



Christianity in Real Life-Part 4

When Life Really Hurts

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Well, they say that the average adult laughs 17 times a day—17 times—and why not, right? We like to laugh. And not only that, it's good for us. Have you heard that it's good for us? Proverbs 17:22 says that a joyful heart is good medicine. Literally—do you understand that?—literally, it will boost our immune system. It lowers the stress hormones in our brain. Platelets are increased in our blood. Disease-fighting proteins are apparently increased. We laugh—your blood pressure is lower when you laugh—and it can even help you lose weight. Did you know that? Help you lose weight? They say that 100 laughs equals 15 minutes on the exercise bike. Now if only we could laugh 1,000 times a day—how awesome would that be?

You know, I guess you could say, understanding all of that—even the Bible telling us that it's good for us—you could say that laughter is a blessing from God. Do you agree with that? You weren't very hard on that. Perhaps you've read the passage that we're preaching on this morning. Yeah, it seems like it's a blessing from God. And yet, in this text that we're here preaching this morning in Luke 6, Jesus is about to say something that we don't expect. Here is another startling comment from Christ in the middle of his Sermon on the Plain. And if you haven't turned to that yet, you can at least see it on your worksheet there printed for you. The second half of verse 21 is where we're at in our study, and we're picking up the corresponding "woe." There's a "blessing" and a "woe" for each one of these.

And here's the blessing—verse 21, second half of the verse: "Blessed are you who weep now." Even that shows a moment that seems like the bad thing—we don't want to weep; we'd rather laugh; we'd rather be happy. You know, choose between happiness and sadness—I choose happiness. No, God says in this text, "Blessed are you who weep now."

Bottom of verse 25—not what we'd expect here, either: "Woe to you who laugh now." What in the world are you talking about? I mean, you've got to stop and say, "What? What does this mean?" Intuitively we understand we'd much rather laugh than cry; we understand that happiness is better than sadness. It's a blessing to laugh—I mean, Pastor Mike's even pointed that out from the Bible. I mean, it's a good thing for us. What are you talking about?

Well, it'll be important for us to answer that question, because you can't apply the Sermon on the Plain from Christ unless you understand what in the world he's talking about. And until I know what kind of blessing it is to weep, I can never please Christ in this respect. We've got to figure this out.



And before we even jump into it, I just want to make sure that you understand it's not just one cherry-picked verse that I'm quoting. They're all over the Bible. I think of Psalm 35; it states it this way: for those who delight in my righteousness, he said, let them shout for joy. Let them be glad. I mean, God is into happiness; he's into joy; he's into gladness; he's into laughter. All of those things are positive in God's Word. But maybe there's another phrase that may help us just start to open the door to this understanding of what Christ is talking about—a phrase that I'm sure you've heard many times, and you've probably heard it more outside of church than inside of church. It's lifted right from the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, verse 4, where it says there's "a time to weep, and a time to laugh... a time to mourn, and a time to dance."

There's a time for happiness and there's a time for sadness. Even right there, we understand that God can say there is blessing in happiness and gladness and joy—and all of that is good—but that's not the unending pursuit or focus of life. As a matter of fact, there is blessing in sadness—not chronic, continual, always—but there's something in that that I can't miss, or I can't apply the sermon of Christ. Time for laughter, time for weeping—that contrast is important for us to get.

And if you know the book of Ecclesiastes, the chapter before it, Solomon had testified to the fact that he hit a season of his life where he made it his unending goal to just be filled with happiness—pleasure—he even calls it laughter. "I just thought that I just wanted to be happy. I just want to laugh all the time—I mean, tell me another joke. Let's have a good time." And that's all he wanted. And of course, the end of that, like every other pursuit, he testifies to its vanity—chasing after the wind. It was all for naught.

Before we even think biblically through what Christ might be referring to here, let's at least identify with what Solomon said is probably a lot like the culture we now live in—in Western, 21st-century, prosperous America. We live in a culture that just wants to laugh. We live in a culture that just wants to have fun. We live in a culture that—well—you know, all we really have time for is feeling good. And we have really no time or interest in weeping; we certainly don't want to say that's any kind of blessing. Matter of fact, if you want entertainment, it should leave you feeling good. If you want to read a book, it should leave you feeling good. If you want to read a magazine—if you want to go to church—you should leave feeling good. And that's how most people weigh everything. It's exactly as Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 2—that is the goal for people. And all I'm going to tell you is: until I get to the truth of Ecclesiastes 3—that, oh yeah, there is a time to laugh; there's a time for happiness and joy; but there's also a time for weeping—until I realize that, perhaps I'll never quite understand what Christ is saying and never have the blessing that follows, because I didn't read all of verse 21b, which is: "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh."

See, the goal is not to stay perpetually sad. Whatever the blessing is, it's a kind of blessing that leads its way through sorrow and comes out on the other side with joy. And in turn, I didn't read all of verse 25 either—the second half of it—which says, "Woe to you who laugh now." The bad thing about that isn't that you're happy. God's not some curmudgeon and he's down on happiness. He's



not a killjoy. It's that whatever kind of laughter it's talking about, it ends in mourning and weeping. "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep." And that's the kind of laughter we need to avoid.

Now, we have to step back from this simple statement of Christ and scan the whole Bible, at least in our thinking, and say, "What kind of laughter is that?" Let's start at the bottom this week and just deal with the "woe" first—25b. Let's think through when it would be wrong for us—what kind of laughter it would be, what kind of happiness it would be—that God would say, "Well, that's not good. Woe to you who laugh." I'll put it this way, if you're taking notes (and I wish that you would): jot it down.

Number one: you need to be careful **what** you laugh about. There are certain things that God would say, "That's not right." You would earn a "woe" from Christ if you found that this is what you laugh about. And if that's the case, we need to say, "Whatever the 'woe' means, let's figure that out biblically."

I don't mean for this to sound complicated, because it's not all that complicated. But let's start with the first one here—I'll give you just a sampling of biblical examples of when it would be wrong to laugh.

