

So, what is it that really makes a believer stand out from the world? What makes us attractive to our unsaved co-workers, our neighbors or family members who don't know Him? I think a lot of you are going to answer, "Our love. Our love. The way that we love others, the way that we love them." And I couldn't argue with that. Jesus Himself said that they're going to know us by the love that we have for one another (John 13:35). But I don't think that's the only thing. I think a lot of the world around us is attracted to the Christian that displays a genuine peace in their lives and a joy that reflects that peace.

Truthfully, without that peace and joy in our lives, our love for others gets kind of stifled, which then makes us less attractive to the unsaved world around us. If that's true - if genuine peace and joy play a large role in making our faith attractive to those that are hopeless and lost - if that's true, how much do you think the enemy wants to rob you of your joy and peace? How active will he be in trying to destroy that beautiful, radiant, infectious effect that supernatural peace and joy have? He's gonna come after you "like a roaring lion." Is that not what Peter says in 1 Peter 5:8? He wants to "devour" you. He wants to take your joy and your peace and eat it for breakfast, lunch and dinner - all day, every day. I mean, what better way to discredit your faith if you're without peace and joy in your life? Not only to others looking in, but to your own self. How easy is it to start questioning God's goodness? Questioning your salvation, questioning His Word and His Bible promises. Wedge just a little doubt in between you and the Lord, and guess what? Satan has got a foothold.

What's a foothold? It's a place where you can place your foot securely to provide support for the rest of the body to either rest your whole weight on it or to be able to advance you forward. That is all Satan needs to work his lies into your life, to dig in, to cause doubt and let your thoughts run wild with no restraint and with no protection. What happens when your mind has no restraint and no protection? Where does your mind run to? I think it's a domino effect, really. One piece tips, and the rest of the pieces just go so fast that you have no ability to catch up to it. When your mind runs wild, it can literally wreak serious havoc, destroying any good thing in there. All comfort, all joy, all peace - it just gets wiped out as your mind races into the darkest places, destroying relationships in your life, destroying

opportunities for the Lord to grow you and build you and snuffing out every opportunity to shine brightly for the Lord. Satan's endgame is to render you absolutely useless. And by taking your joy and by robbing you of your peace, he does just that. You become ineffective. You become paralyzed by whatever doubt took root in your mind and grew into this cancer that kills you from the inside out. Instead of joy, you now live with chronic depression. Your anxiety is through the roof. You have panic attacks when just little things don't go your way. Your mind becomes a prison of fear, doubt and worry.

Did you know that the way that you think can actually alter your brain chemistry for the worse or for the better, which can then also affect your physical body? Here are some symptoms of when we handle stress negatively: migraines, headaches, high blood pressure, stomach aches, chest pain, constipation, (the opposite) diarrhea, obesity, insomnia, loss of energy, reduced sex drive. I'm starting to sound like a commercial for the latest prescription drug. (Laughing) That's why God, in His Word, has a great deal to say about how we use our mind. Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." That's pretty powerful. That's why Paul tells us, in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Ephesians 4:23, on that same note, "and be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Your mind and heart are sometimes, in the Scriptures, synonymous, but they make up who you are and the choices that you make. It is the intangible part of you that makes you, you. No doctor, no psychologist or therapist can fix that. They may be able to operate on your brain or your actual anatomical heart, but they can't fix immaterial; they can't fix what only God can. Sure, doctors can prescribe anti-depressants that alter your brain chemistry or pills for high blood pressure, but they can't promise you a new heart or a renewed mind. They can't promise you a peace that surpasses all understanding. They can't promise you protection for this new mind and heart that is guarded in Christ Jesus. Now, there can certainly be good cases made for modern medicine - that truly help the physical body, that.....there's no doubt in my mind that genetic mutations take place, that disorders happen, and other medical conditions that we see all throughout the world where modern medicine can benefit those people that struggle with certain things - where it either keeps them alive or gives them a better quality of life. If I had Type 1 diabetes, I can guarantee you I would be taking insulin shots - rejoicing in the Lord that science provided that for us today and trusting in Him for every shot I have to inject myself with.

