

Many years ago (in Montana) three men were panning for gold. ... One of them found an unusual stone... and with baited breath... he broke it open. Sure enough... it contained gold !!!

Working eagerly... he and his two partners soon found an abundance of the precious metal. ... They began to dance and shout joyously... but their celebration ended abruptly when they suddenly realized the solemn importance of keeping their discovery a secret. ... The men agreed not to breathe a word of their find to anybody... otherwise they would lose what they had found to all the others who would move in... grabbing... pushing... shoving... once “gold-fever” broke out.

Well... eventually the men had to go into town to stock up on supplies. After they had loaded their wagon with their necessary provisions... (to their dismay)... HUNDREDS of men had gathered and were prepared to follow them.

One of the partners asked the crowd to tell him which of his two other associates “let the cat out of the bag.” ... The reply came... “*No one had to... Your faces show it.*”

... .. [P A U S E]

If you or I were one of these three gold-mining associates... would **we** have done a better job hiding our joy...? ... Perhaps we **would!** And the reason that I say that... is because (as believers) we have something much better than all the gold on earth – and we don’t seem to have much trouble hiding our joy... do we...? ... Some of us hide our joy so well... that we have others see us as glum and negative about so many things in life.

Let me read to you the summary of the passage that we come to today...
as expressed by Christian author - John Stott. He writes:

We should be the most positive people in the world. We cannot mooch round the place with a drooping, hang-dog expression. We cannot drag our way through life, moaning and groaning. We cannot always be looking on the dark side of everything, as negative prophets of doom. No, "we exult in God." Then every part of our life becomes suffused with glory. Christian worship becomes a joyful celebration of God and Christian living a joyful service of God. So come, let us exult in God together!

"The one clear mark of a true Christian is that he always rejoices."

But let me ask you... Doesn't honesty compel you and I to admit... that we do not rejoice in God... often enough...? In terms of Christian joy... for some of us... it has been a long time since our hearts have fluttered like a "76-trombones-John-Phillips-Sousa-march down-main-street type of joy." And for some... maybe NEVER.

Why is that? ... What has happened to our joy(?)... and how do we get it back...? (The reason may be simple.) ... I propose to you... that we have given ourselves **permission** to live without it. ... [P A U S E] ...

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones gives a few more reasons... which our passage today is going to address: "Our lack of rejoicing as we ought is due to...

1. A failure to grasp the truth of justification by faith only.
2. A failure to meditate as we really need to, that is, a failure to think about the truths we will see in today's passage.
3. A failure to draw the necessary conclusions from the Scriptures... that Paul leads us to in our verses of study today.

I do not know if these are your failures (if you have failed to rejoice in God) or whether there is some other hindrance in your case... (as there may be.) But whatever the cause... anything that keeps us from rejoicing in God... is inappropriate... and should be overcome by us. ... (We need to **STOP** giving ourselves permission to live without it!) ... God's Word is going to challenge you and I to overcome it. ... Let it challenge you to think about these great truths. ... Meditate upon them. ... Learn how great the love... power... wisdom... and grace of God **is** toward you. Then... as the concluding verse of our passage will exhort us - Exult in our God!

Today... we are going to learn how to **SINCERELY** reclaim the joy! ... So let's get to our Bible passage in Romans.

Romans 5:1

We are now at peace with God! "O.K. ... Great!" Someone might say. "*But I did not even realize that I was at war with Him.*" ... Certainly very few unbelievers regard themselves as "**enemies** of God." They have no conscious feelings of hatred. Many (if not most) do not actively oppose His work... or dispute with His Word. ... Going off my personal experience... I would say that most people (on a normal day) consider themselves (at worst) to be "neutral" on this whole "**God issue.**"

However... I must say that the unbeliever's mind really **IS** far from peace. ... When all the distractions of this world are sometimes quieted... (enough so they don't keep them from pondering the meaning of life)... unbelievers are often agitated... alarmed... and trembling. You see... God has placed a sense of eternity in **every** person's heart.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (ESV)

¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

Blaise Pasqual called it “a God-shaped vacuum”... It is an inner sense that such things as God and eternity... *really do* exist... and that they (themselves) are *alienated* from God. ... [P A U S E] ...

Isaiah described the unbelievers lack of peace this way...

Isaiah 57:20 (ESV)

²⁰ But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt.