A. It's a kind of pursuit of happiness, or joy, or gladness that would, in some way, blind me from a problem. It would keep me from dealing with a problem. It's a kind of distraction. It's a kind of, "I just want to feel good right now, because that will help me not have to face the problem right now." It's like the old adage: he was fiddling while Rome burned. Remember that old idiom—"fiddling while Rome burned"? Do you remember the historic setting in which that saying came to be? In AD 64 at the great fire in Rome that destroyed the city, this was a statement about Nero—very eccentric, bizarre, heavy-handed emperor. When the city burned—here's the line—he was fiddling while Rome burned. And I know that's anachronistic, because there were no fiddles back then. But the story goes that he put on—literally—costume, and he had a concert, and he sang songs with his little lyre, his little small harp.

Now, think about that. You are the emperor of this great kingdom and this great capital city, and it is burning—it is burning down—and you say, "Well, let's have a party. I'm going to play some songs for you." This is a kind of pursuit of feeling good that keeps me from dealing with the problem at hand. It's a kind of insulation. It's a kind of barrier: "I don't want to face the thing that makes me feel bad, so let's just put on a few more coats of happiness." That's happening all the time. That's a kind of distraction from the real issue. It's like standing on the listing deck of the Titanic and saying, "Well, tell me another joke." You know, it's not time for jokes right now—this is the time to deal with how we're going to fix the problem of a sinking ship and how I'm going to



get off alive. And some people say, “Well, that’s scary. I don’t want to deal with that. So let’s just do something that makes us happy.”

I see this in relationships all the time. Marriage is struggling: “Well, let’s just... I don’t know... let’s just go out and have a good time. Let’s go to dinner and a movie, and let’s just forget about our troubles.” Or a parenting situation where there are definite problems: “Well, let’s just—come on—let’s make a trip to an amusement park, or let’s plan a vacation.” It’s this kind of “you’re not dealing with the problem” laughter. It’s the kind of insulation.

And you see this all throughout the Old Testament. I know this is hard to pin down in a phrase, but I think you’ll recognize it as you think through—if you’ve been reading through the Old Testament with us (we’re in the middle of the prophets right now). So often you’ll see God condemning people that seem to be very happy, having a lot of fun. And you might come to the conclusion, “Well, God is a killjoy. He doesn’t like people having fun.” That’s not the case at all. You look to other parts of Old Testament history and he’s blessing his people with prosperity, and he’s glad that they’re rejoicing, and he’s glad that they’re happy.

Let me quote one example of this. We’re going to get to this in our Old Testament reading—and if you just want to jot it down, I think I have you turn there in your discussion questions on the back of your worksheet—but it’s from Amos chapter 6, beginning in verse 4. In Amos 6, God is condemning the people of Israel because they have a serious national problem, but the people who have the power to do something about it are ignoring it. Here’s how it’s put. He says, “Woe to you”—just to pick up on the word from Luke 6—“Woe to you,” Amos 6 says, “who lie on beds of ivory” (those are the... “Where’d you get that headboard?” “Oh, IKEA. Oh, it’s so cool.”). I mean, you’d think it’s a good thing. “They’ve got beds of ivory; they’re stretching themselves out on their couches; they’re eating lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall; they’re singing songs to the sound of the harp, and—like David—inventing for themselves new instruments of music; they’re drinking wine by the bowlful; they’re anointing themselves with the finest oils.” Man, it sounds like this is a time of prosperity.

But here’s the problem. He says they’re doing all those things, **but** they are not grieved over the ruin of their nation. He calls them “Joseph”—the nation. “You don’t seem to care that there’s injustice and idolatry and immorality. We have a problem we need to fix.” And the elites in the country are saying, “Let’s just have another party; let’s just have a good time.” They focus on pleasure so that they can ignore the problem—of whatever it might be. In this case, a declining nation with sin just around the corner.



Next verse (v. 7) says, “Therefore they shall be the first of those to go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out is all going to pass away.” All your parties—done with that. Why? Because you used your party to insulate yourself from the problem at hand.

Unfortunately—I don’t mean to make this about church—but a lot of people are looking for a church that makes them feel good every week. Have you noticed that? A lot of your friends you invite to church are like, “Oh, man, at the Phoenix we feel bad about where I’m not at.” Here’s the problem—no, that’s more than one experience here, I’m sure. Here’s the deal: we could put a coat of varnish every week on your life and never have any kind of real confrontation of what the Word of God says regarding where you live. But according to James 1, the mirror of the Word of God is supposed to expose the issues that are unkept in your life where you can make corrections according to the Word of God. And if I don’t deal with those problems, all I’m doing is making people feel good in a sermon, and we’re avoiding a problem that’s going to come home to roost at some point.

“Woe to you who laugh now, for later you’re going to mourn and you’re going to weep.” That just means that I need to be vigilant about issues in my life, and when I see them—unpleasant as it may be—to address it in my marriage, in my home, in my business, in my life, in my health, whatever. I can’t just try to put on the comforter of laughter and the pursuit of joy and happiness.

B. And I don’t mean to make it sound like a junior high sermon, but if I’m going to look through the Bible and think about things that we should never be laughing about—we shouldn’t be laughing at other people’s expense. The Bible calls that “mocking.” We just shouldn’t do that. The Bible is very clear about that. Even when you’re choosing in your heart to hold back a feeling of satisfaction and happiness and joy over the calamity of someone that you think really deserves it—the Bible says this in Proverbs 24:17: “Never rejoice when your enemy falls; don’t let your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the LORD see it and be displeased.” See, there’s a kind of happiness and pleasure and joy that we get—and when we teach our junior highers, it’s about that kind of condescending, mocking, jeering, scoffing—but in our lives, even when we see someone that we think... I don’t know... we feel good about the bad that they are encountering, the calamity in their life—the Bible says that should never bring you joy. Even when God is judging—as we read in today’s DBR—when God is judging the sins of people, he says, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” God doesn’t revel in that. So just to be complete, I certainly don’t ever want to have us laugh at things that come at the expense of others—even if we think those people may deserve that. And I don’t even want to, as Psalm 1 says, sit in the seat of those kinds of scoffers and mockers. I need to be separate from that.