But there is no medicine, no doctor by which you can obtain genuine peace and joy. And Satan knows this, and he'll use it to his advantage. And we must remember that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). It's why Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 that, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." We are to take every thought captive because there's a war taking place for your heart and mind.

John 10:10, Jesus says, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come," Jesus says, "that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." I'm gonna be honest. I don't see a lot of Christians living the abundant life. Do you? I think the enemy has been having a field day, and many well-intentioned believers have bought into his lies. What's the lie? The lie is everything the enemy throws at you that keeps you from believing in God's Word for yourself. Every person or relationship, every material possession, every circumstance put before you - you name it - whatever is robbing you from joy, that has left you believing "this is as good as it gets, and I'm miserable" - outside of a few things in my day or week that temporarily make me happy, give me brief moments of relaxation where I can take a breath, but I feel a weight on me that I feel is never going to come off. And what are we seeing more and more and more of as a result of this? Suicide. People ending their life. And this is invading the church, and it's not just people in the pews. It's pastors behind the pulpits. Now, this might not be you. You might be a relatively joy-filled person. Praise God! But let me tell you this. I guarantee you, you are sitting next to people who aren't. And you would never even know it because so many people suffer silently. So many Christians, for fear of being judged, being found out or just plain selfish pride keeps them from being vulnerable to others. They put on a face, they put on a mask, or they avoid interaction with people altogether. But they come to church - either because they're programmed to ("It's just what I do"), or it feels good to pretend for a moment (which explains why social media is so popular), or they go to church because that weight is lifted for just a moment so that they can breathe. But they go back right into life missing what God wants for them because their minds are plagued with doubt, with fear, with worry, with pain, with responsibility and frustrations and depression and anxiety, unmet expectations of self and others. The list goes on and on. They come in these doors wanting to believe in

something better, but as soon as they walk out these doors, and something happens to trigger a response, all hope and joy disappear. Why? Because we confuse calm for peace and happiness for joy. We confuse God's plan with the American dream. We knit our emotions to lies and not truth. We operate off performance and not faith. We strive in pride rather than walk in humility.

All that to say how important is it that we get our mind right. How do we do that? The book of Philippians - it is literally the Christian's psychology book. But this one's inspired by God, which means it works. It works because God's Word is all-sufficient. Otherwise let's go home. No point reading this book if it's insufficient. Correct? If it's just man's word full of some crazy stories and wishful thinking, we are all wasting our time. But many of you are here because, ultimately, you believe God's Word is true. And although we fall prey to not live like it is sometimes, we come to hear the Bible taught because in it there is life. I think of Jesus, when He was speaking to a large crowd in John 6, and He tells them that He is "the bread of life," (verse 48) and in order for them to have this life, they must eat of His body and drink of His blood (verses 53-54). That wasn't a popular message. The people freaked out. They were like, "You want me to eat Your body and drink Your blood? That's disgusting!" And many of the followers walked away right then and there, after what He said, because they didn't understand that what He was saying was spiritual things. But Jesus turns to His twelve disciples - those closest to Him - and He says, "And if you want to leave too, the door's open." And Peter, God bless him, 50-50 (he gets it right half the time - this is one of those moments), he says (John 6:68), "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words to eternal life."

Well, let me ask you this, then. Do you believe like Peter? Are these the words to eternal life? Are they all-sufficient? Or is it just comforting words to you for a moment but mean nothing to you when you leave these doors and the trials of life hit you hard? Well I believe that they're all-sufficient, and because of that, I can speak with authority when I say this - that you can live a joy-filled, abundant life and experience the peace of God that He promises. That doesn't mean that you do not face pain, sorrow, difficulty or grief. It doesn't mean you do not face suffering because you are promised suffering. Also, joy is not a plastic smile that we put on our face in times of difficulty, and peace is not counting to three and taking a deep breath to calm our nerves. It's bigger than that. It's eternal, it's supernatural, and it's genuine. How do we know that?