That is what happens inside the *unbeliever*... But something is also going on with *God*. ... The first three chapters of Romans has been declaring that God has been storing up wrath - against all unbelievers. Chapters one through three have all been about man rejecting God and therefore deserving God's wrath.

So against this grim (and yet) hostile background... Romans 5:1 reminds us that the moment a person places their trust in Jesus Christ... God declares this fact: HIS WAR WITH THAT PERSON HAS **ENDED** FOR ALL ETRNITY !!! The missals of His wrath are no longer targeted at us. ... [P A U S E] ...

Perhaps we have all seen the old black-and-white movie reels... maybe even the Life Magazine photographs... documenting all the celebrations in the streets... at the end of World War II. ... Boy! What jubilation everyone felt – and demonstrated. ... The ending of a war is a great reason to celebrate! ... We have great cause to revel in praise!

We are at peace with God... which also means that He has accepted us. We have been brought into a place of favor with God. ... But the believer's standing before God... gives him even more than acceptance. It gives him (#2) – access!

Romans 5:2

Not only has Christ made us right with God... but he also has given us personal access to God... bringing us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand. We have been brought into a place of favor with God.

(I don't know if it is true or not)... but the story is told about a little boy who once stood outside the gates of Buckingham palace in London. ... He wanted to talk to the king... but was sternly repulsed by the guard at the gate. ... He rubbed a grimy hand to his cheek to wipe away a tear. ... Just then along came a well-dressed man... who asked the little fellow to explain his trouble. ... When he heard the story... the man smiled and said... *"Here, hold my hand, sonny. Ill get you in. Just you never mind those soldiers."*

The little boy took the extended hand and... to his surprise... saw the soldiers leap to attention and present arms... as his new-found friend approached. ... Past the guard he was led... along carpeted halls... through wide-flung doors... and on past grand Stair cases... right up to the throne of the king. ... He had taken the hand of the Prince of Wales... the king's son! Through him he had gained access.

It is a glorious thing to have acceptance... to know that the war is over... and that God no longer looks upon us with disfavor and wrath. ... But... It is

even *better* to have **access**. ... And those who have taken the pierced hand of God's Son... have access ***indeed!*** ... What a standing!

Now... there are two very important things for us to stop and consider here in verse two. "*What is God's grace?*" and "*What does it mean to stand in it?*"

Perhaps you already have a good idea what grace is... but let me briefly define it... in case you don't. ... Grace is the undeserved... and unconditional love of God toward us. It is God showering His favor on us – even though we deserve the exact opposite.

Verse two says that we stand in this grace. ... The word for "stand" (in the original language) is "ἵσταμι." It carries the idea of permanence. We stand FIRM in God's grace. We stand completely IMMOVEABLE in it. We are KEPT stable and secure in God's good and undeserved favor toward us. ... God places us in this secure and stable relationship with Him.
... .. [P A U S E]

Now... before we move on to the next couple of verses... I want to say 2 things about the final phrase in our current verse... "*We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*"

#1. The biblical term "hope" (*ἐλπίς*) expresses ***not*** "*the uncertainty of a wish*"... but ***strong confidence and expectation***. (In English... the word "hope" is a weak word... isn't it?) ... But that was not true when Paul used it. (It comes up again in our passage and I will say more about its certainty at that time.)

#2. Whenever we see this word "hope" in the New Testament... it is usually used in the context of anticipating the coming of Christ... and our life in

eternity. ... And that is what it means here. We rejoice in our certain future... when God's full glory will finally be revealed and we will share in it. But until that happens... we face life here on earth – which will include suffering.

Romans 5:3-4

One of the least attractive promises in the Bible is this one (found in 2 Timothy 3:12.)

2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

¹² *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,*

And yet... as unattractive as this promise is... Romans 5:3 seems to dive right into the realm of **absurdity**... by saying that the Christian is to exult in our tribulations. ... This seems to make as much sense... *as trying to break **concrete** - by throwing light bulbs at it.*

I am so glad... however... for the explanation that Paul gives. We rejoice in suffering – not because we enjoy pain... but because we know that God is using it to build our character.

Verses 3 and 4 tell us that suffering often becomes God's means to bring us to maturity. ... "*Suffering produces perseverance.*" The Greek word (θλιψις) is often translated as "tribulation" or "suffering." But it more generally means "pressure."

