time swallowing and every swallow is a gift of God.

If you've been in pain or let's say you have to focus on your breathing, every breath is God's grace in your life. If you're in the hospital and you're in pain because you broke your hip and you're trying to walk, you need God's grace every moment to take every step.

Are you understanding what daily grace is all about? That's what God says to Paul. I'm going to give you daily grace to live your life. This is so important for us to understand what this grace looks like because it helps us in a supernatural way deal with the life situations that we're experiencing. I don't know what you're experiencing right now, but whatever it is, God gives you grace in this moment. That's the daily grace that you have.

This week I had an interesting experience. One of the clients I'm working with has an eleven-year-old boy. I work with parents. That's what I do in my counseling practice. This dad says to his son, "Hey, I'm going to be meeting with Dr. Scott this evening. Is there anything you want, any advice you need that you want me to get from him?" What a great question to ask your kid. And this eleven-year-old boy says, "See if he has any ideas about procrastination." I'm thinking that's a pretty good question for an eleven-year-old to ask! I think all of us could be asking that question.

So I talked about internal and external motivation. I said, "I've got some ideas for him. If you're procrastinating, you wait for external pressures to get big enough until you're forced to do it. But if you want to be internally motivated, it's about the heart. So if you take the conscience, it prompts you to do what's right, and you have self-control in your heart then you're going to move forward." So I explained that for ten or fifteen minutes.

And then I said, "Okay, here's the deal. You have to understand that self-control is part of the fruit of the Spirit and God provides grace for you to be able to deal with your life in the moment. That this is a supernatural experience that you can have with God to deal with your particular situation, whatever your problem is you're dealing with. If you've got a problem relationship you're trying to work on or you're feeling lonely or discouraged, whatever it is, God has daily grace available to you. If you understand the grace that God provides that is the saving grace and you understand daily grace then you're ready to go to the next part of my circle, which is to see grace everywhere."

Now I think it is easy to see grace in the strongpoints of life, in the successes. It's easy to see grace when things are going well. When you're going down the road and an accident takes place but you're not in it, and you go, "Yes. Thank you, God, for your grace." When you get a promotion at work and God promotes you and you get extra pay and you're going, "This is God's grace." It's easy to experience God's grace when things are going well, when you have strength. But it's harder, I think, to experience God's grace sometimes when things don't go well. When you get into a car accident it affects you. You're in it. When you don't get the promotion that you had hoped for in those moments can you experience grace? The answer is yes.

So let's look at what Paul continues on in our same verse in 2 Corinthians 12. He says this: "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*" This is going to take some practice, but when you recognize that God is working in you, in your life, even in the midst of weakness, then you see God's grace. Can you see God's grace in the problems of life? When you can do that, good things will happen for you and you'll be able to experience joy. Because you see God's grace working even in the problems. I think this is the key to being able to rejoice always. You can rejoice always, not just in the good times. You can rejoice in the difficult times because God's grace is working even in those challenging times.

That's why James when he's talking about joy notice he says – *Consider all joy when you encounter these various challenges, trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so you can be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* So what he's saying there is you want to see grace everywhere. You want to see grace not just in the good times. You want to see grace in the challenging times as well.

We're back again to understanding grace. We see grace everywhere, but now we have to grasp this idea that grace is in the now.

I want to tell you about my friend Doc. Now Doc was one of my fellow students in seminary. We were in a history class together. I never did too well in history. This is church history. So Doc and I agreed to study together. We took all the facts and memorized all these facts. In fact what we did is we used this study method where you go into a room and all the facts about this subject are on this side of the room and then you go to another part of the room. We memorized all of these facts. We had them down. We were very pleased. We spent hours memorizing all these facts. Then we went into the test. And the test wasn't a factual test. It was an essay test. But we knew the facts. So maybe we can put them together. So I wrote my essay and I felt like I did pretty good because I had all these facts. Doc felt like he did pretty good.

But a couple days later when they had graded the papers, when we went to get our papers, I got a D and Doc got an F. I was so disappointed. But Doc, on his paper when he got an F he wrote across it "grace." I said, "Doc, come on now. Why are you writing 'grace' on your paper when you got an F?"

He says, "It's only by God's grace that I'm able to attend this school. It's only by God's grace that I'm in this class."

