

Supernatural Joy & Genuine Love

Profiling Christians, Part 5

1 Peter 1:6-9

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

In the midst of great trials believers are described as people of true love and inexpressible joy.

Discussion Points:

In this sermon we were reminded that joy and happiness are not the same. Happiness is externally generated, where joy is internally generated – joy is a glad and settled contentment; it is the fruit of a divine relationship that produces a divine perspective on what happens in life, by means of our submission to the Holy Spirit.

- Where are the places that people look for happiness?
- Explain in your own words the difference between joy and happiness.
- It is true that joy cannot be “naturally” produced. What then is the key to producing joy? What would be some indications that a believer is indeed joyful?

There are several realities regarding trials that are extremely important for every believer to grasp: Trials are not eternal; Trials are never wasted; Trials are always painful; and Trials reveal and refine genuine faith.

- Peter describes the believer’s trial as “for a little while.” How should this change our perspective regarding difficulty? For what reasons is it difficult to have this perspective?
- In the sermon we were given four ways in which trials are used in our life to grow us spiritually: they strengthen dependency on Christ, reduce attraction to the world, equip us to comfort others who suffer, and develop deeper character. Looking back on your life what are the difficulties that you would have edited out if given the chance and how have these difficulties grown you?
- What is your reaction to the idea that it is God’s will for you to suffer? How does this idea contrast with common concepts of God and His will for people’s lives?

Discussion Guide cont.

- Our genuine faith will result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The passage makes it clear that trials serve to purify and produce this type of valuable faith. How should this truth change our perspective regarding our difficulties?

Believers are characterized by a genuine love for someone that they have not seen even though their experience of following Him is full of suffering and trials. Even though we do not presently see Him we believe in Him and rejoice with inexpressible joy that is filled with glory even in the face of trials. This is what defines those who are true believers.

- Jesus said that those who follow Him will experience suffering. The world hated Him and it will also hate His followers. In your own words, explain why the reality of suffering for Jesus' followers could be met with joy that is inexpressible and full of glory?
- In the context of this sermon what would be an indication that someone does not love Jesus but really is only interested in what they can get from Jesus?

Gospel Connection:

Our identity in Christ is the source for our joy in the face of trials. God is committed to growing us spiritually and will use the trials that we face to accomplish this. As we face difficulty it is important to resist the urge to run from them but instead embrace them as part of God's plan to make us into the image of His Son. The goal of the gospel then is not to rescue you from trouble but to use the trouble to rescue you.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** Our perspective on suffering and trials needs to change. By God's grace this week work at considering each difficulty that presents itself as a stepping stone to spiritual maturity.
- Pray:** In your prayer time this week pray positively about your trials. In other words, instead of asking God to get you out of them, thank Him for them and what they are accomplishing spiritually in your life.
- Do:** Others around you are suffering as well. Identify another believer in your life that is currently going through a circumstance that you yourself have experienced. You are probably one of the few people that know how to comfort them in that specific situation. Call them or take them to lunch to encourage and pray with them. Use your suffering as a way to comfort them in theirs.

Supernatural Joy & Genuine Love

Profiling Christians, Part 5

I Peter 1:6-9

Today we hear a lot about profiling people and why we really ought to be careful. Just because someone is from the Middle East, has a dark beard and complexion doesn't mean he's a terrorist.

Just because they're Hispanic and working in landscaping doesn't mean they're here illegally without a green card.

Just because they're young and black doesn't mean they're not looking for trouble.

Just because they're white doesn't mean they're stuck up or prejudiced.

And this isn't just a problem in America. I remember 20 years ago, visiting one of our global staff members in Kagoshima, Japan. He told me while touring one particular area in his city – he said – “Now, Stephen, you need to understand that these people recognize you as an American and most of them immediately think two things about you: one, that you have aids and two, that you're carrying a gun.” So they're somewhat leery of you.

He said, they've all seen Chuck Norris on TV – and they assume you're like him and you're probably going to break something. How's that for profiling.

When Peter wrote his first letter to the scattered believers, their communities were beginning to profile them in all the wrong ways.

Historians like Tacitus, a Roman senator from the first century, and others, revealed how Christians were coming to be profiled in that culture.

For one, they were viewed as treasonous to the crown because they wouldn't acknowledge the divinity of Caesar.

They were also profiled as atheists because they rejected the pantheon of gods and goddesses and instead, Tacitus wrote, they worshipped a dead man.