Naturally... when the pressure builds... we should take reasonable measures to relieve the discomfort. ... No one is suggesting we volunteer for pain... or ignore the opportunity to eliminate it. ... But sometimes we

cannot avoid or escape the pressure. ... When that happens... we deliberately choose to endure and to do so with graceful and calm dignity.

And we all face pressure... the pressures of deadlines... the economy... people's expectations... workplace politics and demands... home and auto repairs... relationships. ... And these pressures can become intense with failing health... job loss... grief... divorce... persecution... and other major life events. ... Nevertheless... because we have the peace and grace of God... and we have the certainty of our future in glory with God... we can live with joyful confidence under pressure.

How do we come by this supernatural ability? ... We gain the ability to rejoice under pressure through a carefully monitored training program... which is directed by the Lord Himself. ... Paul described this program as a chain reaction... in which one phase leads to another... eventually giving us the ability to experience joy - despite our circumstances. Think of it as dominoes... standing on end... one toppling the next... Suffering... Endurance... Character... Hope.

Holding up under pressure is the only way to develop character. Suffering is like the pressure that was put on carbon to produce a diamond. As we persevere... we have our character molded into something valuable. ... And then our character cultivates hope. (And remember "hope" is far more than wishful thinking... it is an "assured expectation.")

This final end-product to our suffering is an assured-expectation that reminds me of an experience that I had on December 29, 1992. All day I could not wait to finish my work... get home... and turn on the TV. My

Fresno State Bulldogs would be playing the USC Trojans in the Freedom Bowl... down in Southern California... and on National Television. My team had made it to the big time... and I hoped that they would do well... and not choke their opportunity to impress the nation. All through the first half of the game... I was biting my nails... hoping that my team would not embarrass themselves – or me. I was very excited and very nervous... and very hopeful... all the way to the end of the game. My team won. They beat the Trojans 24-7.

I was so happy that I watched a re-run of the game. (I think I had mistakenly copied over the video tape of the birth of our first child. O.K. that was a huge mistake. ... I wanted to savor the victory of the huge game. However I've had to savor a different emotion over the years... but that is a different story... than why I am using this example.)

Now it was watching the tape of the game... where I experienced the type of hope that our passage speaks of. I experienced the game the second time a little different than the first time. My anxiety level was different. I experienced set-backs when my team would mess-up... but I endured those set-backs without heart-stopping panic. I had a hope that could not disappoint – because I had an assured outcome.

That is like the final outcome to a believer's suffering. It is the final domino to fall. Suffering... Endurance... Character... Assured Outcome ! We exult in suffering... because it is the path to maturity and glory. ... Each of our heroes in the Bible will agree.

Ask Abraham and he will direct your attention to the sacrifice of his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. ... Ask Jacob and he will point you to his stone pillow. ... Ask Joseph and he will tell you about the dungeon. ... Ask Moses and he will remind you of his trials with Pharaoh. ... David will tell you his songs came in the night. ... Peter will speak of his denial... John of Patmos... and Jesus of the cross. Blessings are poured out in bitter cups.

Any believer who has walked with God for any length of time will say the same thing: *Their greatest growth has occurred during times of greatest testing.* To glory in our tribulations is a real sign of maturity. That is a person who has an assured outcome.

When we handle suffering right... its shows that our faith is genuine. It shows that our faith is from God. It also directs our mind *onward*... to another world... and the prospect of a glorious future there.

Romans 5:5

The love of God has been poured out. (LISTEN!) Our Heavenly Father does not dole out His love to us in measured droplets... but in unmeasured torrents! Εκκεξυται means abundantly poured out.

Our hearts have been filled to overflowing with divine affection. The Agent of this is the Holy Spirit... Who personally expresses God's love inside our hearts.

Now... some believer may say... "*Why does Paul write with such extremes...? ... At times... God's love expressed to me... barely even feels like droplets – and certainly not torrents!*"

Oh! But Paul continues... and gives proof... that he is not exaggerating.

Romans 5:6-8

Natural human love is based on the attractiveness of its object. (We are inclined to love people who love us in return.)

I just got finished teaching my (secular) college class... on interpersonal communication... about relationships in general. Do you know how secular social scientists define relationship...? They don't. It is too hard... and they admit it. Instead they depict the elements of what is necessary in order for a relationship to exist. They are: "attraction," "some level of intimacy," and (now get ready for this...) "reward."