Once again the book of Philipians. This letter was written by Paul while incarcerated in Rome, unsure of his future - whether he would be put to death or he would be released. Now, we know (because hindsight's 20-20) he was released and given more time to serve the Lord. But he was eventually rearrested and put to death by Nero. But Paul didn't know that at the time. And this letter isn't about Paul, actually. It's about joy. And God knew no better person to write a letter about genuine joy than a man of faith who has been put through the wringer. You see, no one likes to be coached or corrected by someone who hasn't themselves experienced what you have. Take for instance, no one likes receiving parenting advice from folks that don't have their own kids. Right? It's like, "What do you know? Be quiet." I'm sure there are some folks sitting in here tonight struggling to listen to some 30-year-old punk instructing them in life as if I knew what I was talking about. You know what? There's some validity to that, and I am not offended by it. But I'm not sharing my ideas about life. I'm sharing Paul's, which were inspired by the very breath of God. And Paul had every reason or excuse in the world to complain, to grumble, to be stressed out, to be worried and depressed, and to question God's goodness in the circumstances he was facing - all while doing the very work of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 11 speaks of the difficulties that Paul faced over the years, ministering. And Pastor Jack's probably going to go into it in length when he gets to it on Sunday mornings, but I just want to share with you the list so that you can have the full context of which Paul pens this letter about joy that all believers can have. So, verses 24 through 28 read this, "From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;" (the ocean) "in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness - besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches." Any of you sit, stranded, for a full night and day in the deep of the ocean? I don't know about you, but that's terrifying to me. Terrifying. This list pretty much rules out any of us going, "But my case is different! I'm unique! You don't understand what I have to deal with or what I have to go through!" We always want to believe that we're the exception. We want to excuse ourselves from needing to obey God's Word because our case is different.

Now, while your problems and trials may be more difficult than my own, they still do not fall outside God's Word, His solution and His ability to accomplish what He promises. Because Paul can make that argument that, "You guys don't understand, this is too difficult for me, this is unfair;" yet he commits his mind to the truth, and he submits his fears, concerns and disappointments to the Lord in prayer, with thanksgiving, where he is promised incomprehensible peace that will guard his heart and mind in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7). I think that qualifies him to tell us a thing or two about joy and the peace of God. Paul speaks of joy nineteen times in four chapters through the use of words such as joy, rejoicing, gladness, and other variations of those very words. I would encourage you to read Philippians and underline, mark or highlight every time you come across a word like that. I would encourage you to do that because it reminds you. But Paul wants this church to know that the secret to a believer's joy begins with how we think. Hence Paul references the use of the mind sixteen different times. That tells us that how we think plays a significant role in how we go about life, how we process life events, how we handle difficult situations, how we view God when things don't go our way, how we deal with our emotions when they want to spiral down into despair. That doesn't mean that we can manufacture joy or peace by just positive thinking. Tony Robbins doesn't work. These are gifts from God.

Joy and peace are gifts from God. They cannot be manufactured. But they can be had by anybody. But it is conditional in the sense that if you want to experience them to their fullness, you have to do it God's way. And Paul gives us insight into God's way. And so I want to start in Philippians 4:4. Give you a little context. Philippians 4:4. It reads, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" Let you think on that for a second. You think there's a reason why Paul felt the need to repeat himself on this one? You betcha. The command to "rejoice always" was repeated or emphasized because we are not prone to rejoice. It does not come naturally. Complaining does. We gripe and complain. We get distraught. We sound like grumpy old men who find misery in literally everything. I had an old boss at my previous job, and whenever I or someone else would say "good morning" to him, in his cranky old voice, he'd go, "What's good about it?" I think the only day he didn't respond like that was on his last day before retirement. He was a real crank. But clearly, this has been a problem for people for most of history. And there're a few things I want to point out in regards to this verse because I think it says some things. One is - rejoicing is not dependent upon circumstance or emotion. If it were, we wouldn't be able to always rejoice, would we? Which tells us that joy is not based on how we feel. Rather, rejoicing is a choice which then

requires our minds. We have to use our ability to think in order to rejoice. Well, let me ask you. Who is the only One we can actually think on that is unwavering, unchanging and never fails? The Lord. Hence Paul tells the church to, "Rejoice in the Lord always." When our source of joy is anything but the Lord, it's faulty, prone to failure and going to let you down. That is why we don't base our joy on circumstances, on people or possessions, or anything of that sort. They will all fail us.