They were considered bad for business simply because they refused to worship in the temples and buy all the locally manufactured idols – and as a result, moneymaking enterprises related to the temple dropped wherever Christianity took hold.ⁱ

In addition, the Christians didn't fit the culturally acceptable and politically correct ideals of Roman culture of ego, and power and promiscuity. Keep in

mind that the early church will follow the New Testament letters in condemning adultery and fornication and homosexuality as out of bounds – and they would deliver that message at the very same time their emperor had married both a man and a woman and had various affairs with married women.

The profile of the Christian was that they didn't fit in. But even darker elements of their profile were beginning to hit the gossip and the slander circuit. The rumor mill began buzzing that they met privately in homes to engage in some kind of ceremonial eating of flesh and the drinking of blood – so it was rumored that they were actually cannibals in secret.

They were also viewed as incredible hypocrites, because although they condemned their culture for sexual immorality, they were holding what they called Love Feasts where they were encouraged to kiss one another – which spread the rumor that they were secretly holding orgies in one another's homes.

To add to that profile, Christians were viewed as those who were anti-family - against the family unit. And that was because their religion encouraged people to place loyalty to their leader over and above the family – which divided mothers and fathers and children and siblings. In other words, this religion was splitting homes apart, just as their leader had prophesied it would.ⁱⁱ

So Christians were actually being profiled as anti-business, anti-family, anti-patriotic, anti-social, anti-Caesar, immorally deviant, cannibalistic and atheistic.

Tacitus writes in the first century, These who had been given the vulgar name of Chrestians, were detested for the abominations they perpetrated; the founder of the sect, Christus by name, had been executed by Pontius Pilate; and this dangerous superstition, though put down for the moment, broke out again, not only in Judaea, the original home of this pest, but even in Rome.ⁱⁱⁱ

Another Roman historian wrote, [Because of these issues], this religion was slowly prohibited by laws which were enacted and by edicts which

[eventually] proclaimed that it was unlawful to be a Christian.^{iv}

As Peter is writing his letter to the scattered believers it is becoming perilous to be a Christian; which is why Peter's letter doesn't deal with any theological controversy or heresy or confusion; it was merely written to encourage the believer who was facing public ridicule and scorn and financial loss and physical loss and all the distress and suffering they were only beginning to experience.

They were being profiled incorrectly and tragically.

Now what Peter doesn't do in his letters is tell the Christians their major mission in life is to straighten everybody out; that they need to fight their unjust treatment, march on Nero and demand better treatment.

What Peter does instead is to encourage the believers to rewrite their profile in the minds and hearts of people who know them and work with them and live next to them and watch them. Change the mind of one person at a time, by means of the gospel.

So far we've covered in First Peter chapter 1 what we could view as the kind of profile that marks us in our unbelieving culture:

- We are people marked by graciousness – v. 2
- We are people known for a spirit of internal peace – v. 2
- We are people that always seem to be grateful for what we have – v. 3
- We are people who talk to our Founder and Leader as someone who is alive and risen from the dead – 3
- We are people of certainty about the future – 3
- We are people who anticipate an incredible inheritance that dwarfs anything the world can offer – v. 4
- We are people who talk often of another world that's coming soon – v. 5

This is the true and accurate description of the Christian!

Now, in the next four verses, Peter gives us a few more characteristics to add to the profile of the Christian.

1. **First, we are people who rejoice in the midst of difficulty – verse 6**

Notice *verse 6. In this you greatly rejoice . . .* stop there. The opening phrase – *in this* – ties back to the previous description of our living hope in our resurrected Lord.

In this – notice – you greatly rejoice . . . this is an intense, expressive term.^v

And it doesn't even seem to really fit here, does it?!

But Peter uses this expression almost as bookends to his thoughts here – you'll notice that he begins with *greatly rejoice* here in *verse 6* and then as he wraps it up down in *verse 8*, he again refers to the believer *greatly rejoicing*.

Now before we go any farther in this text, I want to make the point that this term is never found in secular Greek.^{vi}

Greek authors never used it – people didn't refer to it. The Greeks – and the Americans – use the words happiness and happy – and those words are derived from happenings.

In other words, the world never talks about joy, but they talk a lot about happiness. In fact, the United States Declaration of Independence, ratified by Congress on July 4, 1776, gave every American the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Which I think is rather ironically written because since that time, all of America has been officially pursuing happiness but nobody's been able to catch it.