C. Here—I suppose it’s maybe moving from junior high to high school—I suppose, but it’s certainly important if we’re going to think about, “What does Christ mean, ‘Woe to you who laugh now, because you’re going to mourn and weep’?” What kind of laughter could that be? Turn with me for a third one here to Ephesians chapter 5. Ephesians 5—and you need to understand the context of this. As we’ll read, it keeps putting the distinction between the people of God and the



world in which we live, and that's always the problem. And now, when the world has its tentacles in your life—with everything, I mean, the apps on your phone and the channels on your television and the ads in the magazines that you read, whatever it might be—the world's going to get its influence at you, at least. And the goal is for you to live that kind of distinctive life that, in this case, keeps you from having an identical, parallel sense of humor that the world has. The world loves to laugh at things that they shouldn't be laughing at. And in our lives, we need to say, "We can't—that can't be our sense of humor."

If you're building some sub-points, I guess this would be letter C: what I don't want to do—I want to be careful that I don't laugh about **sin**. Just to make it as broad as I can in this passage: don't laugh about sin. And there are entire industries—millions of dollars spent, script writers, joke writers, television—all about trying to get us to laugh. And one of the easiest ways to get us to laugh is to get us to laugh at things that, really, we shouldn't be laughing about—things that, really, God is not pleased with. And our humor shouldn't parallel the world.

It's not that God doesn't want us happy; it's not that he doesn't want us joyful; it's not that he doesn't want us glad; it's just that he wants to make sure we're not laughing about things—or even speaking about things—that the Bible says he condemns. Start in verse 3, Ephesians chapter 5. Let's read a bit of this. Verse 3: "But sexual immorality and impurity and covetousness"—I mean, before we even get to laughing at it—"must not even be named among you, as is proper among the saints." There's that picture of distinctiveness. Our lives are distinct from their lives, and so should our discussions be distinct from their discussions. "Let there be no filthiness, nor foolish talk, nor crude joking"—all of those are the kinds of things that, in our world, are used to make people laugh. It used to be you could talk about—well, that's junior high humor—and now it seems like everyone in Hollywood thinks that we're all perpetual junior highers. They're always working to get us to laugh at things that the Bible says are improper among the saints, and they're not appropriate; they're out of place. "Instead"—it's not that God doesn't want us glad—"but let there be thanksgiving." Let's be grateful; let's be joyful; let's be glad about the good things that God does.

Because when it comes to the things that the world likes to see as entertainment—verse 5—"you can be sure of this: everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous"—that's the list that started in verse 3—he explains, "anyone who is covetous (that is, an idolater) has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." He's talking about the non-Christians in the world now. "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." God is going to judge the world, and the things he's going to judge the world on should never be the things that dominate our discussions or even make us laugh. Our sense of humor should not be built on those things.

Verse 8: "For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." What kinds of things does that entail? Verse 9: "For the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. And try to discern what is"—here it is—"pleasing to the Lord." We often



try to figure out what makes **us** happy, makes **us** laugh, makes **us** feel good. And the Bible says, “Let’s talk about the things that **please God**. Let’s make those the dominant feature of our lives.” Because I don’t want to find pleasure or happiness in things that nailed Christ to the cross—let’s put it in those dramatic terms. I don’t want that. The things that Christ died for, the things that God will punish non-Christians for, shouldn’t be the things that make me smile, giggle, or laugh.

Verse 11: “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness”—which is not only doing those things, but making light of them and making comedy of them—“but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.” “But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’” Verse 15: “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise...” You’ve got to give it some thought. And no, we don’t like doing that, but we need to. “Making the best use of the time”—now here’s something you’ve got to underline, and it’s only getting worse—“because the days are evil.” Not a good time for us in this culture, especially with, as I said, the tentacles of our culture that invade our lives at every turn. We’ve got to be distinctive. We’ve got to think. We can never just go right along and pattern and parallel what makes us happy, what makes us laugh, what makes us feel cheerful. We can’t just brainlessly follow along with the pattern of the world. “Woe to you who laugh now”—there’s a lot of laughing going on about a lot of things in the Bible that God ends up judging, because that only ends in mourning and weeping and regret and grief.

Which, by the way, helps us transition into what should help us understand why we would ever weep at all as Christians. If we’re forgiven, if God is our King, if everything’s going to work out for our lives—why in the world would we ever weep? Well, partly because of what we just read. The things that so often dominate the culture in which we live—and certainly do now—and the things that punctuate our lives as not-yet-perfected Christians are the things for which Christ died—the things for which the wrath of God is going to come on a non-Christian world. When I give that some thought, then I should recognize there are some very legitimate things for us as Christians to weep about.

Number two on your outline—let’s put it this way: we need to **cry about the right things**. And the reason I worded it that way is I’m preaching not in the first century, but I’m preaching to the 21st century. And I understand that we’ve become—as Christians in a very prosperous, insulated Christian culture—we’ve become very thin-skinned. I’ve recognized—and to read a passage to you like verse 21, “Blessed are you who weep now,” we can have a lot of people maybe take that and run out of the auditorium today feeling justified and commanded by God—because you’re a crybaby. And I don’t want that. I don’t want to give you license to be a thin-skinned, hypersensitive person who’s always getting your feelings hurt and feeling like God is saying, “Oh, blessed are you when you weep. So good—you should be hurt. He looked at you funny; he said that weird.”



Just take some time, if you would, to read Paul's last excellent letter, which is 2 Timothy—the last one we have from him. When you are tempted to feel bad, make sure it's not for the selfish things that so often seem to knock Christians these days off the rails. I don't want you to be another thin-skinned Christian. I read books all the time—every other page, it seems, in these modern Christian books, everybody's talking about how they got their feelings hurt. And it's not because they're getting fed to the lions or their relatives are getting fed to the lions; it's because they didn't get quite understood quite right. I'm tired of that. Read 2 Timothy to remind you of this: that you're a soldier; you're a fighter; you're a warrior; you're fighting the good fight. You're supposed to endure hardship like a good soldier; you're supposed to persevere under the difficulties of the Christian life. Just remember that.