So what can we learn about joy, not only from what Paul commands us to do but has also shown us in his own life (after we read 2 Corinthians)? That joy comes from a deep, abiding confidence that, regardless of one's circumstances in life, all is well between the believer and the Lord; and that we can rejoice because we know God is sovereign, that He's in control of all things, and that He will not allow one thing to happen to me that He doesn't want to happen. When our source of joy is the Lord, our minds can be anchored to Him - the Rock - which then makes the believers stable, consistent, secure. Something I see a lack of in many believers.

Paul follows this verse by going to verse 5 and saying, "Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand." The translation for "gentleness" here is kind of a weak one because the original word in the Greek has much more of a rich meaning to it. One commentator said, "The best way to truly express the full meaning is graciousness, the graciousness of humility. It carries the idea of showing mercy towards others' failures and faults and produces a patience to endure injustice, disgrace and mistreatment without retaliation, without bitterness or without vengeance. It is to be content even when harmed or hurt, as opposed to seeking self-interest." Nothing causes more stress, more anxiety, more depression than being solely focused or fixated on yourself. Rather, rejoice in humility because the Lord is near. He is at hand. He has our back. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) This is the mindset a believer should walk in because that is our reality. This is truth. "He will never leave us nor forsake us" (Hebrews 13:5). Read Bible story after Bible story. Listen to Pastor Jack's Easter message again: "But God"God always steps up to the plate, and He hits it out of the park. He's better than Barry Bonds on dope. (Laughing) But "God knows our frame; He knows that we are but dust" (Psalm 103:14) and that we can have lapses of judgment, that we can get tweaked-up pretty good or panicked.

Look at Abraham, David, Elijah, Peter, Thomas. They all had their moments that took them away from this confidence that they had. And we do the same. So Paul

addresses it in verses 6-7. He says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Anxious means to be pulled in different directions. For those of you that struggle with anxiety, you know exactly what that means. Paul is saying here, "Look, there's no need to panic, no need to fret, no need to freak out, no need to lose your mind over what is happening. Just come to Me. Come to Me with everything, acknowledging that I am the God that is near to you. I am the God who can do all things. I am the only One that can heal a broken heart. I am the only One that can renew your mind. I am the One who can give peace that surpasses all understanding. So come to Me, talk to Me, bring it all to My feet. It is not too big. And, believe it or not, I actually care." While no one else might, God does. 1 Peter 5:7, he says to "cast all your care upon Him." Why? "For He cares for you." But you've got to go to Him in faith. Faith is what pleases the Lord. Faith is what God wants to bless in your life. Isaiah 26:3 reads, "You" (speaking of God) "will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You."

Our faith in terms of our spiritual stability thrives or dies on what we actually think. So once again, how important is it that we get our mind right. Which is why Paul concludes this series of thoughts with the command in verse 8. He says, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things." This verse is the culmination of the previous four verses that we just talked about. You want joy? The peace that God promises us? Then "meditate on these things." Focus your mind, your attention, your thoughts on what is true, noble, just, pure, of good report, anything that has any virtue or is praiseworthy. Discipline your mind towards these things. The word "meditate" here is not a suggestion or an option for the believer. Paul is commanding the believer to calculate, to consider the implications of each of these qualities. This requires us to take action on our thought life. If we neglect this duty, guess what the result is. We leave our mind unguarded, unprotected, and we leave room for the enemy to get his foothold in (that we mentioned earlier). You choose what you want to set your mind to. You choose what thoughts have a voice into your life. But if you leave them unguarded, if you leave them to wander, there's no telling where your thoughts will take you.