All the world will ever be able to do is pursue it . . . they'll never be able to chase it down.

And that's because happiness depends upon what happens. And what happens in life isn't always happy.

Happiness is externally generated, where joy is internally generated – joy is a glad and settled contentment; it is the fruit of a divine relationship that produces a divine perspective on what happens in life, by means of our submission to the Holy Spirit.

Paul writes that *the fruit of the Spirit is love . . .* then what? *Joy . . .* and much more. (*Galatians 5:22*).

So happiness is natural . . . and there's nothing wrong with it – but joy is supernatural.

Joni Eareckson Tada, the quadriplegic who has impacted the lives of so many people with her testimony, wrote in a magazine article I read a few years ago, recorded an incident where she was speaking at a Christian women's conference. One woman said, "Joni, you always look so together, so

happy in your wheelchair. I wish that I had your joy!”

Joni responded, “I don’t do it. In fact, let me tell you how I woke up this morning. This is my average day. After my husband, Ken, leaves for work at 6:00 am, I am alone until I hear the front door open at 7:00 am. That’s when a friend arrives to get me up. While I listen to her make coffee, I pray, “Lord, my friend will soon give me a bath, get me dressed, sit me up in my chair, brush my hair and teeth, and send me out the door. I don’t have the strength to face this routine one more time. I have no resources. I don’t have a smile to take into this day. But you do. Can I have yours?”^{vii}

The reason the believer’s glad contentment has to be internally produced by reliance on the Holy Spirit is simply because of the hard and harsh realities of life.

Notice how realistically Peter writes next in *verse 6. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.* Man, what a loaded statement.

And I’m so glad for his realism – his down to earth, up front, authentic, no pie-in-the-sky reality.

What Peter does here is give us four realities about trials:

a. First, trials are not eternal – notice, even though now, for a little while...

And in the context of this paragraph, “a little while” can last a long time . . . just keep in mind that earlier, Peter told us that our inheritance is eternal – but now he makes sure we understand that our trials won’t be eternal.

That might last a long time, but they won’t last forever.

They are temporary and eventually replaced with *an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Corinthians 4:17).*

Pain one day will give way to unhindered, indescribable praise.

And Peter is just fast forwarding the tape for these struggling believers. He’s reminding them that what they are experiencing isn’t going to last forever.

An analogy that came to my mind was the joy of a mother after the birth of her baby. What pain – and then what praise. Listen, I consider one of the miracles of life the fact that a woman will actually want to have a second child. That she would

actually go through all that pain again. If guys had to endure that kind of pain, there’d only be one child and probably not even one.

I remember Marsha and I going to those prenatal classes in Dallas, with all those other couples. We were being educated – they showed us videos. I remember one night during a session almost fainting . . . I broke out in a sweat . . . got lightheaded – and it was just a video. What saved me was a guy across the room who was in worse shape than me – and I just began to focus on him . . . while the woman on the video was screaming, I just looked at him. And I made it through it.

I am amazed that my wife would be willing to go through all that after the first child . . . I mean that’s enough!

How many first born children are in here? You almost ruined it for us.

How many second born children are in here . . . and I’m one of them – aren’t you glad your mother viewed the pain of delivery as temporary and chose to focus on the joy of what came next?

By the way, this kind of perspective is ultimately described as the example of our Lord, Hebrews writes, *who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame (Hebrews 12:2).*

He willingly experienced pain and suffering and separation like we cannot imagine so that you and I could be born again – to life eternal.

Pain and suffering is not eternal.

b. Secondly, trials are never wasteful

Peter writes, *even though now for a little while, if necessary . . .* He uses a conditional form here that assumes the reality of the condition.^{viii}

In other words, it could be amplified to read, *even though now for a little while, if necessary . . . and it is!*

So Peter is pointing to a Divine purpose behind every trial.

Ransack the New Testament and you’ll discover that God uses trials for a variety of reasons.

- **For starters, trials remind believers of our dependency on Christ**

Paul writes, *I was given a thorn in the flesh to keep from exalting myself . . . most gladly therefore, Paul writes, I will rather boast about my*

weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

So trials not only serve to remind believers of their weakness and dependency on Christ;

- **Secondly, they reduce the attraction of worldly things (1 Peter 4:13-19)**

Later on Peter will talk about that in chapter 4.