You know—and it's almost absurd, I think—I don't want to be as current as the headlines this week, but when I see football players getting their feelings hurt when they talk to one another... I don't know—maybe you're not up on all that. And maybe I don't know the whole story. I don't know. But from what I see in the headlines, I think: you've got a guy with a neck the size of a tree trunk, and someone hurt his feelings? I don't... I don't understand that. That to me is—at least—a visual depiction of what I feel is happening to the church today. We're fighting together a fight of faith. We're here trying to extend the borders of the kingdom. We're at war with the devil, the flesh, and even the culture in which we live to establish the right and the cause of Christ in our world and generation. And we often run off and weep and sob because someone didn't treat us quite right. We're soldiers.

But there **is** a time to weep, and there **should** be things we weep about. Ephesians 5 said that there are some things that are coming in terms of judgment because of sin. That would be a good place to start. You want to talk about crying about the right things? The things we need to be crying about, then, are **sin**.

Okay, let's start with your own sin—my sin and your sin. When we commit sin, it should bother us. Now, if the Spirit of God is living in your life, you're going to feel that conviction. But I need you to make sure that you understand that that's a much bigger deal, I suppose, than our conscience used to condemn us for when we were non-Christians. Now we're Christians; we understand something about the price that was paid to forgive you of your sins. And we need to stop and say, "Wow—look at this pattern of sin in my life. Look at this failure. Look at what I did in denying the standard of Christ in some area of my life." That needs to affect us emotionally.

Let me turn you to one passage on this. It's not a very pleasant passage, but important—James chapter 4. Turn to James 4. In James 4 we find another verse that Dayspring will never print on a card. You can hunt endlessly in our bookstore for a framed version of this verse to buy for your guests at Thanksgiving, but you're not going to find it. We don't like it. Why? Because—much like Solomon in Ecclesiastes 2—we are in a culture that never sees the value of weeping and mourning. And yet, right here—drop down to verse number 9—we're commanded to do so.



Now we'll get the context, but let's look at the command first of all. Verse 9b—this is James 4 (you with me on this, 11 o'clock crowd? My favorite crowd. "You say that to all the services." That's true.) Verse 9b: "Be wretched and mourn and weep." These are commands here. "Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom." You can't picture that on a framed verse plaque, can you? We don't make our kids memorize that in Awana, I don't think. What is this verse all about?

Context—verse 1: James 4:1—"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?" The Christians James is writing to are always bickering with one another. "Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" Always fighting that battle with the flesh. "You desire and do not have"—and apparently, in this text, there's someone standing in the way. You don't get what you want in some situation, and so "you murder." Now I don't think there's literally CSI rushing into the church here that James is preaching to. I don't think they're slitting throats and stabbing each other. But I think this is reminiscent of what Jesus taught the early church—and teaches us—and that is: when you deal with murder and the kind of tearing down of one another that we have—that hatred and bitterness for one—it's on the same spectrum. You may not have murdered them and stopped their heart from beating, but when you assassinate their character and gossip about them and hold that bitter grudge in your heart—it's the same kind of thing. It's this antipathy for that person. It's this anger and hostility about that relationship.

And he says, "Look what you're doing in damaging relationships because you've got something that you want that's not even godly; it's something fleshly," as he ended chapter 3 with. It's this rivalry and this kind of envy and strife in the church. He says, "You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask." Verse 3: "You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." You're asking God to do things, and you want things that are not coming from your core, rewired desires as a new creature in Christ. You're still just dealing with the surface desires of your flesh, and you have these impulses—you want things your way—and so you're constantly in all this problem.

And because you're mirroring the values of the world in that—the world that just lives to satisfy whatever desires they have—this is a problem with you and God. And he ups the ante here. You don't have conflicts here horizontally; your conflict is ultimately with God. Verse 4: he calls them "adulterous people." God has an agenda for you; he's rewired you; he wants you to live for him. "Do you not know that friendship with the world"—this kind of parallel, patterning just your lives to have what you want—"is hostility," it's **enmity**, "with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." And he speaks in verse 5 about God's jealousy for us—"Do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says he yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?" But God gives more grace. And he says to us, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."



“Therefore submit yourselves to God.” You’ve got a problem. It’s a sin problem. It’s your passions. It’s giving in to those passions. It’s being led by those passions. “Resist the devil.” He’s always trying to fan into flame those fleshly passions. “If you resist him, he’ll flee from you. Draw near to God, and he’ll draw near to you.” “Cleanse your hands,” he calls them “sinners.” “Purify your hearts,” he calls them hypocrites—“double-minded.”

Now’s our verse—“Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.” Now the rest of it, verse 10—“Humble yourselves”—that’s what we’re talking about here. You’ve got a problem; see it for what it is. “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” See, the verse (v. 9) is not meant to be the perpetual, chronic state of our lives. But when we’re seeking, as we said in the first point, to insulate our lives from the problems at hand by trying to put this nice varnish on it that’s all about just having fun and prosperity and laughter and revelry—the problem is we never deal with the issue. And when the issue is dealt with, God then wants to exalt us. He doesn’t want us to live in a perpetual state of mourning; he wants to turn our mourning into joy. But first we’ve got to turn our pursuit of joy into mourning—recognize the problem.

Cry about the right things. The things that should really grieve us are not the little selfish tears that we cry because our feelings are hurt. We ought to be grieving over the problem of sin in our lives—our deference and giving in to the fleshly impulses of our heart that are above us—so that we can reach a place of repentance. More on that in a minute.