Every college textbook for Interpersonal Communication that I have read includes what is called "The Social Exchange Theory." ... This is what it says: "*We seek out people who can give us rewards – either tangible or emotional – that are greater than or equal to the costs we encounter in dealing with them.*"

We tend to attribute this human understanding of love and relationship to God... and think that His love for us is dependent on the rewards He receives from us. But He operates on a level that defies our human comprehension. His torrential love to us has no social exchange. It is not based on what we give Him.

If we think we deserve God's love... we cannot ever really be secure in it... because we will always be afraid that we may do something to lessen... or destroy the depth of God's love for us. ... It is only those who know that God has loved them in spite of their sin... who can trust Him to continue to show them favor.

I love the story about a five year old boy named “Tommy”... from Chicago. A few years ago... his sister (Debby) had been crippled and needed an operation. The operation was provided for her. But after the operation Debby needed a blood transfusion... and Tommy (her brother) was asked to volunteer. He was taken to her bedside and watched tight-lipped as a needle was inserted into his vein and blood was fed into his sister's body.

When the transfusion was over... the doctor put his arm on Tommy’s shoulder and told him that he had been very brave. The youngster knew nothing about the nature of a blood transfusion. But the doctor knew even less about the actual bravery of Tommy — until Tommy looked up at him and asked sadly, "*Doctor, how long before I die?*"

(You see) Tommy had gotten the idea that he would have to die to save his sister... and he had thought that he was dying (drop by drop) as his blood flowed into her veins. But he did it anyway!

This story sobers us... because in it we recognize something of the highest form of human love. ... Yet... when we read of the love of God in Romans 5... we need to know that it was not for those who were close to Him or who loved Him that Jesus died — but for those who were opposed to God and were His enemies.

How remarkable it is when one good person sacrifices his or her own life to save that of another good person. Most of us can identify with that kind of selflessness... and hope to have similar courage if called upon to do the same. ... But who would volunteer to take the place of a serial killer on

death row? ... Who would give his or her own life to save that of a Hitler or a Stalin? ... Jesus Christ did. ... Do you see the torrents now...?

You can't keep God from loving you. ... Now... you can get to the place that you do not experience the love of God. ... (It's sort of like this)... You can't keep the sun from shining... but you can get out of the sunshine. You can put up an umbrella of sin... an umbrella of indifference... an umbrella of stepping out of the will of God... which will keep His love from shining on you. Although each these things will remove you from experiencing God's love... He still loves you.

God loved you (past tense) when He died for you. He loves you (in the present tense) keeping you standing in His grace. And the next verse shows that He loves you in the future tense.

Romans 5:9

The "wrath" mentioned here is what the prophets spoke of:

Zephaniah 1:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness,

What is this great day of wrath? ... It is what the Lord Jesus called "the Great Tribulation." And Paul tells believers that we shall be "saved from the wrath" – here... and in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; and 5:8-10. ... Every believer will leave this earth at the Rapture. ... We will escape that day of wrath... not because we are worthy... but because we have been saved by the grace of God... and we stand in it. ... We are saved from the wrath through Christ. It is part of His complete and torrential love for us.

Romans 5:10-11

If you do not yet fully appreciate (or perhaps have not even begun to appreciate) the greatness of the love God has for you... the explanation is probably that you have never really thought of yourself as God saw you in your fallen state. ... Perhaps you have never thought of yourself as someone who was utterly without strength or powerless before God saved you. ... Perhaps you have never considered yourself to have been ungodly... Nor a sinner... Nor God's enemy.

But that is what you were — and still are... if you have never come to Christ... in order to be justified. ... It is only if you can recognize the truth of these descriptions... that you can begin to appreciate the love that God holds out to you... through the death of His Son.

"The one clear mark of a true Christian is that he always has reason to rejoice." ... But do we rejoice? ... Have we actually come as far as Paul assumes we have in verse 11? ... Right now... wherever you are... whatever your problems are... my friend... you can celebrate with joy... in God. ... I am not asking you to go around smiling like a Cheshire cat... but how often do you display a proper joyful heart...?

Stop giving yourself permission to keep hiding it or live without it! ... Come! Let us exult in God together! ... Let's be distinctive. Let's be the most positive people on the face of this earth. I think THAT is what our passage is calling for. Don't you...?