- **Further, trials enable us to comfort others who suffer.**

Again Paul writes that *God . . . comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Corinthians 1:4)* Comfort is intended to passed along.

There's so much more to why our trials are never wasted, but I'll mention one more – and that is the reality that:

- **Trials develop in the believer deeper and wiser character.**

Trials produce, James wrote, *endurance and endurance leads to greater maturity (James 1 and verse 2).*

This is one of the challenges your parents had with you – and many of you now have as parents – you want to see your children avoid suffering and hardship, but at the same time you know that those things actually produce character.

While you want to protect them from hardship, God wants you to prepare them for hardship.

Psychologist Jonathon Haidt had a hypothetical exercise to illustrate the problem: Imagine, he said, that you have a child, and for five minutes you're given a script of what will be that child's life. And you are given an eraser. You can edit it. You can take out whatever you want.

You read that your child will have a learning disability in grade school. Reading, which comes easily for some kids, will be laborious for yours.

In high school, your kid will make a great circle of friends; then one of them will die of cancer.

After high school this child will actually get into the college they wanted to attend. While there, there will be a car crash, and your child will lose a leg.

A few years later, your child will finish college and get a great job—and then lose that job in an economic downturn.

Okay, so you get this script for your child's life and have five minutes to edit it.

What would you erase? He concludes, more than likely you will erase all the stuff that causes them pain.

And yet, from Peter's perspective, he'd leave all those things alone. Peter is effectively informing us that trials are moments that are not *wasted*, they are *invested* by God into the life of His children so that they develop endurance.

One pastor and author called himself a member of this current generation of adults he called, "helicopter parents"; he writes, we are constantly trying to swoop down into our kid's educational life, relational life, sports life, etc., to make sure no one is mistreating them, no one is disappointing them – no one is failing them – so they can experience one smooth transition and one success after another.

He writes, One Halloween a mom came to our door to trick or treat. I asked her why she didn't send her child. Well, the weather's a little bad, she said; she was driving him around the neighborhood so he didn't have to walk in the misty rain. But why not send him to the door? "Well, he had fallen asleep in the car," she said, so she didn't want him to have to wake up."

This kid doesn't deserve any candy. Mom needs to let him miss the whole thing . . . he'll only miss it one time.

Some of you are thinking, Stephen, are you condoning a pagan Halloween – no, I'm condoning free candy.

When I was a kid – a missionary kid, no less, this was that once a year event that you weren't about to miss. We didn't know what the pagans believed – we just knew there was free candy.

We didn't do witches and goblins, we did hoboes and gangsters. And we didn't race through the neighborhood with little containers – those little plastic pumpkin containers they use now when they show up at our door.

We didn't use little pumpkin things, we used pillow cases!

We'd literally race to every house and ring the doorbell: Hello Ma'am, trick or treat, now hand it all over. There's a reason I'm dressed up like a gangster . . . now fork it over.

I don't know what that has to do with this sermon. Look, God knows how to raise His children . . . he is not a helicopter God . . . He doesn't swoop in to rescue us from pain or erase all the painful paragraphs.

He knows that it requires hard work and hard knocks and tough times in order to produce maturity and endurance and wisdom.

And according to Peter here, not one trial – ultimately written by God into the script He has designed for your life – and not one event, great or small, is ever random or trivial . . . God never intended for any of it to be wasted.

Trials are not eternal
Trials are never wasted

c. Third, trials are always painful

Notice, he writes here at *verse 6, you have been distressed by various – or multicolored – trials.*

Peter doesn't put on a plastic smile here and fake anything. He even admits that they come in all shapes, sizes and colors. They are literally multicolored.

Let's get real and admit what they do to us – they *distress us*.

The word *distress* refers to not only physical pain, but also to mental and emotional pain and anguish; the word can include disappointment, heartache, sorrow, anxious and fearful thoughts.^{ix}

And anybody who says that if you're following God like you should, you will never feel any distress or grief or sorrow – look, just take them to Gethsemane . . . and watch Jesus through the scripture become so deeply distressed – same word used here – that corpuscles beneath His skin burst and His sweat was mixed with blood (*Matthew 26 and Luke 22*).