Let me move beyond your own personal battles. If you really want to reflect the character of Christ, we’ve got to move out of that to something that really extends beyond yourself to other people. What I mean by that is this: Christ didn’t have that kind of grief over his own sin, did he? He didn’t have any sin. He wasn’t battling these things in his own flesh, in his own heart. Oh, I know he had temptation—I get that. But he wasn’t grieving over **his** sin. And no one could ever call him an adulterous man and someone who was in friendship with the world. But he sure grieved over that in **other people’s** lives when he saw it. If you want to cry about the right things, we should be, as a category, crying about sin—not only your own, but if you want to be a godly person, you ought to start caring about the people around you. That should grieve you. Is that not a godly thing?

Here’s Jesus predicted in Isaiah 53 as “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” And you might say, “Well, that’s because he’s going to go to the cross, and I read about the garden of Gethsemane, and that was really hard for him.” I understand that. But that seemed to be the exception and not the rule for his life. Have you noticed that? In his life and his ministry, he’s not always grieving the cross; he’s grieving the sin in the world. He’s grieving the sin in his disciples’ lives. He’s grieving the sin in people that won’t become his disciples.



Think about it—in Matthew 23 he looks at the city of Jerusalem, and he just says, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets... How many times I wanted to gather you like a hen gathers her chicks, but you wouldn’t have it. You wouldn’t do it.” And there’s nothing left for those people but judgment. He grieves over that. Or in Matthew 9, where he looks at people and he—well, the Bible says he has compassion for these—“Oh, look at these people. They’re like sheep without a shepherd. How badly they need what I have that they’re not even willing to have.” “Oh, you’ve got to beg God—pray to the Lord of the harvest, that he’ll send out workers into his harvest field.” He’s always concerned about the sin that he sees around him.

And that’s not just Christ. You may see that as an impossible standard, but just read any godly person in the Bible. They care about the sins of other people. They’re grieving over it. Think about Jeremiah—we just got done reading that in our Daily Bible Reading. He was known as “the weeping prophet”—at least that’s what commentators call him. Why? Because we read a lot about him crying. He’s always crying. Weeping. For what? Because he’s such a bad person? His failures? No, not it. I mean, I’m sure he was an imperfect person; he had his own failures. But what was he grieving about? The sins of the people that lived in his country. He grieved over that.

I know we want a happy-go-lucky Christian life, but we live in a culture and a world—you probably live in, even, a family—where you’ve got things that should grieve you more than they do. “Blessed are those who weep”—if you share the concerns of Christ, Christ will lead us to solutions that will give us much to rejoice in. Matter of fact, the apostle Paul—he looked at people that were lost. I’m thinking now of Romans 9:1–2, and he says, “God is my witness, I’m not lying—I have unceasing anguish and grief in my heart.” Over what? People that reject the gospel—in that case, his own kinsmen, the Jewish people of the first century. And what did that do for him? Well, the book of Romans started with his passion to share the message. How often did he rejoice in people that became Christians? Why was that motivated in his life? Well, for the glory of God—I get all that. But because he looked around and he could not live with the fact that the people that he cared about were lost. They were enslaved to sin and they needed release. Same for Christ. We see it all over the Bible.

One verse—here’s one verse that should temper a bit of our lives. It’s in Psalm 119:136, where David says (I believe David wrote Psalm 119), “My eyes shed streams of tears”—it’s regular—“because people do not keep your law.” In his prayer life, his heart was breaking—not just over the fact that he didn’t get the promotion or he’s a little short on cash this month. Think about David’s prayer life. Think about Paul’s prayer life. Think about Jeremiah’s prayer life. Think about Christ’s prayer life. They grieved over the fact that there was sin in the lives of people they cared for.

“Blessed are those who weep.” When is it godly to weep? Well, it’s godly to weep when we’re weeping about sin—not only in our own lives, but the lives of others. So I guess that’s the question: when you are crying, what are you crying about? When you’re sorrowful, what are you sorrowful about? When you’re bummed out and depressed, what are you bummed out and depressed about?



Are they the kinds of things that God rebuked Jonah for? Remember—we quoted it not long ago in the PET series—we were looking at Jonah chapter 4. You don't need to turn there. But remember the story—God basically comes, in the very last paragraph, and rebukes Jonah because he's grieving over... what? You remember? The plant that had grown up over and gave him shade had died. And now he has to slather on the SPF 60, or whatever it is—"Oh, my head is burning; it's hot out here." He was grieving, and had these—quote, unquote—selfish tears being shed. And God breaks on the scene and says, "I did all that—made you very uncomfortable—to show you how immature you are. Look at this: you are grieving over a plant." And he says, "Look across the valley at the city of Nineveh. Look at that city with all those people. You don't even care about them. I'm grieving over lost people, and you're grieving over a sunburn." That's a problem.

Next time you feel really bad inside, you've just got to ask yourself, "What am I grieving about?" We need to cry for the right things—that's always going to be sin, either in our own lives or the lives of others.

But here's the thing—our verse is not about living in perpetual weeping and sorrow. Luke 6:21 says, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh." The point of this passage is: godly grief is going to lead to something positive, and it's going to be emotionally positive. You will feel better. You will feel joyful. You will be glad. You'll laugh.

Now, if you have been studying this with us, you know these parallel statements about "Blessed are you who have this now, because later you're going to have this"—a lot of these are what we call eschatological. They're coming in the future when Christ's kingdom arrives. But let's see, in the Bible as we think through the Bible, isn't there a time when weeping should stop **in this life** regarding whatever situation it might be? Some may be chronic, I suppose, but there are a lot of things we cry about episodically in terms of circumstance and situation that should come to an end.

I'll put it this way—**number three** on your outline: we need to **know when to stop crying**. There's a time when our mourning should cease, and we should be now focusing on joy. We should be moving toward gladness. We ought to be working up the next laugh. Why? When should the transition take place? Four things—real quick. This is like five messages in one, I realize—but here we go.