So Paul says **choose these**, the first on the list being the most important. He says mediate on what is **true**. In the famous words of Pontius Pilate, "What is truth?" (John 18:38) Well, very simply, it is the living, breathing Word of God. It is everything the Bible says about God that is true, as well as everything that God says about what is true about us; is everything the Bible says that God has done and will do. Truth is the way to God. Jesus says (John 14:6), "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." He also says a couple chapters earlier, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). If it's truth that sets us free, guess what keeps us in bondage. Lies. And guess what the enemy of your soul is going to try and convince you of. Lies. Our great adversary is the accuser. He just wants to throw lies at you and lies at you and lies at you until they get so convincing that you believe them. He wants as many lies in your head as possible. Some lies. You're a mom. (Pastor Jason begins to whisper.) "You're a bad mom. You shouldn't even have this kid. You're horrible. You're gonna go to church? Why? Liar. Hypocrite." Any Christian that's struggling. (He continues to whisper.) "Why bother? What's the point? You're just gonna keep messin' up. God can't forgive that one. You're a loser. You're a failure. Your life is pointless. It's worthless. You're meaningless. You're not worth God's time. Just stop going." That's what he does. That's what he does.....over and over and over again. Puts you in situations. Actually situations that God intended to make use of building you up - opportunities where God can build you and grow you - you know Satan's going to take advantage of that. He's going to trip you up. He's going to throw lies at you. So what had potential of being a good thing where God can grow you through the trial becomes a terrible thing because you fell to his lies and his temptations. It's so important for you to know the Word of God, to fill your mind with God's promises, to let it be the light to your path, to steer you away from the traps and to know the will of God. The Word of God is our sword against the enemy. But if you surrender your sword, and you flood your mind with garbage, with lies, with things of this world, in comes the doubt, in comes the fear, in comes the anxiety, the depression, thoughts to harm yourself, thoughts to harm others. And these thoughts build one onto the other; they consume you so much that the very shackles that Jesus freed you from, you put them right back on, and you live in misery. The truth will set you free. Jesus, the Savior of the world, has freed you from the powers of sin and death, and, "Therefore, there is no condemnation for you who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). You are the sons and daughters of God. You can actually view yourself as God's little baby. And I say that because I have a 6-month-old boy, and every time I pick him up, I just want to smother him with kisses. Honestly, I've never been a

kissy person, and I've kissed this kid more times than I've kissed anything. (Laughing) And I get him, I kiss him, and I know he can't take any more of my kisses, and so I squeeze him until his little arms want to pop off. (Laughing) I mean, obviously before having a kid, I didn't know what that was like. And now I do. But guess what? God loves you more than I love my little boy. That's truth. Your sins are removed as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). That's truth. Stop condemning yourself. Stop living in the past. Stop putting yourself into bondage when you've been freed from that power. John 16:33, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." You win! That's the endgame. You win! That's truth. 1 John 4:4, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Is that true? Do you believe that? Do you believe that? (Congregation answers, "Yes.") You didn't sound very confident in that. Set your mind to what is true, and the shackles come off. Set your mind to what is true, and those shackles will come off. Otherwise we're wasting our time teaching God's Word.

The rest of these virtues that flow from the first all align with God's truth, and so we'll kind of go through them quickly.

The next one is meditate on what is noble or honorable, honest, worthy. Meditate on things that are worthy of the glory of God, that would bring respect to God and His Word. Meditate on the things that redeem integrity and in character - something that's been far lost, I think, for a long time now.

Next, it says meditate on what is just or righteous. We are to set our minds to conform with God's standards and what is worthy of His approval. "Renewing our minds, that we may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2). We read it before. Not conforming our minds to this world and its tolerance for sin, not looking for loopholes to reinterpret Scripture to fancy our own wills and delights.

Next, meditate on what is pure or holy, moral or clean. Get your mind off the filth. Get your mind out of the gutter, teasing the flesh with what's immoral and destructive to your conscience. Rather, examine your heart's motives, and ask God to reveal sin to be confessed and avoided. Whatever you're watchin', whatever your intaking - if it's filth, that's what's gonna come out....filth.

Meditate on what is lovely or admirable, gracious, generous. Think of ways your life can be used to show off God to the world, ways to show compassion or mercy or generosity to others that speak to the work of God in your life and provide opportunity to share Jesus with others. How often do you spend time thinkin' about that? Looking for opportunities to do something generous versus how much time you spend thinking about how you want to bless yourself. I'm guilty.

And Paul finishes his list with meditating on anything that is of good report, any virtue or anything praiseworthy. I don't think these need definitions. But he says to think hard on these things, meditate on them, dwell on them, and your heart and your mind will be protected. Peace will be given. Joy will be experienced. Strongholds in your mind will be torn down. I'll be the first to admit this doesn't sound easy. On a bad day, this sounds downright impossible. But this is where faith comes in. Faith is very much like a muscle in your body. The more you work it out, the stronger and leaner it becomes. Paul says it earlier in the letter. He says to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). Paul is telling us to exercise our faith. Work it out. Do things. And, as you exercise it, God gives you the ability to actually do it. It's not impossible.