I learned something about grace by being with Doc. He was a guy that was really into God's grace and really understood it, much better than I did. I learned much more about God's grace just spending time with Doc. See Doc saw grace in the difficult things of life. When we do that, then we're ready for this embracing grace now. Embracing grace right in the moment. What does it mean to see things in this moment and experience God's grace? Because we do that we're moving right into this idea of joy. That's how I think you're going to experience joy.

Rejoice always. I think you're going to have to do it through God's grace because you can see God's grace everywhere, all the time, and you can live in the moment of God's grace right now. Paul says to the Philippians this same thing. He says – *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* There's this in-the-moment kind of grace that we experience that takes place wherever we are.

Now once I saw that and I got this idea of rejoicing always and I see that getting this idea of rejoicing and rejoice is one of these things that characterizes a Christian and it's something that we have access to all the time, then I realized that grace is one of these core strengthening exercises that we do in our life. Joy. Joy is a core strengthening exercise that we do in our lives.

I don't know if you saw this week, but the CDC has changed their risk factors for determining whether you would get this disease or not. In the past if you were 65 or older...they removed that now. They don't have an age point that they've decided. They just say in general when it comes to age, the older you get the more susceptible. But the greatest danger is for a person who has comorbidity factors. So if you have heart condition or something wrong with diabetes, you are more susceptible and you are in danger. So that's motivation for me. Okay? I want to be healthy. So I'm exercising more and I'm trying to eat right and drink my water and I'm trying to be healthy in my life.

In the same way, your spiritual life is at risk. There are things that want to attack your spiritual life. Anger that turns into bitterness. Materialism that turns into greed and discontent. Lust that captivates a person who wants to pursue pleasure. Those things that are creeping in on our lives and we are in danger and we must have core strengthening exercises. Joy is one of those. Joy is one of those things that builds inside of us that God wants us to have inside and He's designed it for us. I want to encourage you to rejoice always. Take advantage of this core strengthening exercise.

One more passage I want to show you. This passage is one that really describes the Christian life. Paul characterizes... I'm back in 2 Corinthians. This is three times I've been in 2 Corinthians today. Maybe we'll teach that coming up soon. But it's a great passage. Let me read this. Here's what happens. If you're a Christian, this is what life is going to look like. You've just got to understand this. Because if you think you're going to become a Christian and then everything's going to be rosy, you need to look at what Paul says about being a Christian.

He says this: *Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger.* Wow, that's a lot of stuff. Now he's going to move to some positive ones. *In purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere*

love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor. Now we're going to come to these comparisons back and forth because you have to be ready for both. Bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing (there's our word rejoicing!); poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything. Wow. If you can have joy in all of those circumstances, God is doing something big in your life.

Joy is this core strengthening exercise. This is what Nehemiah is saying to the people when he's trying to motivate them to work and work hard physically on the wall, when they're being attacked by other people. So they've got the physical work they have to do. They're defending themselves from attack and he says to them – *The joy of the Lord is your strength.* That is what leads me to believe that joy is this core strengthening exercise.

And so God says in Isaiah 61 – *To bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.* You see that? This strength that comes through joy – *oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his pleasure.* You become an oak of righteousness and other people are watching. That's why people will often say, "Look at that guy. He's different. He's got something I don't have. There's a difference that that person has. That person is joyful." When you experience that joy in your life in the midst of challenges, people are watching. You are a display of the splendor of God. You're like this tree, it said this *oak of righteousness*, and joy is one of those things that strengthens your core so you can experience that.

Well I would suggest if you haven't trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, this is one of the key reasons you want to do that. Because you can experience joy every moment of your life. You can understand what this looks like. But it requires that you say, "Okay, God. I am weak. I am a sinner." Because you cannot come to God and say, "God, you owe me something. I've done so many good things." No. You come to God and you say, "God, I am a sinner. I need a Savior. That Savior is Jesus Christ and I want to have Him come into my life. I need that saving grace of God in my own heart." When you do that He produces these things like joy and the other things we're looking at each week. He produces those things inside of our heart. I trust that God will use this inside of your life. Strengthen your core, develop the joy that God would have for you in your life.

Would you stand with me? We're going to pray and then worship the Lord together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you and thank you. Thank you for so many things that we're not even grateful for but we need to be. We ask that you would teach us to be grateful more. But show us what it means to experience your grace and then to experience joy in the midst of that. Lord, we want to experience that joy. Point out areas that are hindering us, we ask. Do a deep work in our hearts. Thank you for making your grace sufficient for us, that your grace is all we need to handle the challenges of life. Thank you. In Jesus' name, amen.