A. This may sound odd, but jot it down: when you **realize you're being disciplined**—by God, I'm talking about. Now that may seem odd. And if you're a real Sunday School graduate, you're thinking, "Well, wait a minute—Hebrews 12 is really clear on God's discipline in our lives. Whatever he does to discipline us when we've done something wrong—like a loving Father—he does it so that we will be sorrowful." And you're telling me, "When you realize you're being disciplined, stop being sorrowful"? Yes—that's exactly what I'm telling you. The sorrow of



discipline—you've made some sinful decision, and God has brought consequences in your life, and those have made you really sad; they've made you weep; they've made you bummed out—great. As soon as you recognize the cause and effect—as soon as you see that it's because of sin that God has brought this consequence on you; as soon as you see that this is God's discipline—time for the mourning to end. Time for the weeping to end. Time for you to wipe the tears out of your eyes and get to work on **why** God brings discipline. He brings discipline so that you will **repent** of your sins and **confess** your sins. That's why he brings discipline. All the energy spent on mourning because of the difficult season God brought you in needs to stop as you turn your attention toward real, sincere repentance and real, clear confession.

Give you an example of this—the historical Sunday School story, which I hope you know. Joshua fought the battle of Jericho. Remember that? Smile at me if you remember that—yes, of course. After they win the battle of Jericho in Joshua 6, they move on to the next city that they're going to take in the Promised Land, and that's the little city of Ai—spelled A-I. They think this is no big deal: "We just took the capital of the Canaanite land. We took Jericho, and it was in a real unconventional way. We'll just put together part of our army and send part of the Israeli army up to take the city of Ai." And so off they go. You know what happens, Sunday School graduates? What happens? They get defeated. They lose. Israelite soldiers are killed. Battlefield strewn with the good guys, now dead.

The leaders, including Joshua—led by Joshua—they go before the Lord. They fall on their faces, and they grieve, and they cry, and they lament, and they cry, and they grieve, and they weep. Let me read for you verse 10 of Joshua 7. "The LORD said to Joshua, 'Oh, poor thing—this is so bad. That's really sad for you to lose something. I feel so bad for you. Here's a tissue.'" That's what Jesus said to Joshua—no. The Triune God says to Joshua—here it comes—"Get up. Get off your face. Why have you fallen on the ground? Israel has sinned." In other words, "Don't you know why you lost the battle? Can't you see why, right now, I brought you into a bad situation that makes you feel bad? Don't you know this is discipline? Get up. Israel sinned; they've transgressed my covenant. Deal with it. Call the clans together. Find the violator. Deal with the problem."

Once you recognize that the season of your life that is causing you such pain is related to sin that preceded it—and you haven't confessed it and you haven't repented of it—wipe your tears away and seek the Lord in repentance and confession. That's why God has brought the discipline in your life. And he's not going to hand you a tissue; he's going to grab your hand and say, "Get up. Stop crying. Deal with it."

B. When we confess our sins—to quote 1 John 1:9—"He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That promise leads us to understand that when we confess our sins, whether it's because of just the awareness of the guilt of it or whether the consequences of it have made us aware of our sins—once you recognize the problem, the Bible says then confess it. And when you confess it—here's the promise—he's faithful and righteous to



forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. When that happens, you might want to jot down Psalm 32, which starts with the Hebrew word *'ashre*—we've talked about that word a lot. It's one of the names of the 12 tribes of Israel, but the word itself—the adjective—means “happy,” happiness. “Happy is the one whose transgressions are forgiven. Happy is the one whose sins are covered. Happy is the one to whom the LORD does not credit iniquity.” That's the person that ought to be really happy.

Some of you see your sin—you feel the conviction of your sin; maybe you realize it because of a season of discipline—and instead of confessing the sin and rejoicing in forgiveness, we confess the sin and then lament how terrible it is that we sinned, and how awful it is that we sinned, and “look at the consequences of sin that still remain,” and you wallow in it. The Bible says: on the other side of confession is **forgiveness**. And if you're forgiven, you ought to be **happy**. Oh, there may be consequences—residual consequences, I get that. You've still got to bury all the soldiers on the battlefield; you've still got to comfort the widows here. But you know what? God has forgiven you. You've dealt with the sin. You've put it all out there. You've confessed it. **Be happy**. That passage is repeated in Romans 4 to make that clear emphasis—that that takes place at a moment. We're not trying, through penance, to earn his favor back. We confess it, and in that moment we are forgiven. Might there be some restitution? Might there be some rebuilding? Yes. But in terms of your disposition—it's time for you to turn the tears into joy. **Know when to stop crying**.

C. Thirdly, you need to stop crying when God has **clearly shut a door** in your life. He shut the door—and by that I know that's an analogy—but what I mean by that is: some opportunity has now been taken away; some asset has been removed; some pathway for you in your life—it's been blocked; and you know it's blocked by God; it's been sealed shut; and that no longer is going to be an opportunity for you, an asset for you, or something—it's taken away from you. When you know it's gone, you need to stop crying, and you need to move on to what it is next that God would have for you. Some of you live in the past not because of your own sin, but you're grieving over some loss. And that, at some point, has to come to an end.

Let me give you an example—1 Samuel chapter 16. In chapter 15 we have the end of Saul's reign. Now, he's still on the throne, but Saul had become so compromised in his life that he was rejected. Now, the focus of that story in 1 Samuel 16 is Samuel. Samuel is the prophet. He was the one who laid hands on him, so to speak, and anointed him and authorized him. And he was the one who swore him into the office, if you will. And there was Saul, who now was so compromised that God said, “I reject him.” Samuel—we pick up the story in 1 Samuel 16—he's weeping; he's mourning; he's crying. Why? Because this monarchy experiment that we're working on here—it just failed. It's over.

We find Samuel on his face—just like Joshua was on his face—different reason, but he's mourning and grieving. Here's what God says to Samuel. “The LORD said to Samuel, ‘How long will you grieve over Saul? How long will you grieve over Saul? I've rejected him from being king over



Israel. Now fill your horn with oil”—that was the flask that they carried—“and go. I’m going to send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, and I’m going to provide for myself a king among his sons.” Now, get going—let’s work on the next king.

Sometimes the door slams shut, providentially, in God’s plan for our lives, and we’re too busy mourning and grieving over the loss. And we need to get up—stop hanging on the doorknob, crying that it’s closed—get up and move on. That’s a bit of the thicker skin we need as modern Christians—to stop being quite so sensitive over the losses.