So what does it mean to exercise our faith? That brings us to the last verse. Verse 9 says, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you." Exercise your faith means do what God's Word says. Be obedient to those things. Make it a part of your life. Make it a discipline to do it. Paul wasn't a "do-as-I-say-but-not-as-I-do" kind of guy. He was able to tell this church, "Do what I did; do what you saw me doing, which are the very things I've told you to do." Do these, and not only will your mind be guarded by the peace of God, but your life will be guided by the God of peace. Simply put, right living starts with right thinking. So get your mind right. Get your mind right! You do have a responsibility. I know it's every pastor's "thing" to just.....do what the Word of God says! Just do it! And for some of us - I lump myself in that sometimes - it's easier said than done. It's easier said than done. But the only reason why it gets so difficult is because of the lies that we believe, because of our half-hearted faith that kind of just lingers about doing it. Or because we convince ourselves that our case is the exception that, "You just don't understand, you don't get it. God's Word's not gonna help me here. Maybe in all other aspects of my life, but not here. This is too hard!" Lies! I know that there're many of you in here tonight that absolutely struggle with anxiety, that

absolutely are just plagued by fear, just constantly focused on just wanting to crawl into a hole and never be seen again because a depression weighs on you like a darkness that you can't find yourself out of. Those things are real. All right? Those things are real. I'm not going to sit here and say that they're not difficult. Now, I personally haven't been one that's had to deal with a lot of anxiety or fear or worry. Have I had bouts of it? Sure. But I've seen people that are really imprisoned by it.

And you know what I'm gonna tell you? Because the letter to the Philippians speaks a lot about the body coming together and being of one mind, coming together to support each other in the things of God. And so there're a lot of people in here that are suffering from sins - specifically anxiety and depression, from worries and fears and doubts. Come alongside them. Don't judge 'em. They know they're in the wrong. They know they shouldn't think that way. Help them. If you actually look in the verses before (in chapter 4), it says in verse 2, "I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion," (I think he's speaking to one of the elders) "help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life." Help them. Get down to where they are, and help them, and pull them up out of it. Moses, when he was in battle one time, had to hold up the staff (Exodus 17). And guess what? His arms got fatigued, he got tired. And what did they do? Two guys came alongside and helped hold up the staff. We need to help our brothers and sisters who are struggling. We need to lift them up in prayer. We don't turn a blind eye to it, we don't run it down their throat that they're just going about it all wrong. No. We meet them where they're at, and we point them to God's truth. That is the only thing that helps. We point them to our Savior, and we show them Bible promises, and we show them that God will meet them where they're at and pull them through it. And we remind them that joy is not an emotion. It's not this feeling of happiness. That's hogwash! Joy is eternal, joy is genuine, and it can be had all the time. Even when you're facing immense pressure, when you're facing difficulties that are absolutely impossible, you can have joy because it's that confidence in the Lord that you know that He's immovable, that He can do anything! And I know I sound like a broken record to you, but that is His truth, and we need truth in our culture today. We need truth in our church. So don't forget: if you maybe don't struggle with doubt and fears, which I'm sure you do but maybe not to the extent that I'm referring to, a lot of people around you do. And you know what? There're certainly sins in your life where you show yourself grace, that are hard for you. Me, personally,

lust has always been something that's just that thorn in the flesh. It's always right there, it's always ever-present, it's never just gone. While I'd like that, that's just not my reality....at least not yet. But God's grace is sufficient, is it not? And He's gonna help us. He doesn't promise to remove us from the storm, the trial, the temptation, but He promises us to get it through; He promises to push us through. And we exercise our faith muscle, and we grow, and we learn, and we feel and experience that joy that God's talking about. Even though it's not based in an emotion, you will experience times of great emotion. God ordered it and structured us to feel. All right? So our walk with the Lord is not devoid of emotion. There's certainly great call for feeling the awesomeness of God and being just humbled by that. But let truth dictate that. Don't let emotion dictate truth. Amen?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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