You may say, “Yeah, but my loss is bigger than that—it’s a relationship.” Oh, I know those are bigger. And sometimes they’re so permanent—talk about sealing a door shut—that someone in your life that you love has died. Yeah, that can be. And I don’t want to be insensitive—and I’m not insensitive; I have been to more funerals than you have, I assure you. And I care for the people that are hurting and mourning. But note this carefully: as long as we’re talking about closed doors—if you want to study grief and mourning in the Bible (which would be a good thing to do)—when you do, especially in the Old Testament, there was always a time when the mourning **started**—that’s when you lost your loved one—and a time when the mourning **ended**. It may be too organized and too specific for you as you think it through, and it seems like it’s not based on your feelings—oh, but it was a focused time of mourning. Depending on who it was, it might be a seven-day period of mourning. Maybe it was a national leader and a week of mourning. Or maybe it was someone in your life, your family, your loved one—and sometimes the Bible speaks of those going on 30 days, 40 days—one as long as 70 days—where it was a time that mourning started and a time when mourning ended.

This may seem quite an insensitive example, but David’s the one who did this in 2 Samuel when his baby died—remember that? He had a zero—he didn’t even have an hour—of mourning. He only mourned when the door was cracked open. He was weeping and mourning on his face, and his attendants didn’t want to tell him the baby had died—remember the story? He said, “Did the baby die? You guys are acting weird.” And they said, “Yes—I hate to tell you, King David—the baby has died.” The Bible says David got up off the ground; he washed his face; he went off and worshiped the Lord. And everyone freaked out in the palace: “We don’t understand—you were weeping and mourning when he was sick in ICU, and now the baby’s died and you’re moving on?” And his answer was this: “I fasted and wept because I thought in my mind, ‘Who knows? Maybe the LORD will be gracious to me and the child will live.’ Now the child is dead—why should I fast? Nothing I can do. I can’t bring him back again. I’ll go to him—I’m going to die—he’s not coming back to me.”

Now you may say, “Well, David sure is callous.” Well, in this case he had no relationship with the child; the child was a potential life relationship with him—a real human being—and he was going to grieve the loss. But when he recognized that there was nothing he could do, he was ready to say, “You know what? The tears—time for the tears to stop.” I’m not asking you to be callous—



especially in the face of death. I mean, funerals—by the way, this is another thing about our setting—look, it's **not** a time for us to celebrate; it's a time for us to mourn. Funerals are for mourning. We should mourn the loss of people that we love. But at some point, we can't mourn that for the rest of our lives. We really can't, nor should we. The Bible gives us no examples of that. We've got to, at some point—depending on the relationship, depending on who this was—at some point we've got to draw a line and say, "Okay, it's time for me to turn to the **open** doors in my life."

I just need to say that—and that's just part of this point, the sub-point. But when God closes a door—whether it's a job that you've lost, a house that you've lost, a bank account—whatever it is—at some point we stop crying. We accept the sovereign plan of God for our lives. We affirm, through our contentment and our willingness to look optimistically to the future, his providence over the details of our lives, and we move on.

D. Fourthly—under number three—know when to stop crying. This is not immediate, I recognize, just like the time of mourning being over is not like flipping a switch. But let me say this: you should stop crying when God **sends his comforters**. And by that I mean when he really is providing in your life people that are there to help you get over this—this difficulty, whatever it might be.

Paul speaks of the persecution that he had as a missionary, and he says in 2 Corinthians 1 how it was so bad he **despaired even of life**. Think about that—talk about kind of admitting your depression. Here's Paul saying, "I am so bummed out I didn't want to live anymore." In chapter 7 of 2 Corinthians, he says, "But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus." Think about that. Now, God—he says—is the one who loves to comfort the downcast. "I'm downcast; I'm sorrowful; this ministry has been so bad, so difficult; we've had so many problems; so much opposition; we've been put in the hospital over people throwing rocks at us. But God comforted us by the coming of Titus." God used a person to try to bring comfort to my life. Here's the thing about Paul—he **accepted** it. He **cooperated** with it. He saw it as God's extension to help him emotionally. And he was willing to allow God's tool—a human tool—to be useful to wipe the tears away from his eyes and get back on track. "And not only by his coming," he says, "but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you—your report." He told us of your longing, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. Paul went from depression and being downcast to **rejoicing** because he was willing to cooperate with the human instruments of God's comfort.

Some of you have the pattern, when you are hurting in your life, to **isolate**. You put the walls up. You don't want to be put on the prayer chain. You don't want people bringing meals to your house. I understand—I'm not talking about the day and the time when you want to cry alone—I understand that; we need those times. I'm talking about the people that become reclusive in their pain. They hang on to their grief, and God is sending Tituses to their lives, and they don't want it. They don't want it. Not biblical. "Blessed are you who weep now"—I understand that. But that's not a license for you to build a fortress in which you'll live for the rest of your life. God says weeping is an



alright thing; it's a good thing; it's a blessed thing in certain circumstances. But we need to realize God wants to bring us out of the weeping into joy. And that, in part, is done by being receptive to the comforters that God sends.

I said many of these promises are eschatological—they deal with the end. And you may say, “Well, there are a lot of things where I find comfort, and I get comforted by God, and the tears turn to joy again, and I begin to laugh again—and that’s great. But then there’s another thing, then there’s another thing, there’s another loss, and there’s a death, and there’s a problem, there’s a setback, there’s a disease.” Welcome to human life. That’s where we all live. I know this about your life: until you see Christ face to face, you’re going to have all this. Now, we need to go episodically—circumstantially—from the tears to the joy whenever it’s possible. But just know there are plenty of things that are going to cause you—appropriately—to weep and cry and grieve throughout the rest of your life. They’re going to be there. But then, at one point, they’re going to **completely end**. The Bible has made the promise—Revelation 21:4: at one point he’s going to “wipe away **every** tear from your eyes.” There will be no more mourning, no more crying, and no more pain. No more death. “The first order of things has gone,” the voice from heaven proclaims. Why? Because all of this—all of this life, all these things—are over.

Number four on your outline: I’d like you to **thank God for a happy future**. That’d be a word worth circling—*happy*. Preachers like to avoid it, particularly when speaking of the present life, because I can’t really promise any kind of guaranteed happiness. I can’t. So we talk about joy, and we talk about the fact that though you are imprisoned in a jail cell in **Philippi** in stocks after being beaten, you should be able to find some joy in the eternal things. I get that. But I can’t say that was a happy night for Paul and Silas in prison. It wasn’t happy. I can’t promise you happiness between now and the time you see Christ. But when you see him, I can tell you—you will experience **happiness**. Sentient, emotional, positive, glad, happy—laughter—you’re going to have it. Unmitigated. Completely unending. The Bible says there will be for us joy and gladness, and at his right hand there are pleasures forevermore.

In Isaiah—at one of the worst times (think about it, ramping up to the Babylonian captivity)—they were really, really coming to grips with the grief of their sin. Almost all the prophets that we’ve read so far—and certainly the ones that we’ll read, the Minor Prophets, as we continue to work through our Daily Bible Reading—they’re always, in the midst of all that, stopping and saying (almost all of them), “Hey, you know what, though? God’s going to restore.” And not only that—books like Isaiah that are so big, that have a lot of time—or at least a lot of pen ink has been spent on those pages—to talk about not only the restoration of Israel, but the eschatological restoration of all things. He starts talking about how great it’s going to be in eternity. Starts talking about the New Jerusalem. Starts talking about the fact that he will wipe away the tears from our eyes permanently. And he says this at one point in Isaiah: you want to **rejoice** in what God will **create**. I like that—because even now I should be able to be thankful and heartened by the fact that one day I will be happy. Completely happy. Forever happy. That should do something to me now. I need to recognize that all of the things that cause me grief—and I may have a good period now because I’ve come



through my last struggle, and God has brought my mourning to happiness again—but at some point all of these cycles of grief are going to be over. And for that we ought to be thankful.

When you're reading the Old Testament, it's not hard to find **Christological** connections. In particular, when we're reading in the Kings—when you see the king, you know, particularly reading about David—here's the Son of David who's going to come and sit on the throne and be the ultimate fulfillment of all that David did. But sometimes the other kings—we miss it, because those kings are no David. Even his next—the next king, Solomon—you look at Solomon and you think, “Well, he's no David.” And sometimes it's hard to make the Christological connections. But here's one to make. Whenever you read about Solomon, remember this: David was the warrior who fought the battles; he extended the borders; he brought peace, security, and economic prosperity to the kingdom. Solomon **inherited** that. He was the king who was born with the golden spoon in his mouth. Here he was with all of these wonderful blessings, and he was able to write poetry and do all the wisdom writings that he did. And everyone admired the amazing heyday—they called it the golden age of Israel, right there in the middle monarchy—the 10th century BC.

There was a woman—a queen, the Queen of Sheba—who'd heard all about the **prosperous** kingdom of Solomon. You want to make a Christological connection? Think about Christ on his throne, **ensconced** on the throne of the coming kingdom. Talk about prosperity—that will be the ultimate day of birth. Talk about the golden, golden age of the kingdom—it's coming. Queen of Sheba hears about it. When she hears about it, she says, “I've got to see this for myself.” Now, there's no TV; you can't send pictures. All you can do is hear about it. So she heard about it—envisioned it in her mind—and then she sought him out. 1 Kings 10. She says this to Solomon: “I did not believe the reports of all that I'd heard until I came and saw it with my own eyes. And behold, the **half** of it was not told to me.” “I heard it was great here; when I got here, I realized I hadn't heard the half of it. I couldn't believe it till I saw it. And when I saw it, the story was just not even as good as the reality.” And then—here's the word—“**Happy** are your people; **happy** are your men; **happy** are your servants who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom. How **blessed** is the LORD your God, who has delighted in you, to set you on the throne in Israel.”

Hard for me not to see Christ in my mind's eye when I read about anybody being set on the throne of Israel, because that's only a portent to the real **ensconcement** of the King on the throne in Israel—and that's the ultimate King. And you want to talk about prosperity? You haven't seen anything yet. Whatever you imagine, you'll get there and, like the Queen of Sheba, you'll say, “I hadn't heard the half of it. I hadn't imagined even a part of it.” And then—what's the result? **Happy** are those who stand before you, who get to hear this; who get to experience this. “I'm a foreign dignitary—how blessed are your men; how happy are your people; how happy are your servants.” That's a good thing. And it's coming your way. And I want you to be thankful for it.

Pray with me, please.



God, we are grateful—probably not as grateful as we need to be. I’m sure we’re not. We want to be more grateful. We want to see the profundity of this in a way, maybe, that we haven’t in the past. This Thanksgiving week, when we have modified schedules—at least most of us do—we get some time off; we get to sit around a table and think about thanksgiving. As Christians especially—though we have a lot of little things to be thankful for, and we should rightly thank you for those—we want to be motivated, as we begin this important week, by just being thankful for the most important thing of all. That is, as Christians—by your work in our heart, in the expression of faith and repentance—you have taken all that should condemn us and you canceled it out. Thank you, God, that we are qualified to be one of those **happy** people, living continually in the presence of the King, because of the finished work of Christ. For that, God, we should celebrate. We should be thankful. We should find that great sense of joy that should undergird our lives, no matter how rocky the road might be for us.

So, God, I pray—in the episodes of our lives, you would turn our tears into laughter; and then, in the big picture of our lives, we look forward to the day when there’ll be no more tears. There’ll be nothing left for us but joy and gladness and laughter. We look forward to that day. God, we’ll be faithful; we’ll work for you; we’ll do what we need to do until we see that reality and our faith is sight. So, God, I commit our church, just as best as I can as someone praying and interceding right now, to your care. Build them up; encourage them; allow their expressions of thanksgiving to be sincere and pleasing to you. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.