Listen to the Apostle Paul who was so distressed over the failure of the Corinthian church that when he wrote them he admitted that when he had visited them earlier he was burdened down with feelings of distress – same word. (*2 Corinthians 2:1*) Later in this letter, Peter will remind the believer that for every color of trial you might face, God has a color of grace to match it.

But they are called trials and tribulation for good reason.

Peter goes on to add another – in fact – the primary purpose for trials.

d. Trials reveal and refine genuine faith

Notice *verse 7. So that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Peter isn't getting on to these believers for being distressed by the trials that surround them – he's just attempting to give them a longer viewpoint.

There is coming a day when Jesus Christ will be revealed – a reference to His coming. And in the meantime, God becomes a goldsmith.

The goldsmith in Paul's day would take that gold ore is put it into the smelting furnace long enough to remove the cheap impurities; and then pours it out and make from it beautiful and exquisite articles of value.

I have read that in ancient times, the eastern goldsmith would keep the metal in the furnace until he could see his face reflected in it.^x

Peter uses that analogy here to inform the believer that your faith is put into the furnace . . . not to destroy it, but to refine it – so that God can pour out your life and your testimony of faith and make of us articles of exquisite value that ultimately reflect His face – the character of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So you want to profile a Christian? Here's what the profile should include: we are people who rejoice in the midst of difficulty.

Why?

- Because we recognize that they are not eternal
- They are never wasteful
- They are always painful
- But they always refine our genuine faith

We are people who rejoice in the midst of difficulty.

Here's another to add to your profile;

2. We are people who love and follow an invisible Deity

verse 8 – Peter commends them with such encouraging words here; and though you have not seen Him – I want to commend you, is the thought here – I know that you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now – and would really love to,

because of all that you are suffering – ***but even though you do not see Him now, you still believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.***

In other words, you find joy in loving Him and knowing Him and you reflect the glory of His face when you do – Peter writes and I’ll expand it here in ***verse 9, you obtain as the outcome of your faith – this kind of faith that loves an invisible Lord – this kind of faith that believes in a God that leads you through unexplainable things – that kind of faith gives evidence of the salvation of your souls – not only now, but forever.***

And here’s Peter’s point – if you love Him and you’ve never seen Him; and if you believe in Him and still haven’t seen Him – but what you do see all around you are trials and difficulties and pain and suffering – yet in spite of all of it you still want to follow Him – that proves you really must believe in Him.

Let me put it this way: if you love Jesus only when He gives you the good life – that actually proves you really don’t love *Him* – you just love the good *life*.

One author imagined the following scenario. Imagine being in a situation where you were dating a young lady and you knew you were falling in love with her. It seemed the appropriate time that you tell her that you are going to inherit a multi-million dollar trust fund in a few months. And she responded by saying, “Oh, really? Well, it really doesn’t matter if you’re rich or poor, because I want

you to know that I’m in love with you too. And I love you just for who you are.”

There are lawyers who handle this sort of thing.

But suppose, just before the wedding you learned that you weren’t going to get that trust fund after all and your career was going to continue uninterrupted at Taco Bell. And when you relayed that to your future bride, she became so upset and disappointed that she called off the wedding.

What would that tell you about her love? What would you say to her? Probably something like, “You only loved me because I was going somewhere and could get you anything you wanted in life. You didn’t love me. You were really just using me.”

Listen, the Christian is referred to in the New Testament as the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5). So why do you really want to be married to Him?

What motivates your love? Is it for Him? Or for whatever it is you want Him to give you?

Here’s the proving ground . . . you can’t see Him . . . and all He seems to hand you is suffering – but you love Him and still believe in Him then you must really love Him . . . and genuinely believe in Him.

So what’s the real profile of a Christian – we’re not cannibals; we really don’t want to destroy families; we’re not into orgies; we’re not treasonous and we’re definitely not atheists.

- We are people who rejoice in the midst of difficulty
- We are people who love and follow an invisible Deity – our bridegroom – our coming Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/16/2016 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from Life Application Bible: 1 & 2 Peter/Jude (Tyndale House, 1995), p. 28

ii Above descriptions adapted from William Barclay, The Letters of James and Peter (Westminster, 1976), p. 148

iii Ibid, p. 147

iv Ibid, p. 150

v John MacArthur, 1 Peter (Moody Publishers, 2004), p. 41

vi D. Edmond Hiebert, 1 Peter (BMH Books, 1992), p. 65

vii Adapted from Joni Eareckson Tada, “Joy Hard Won,” Decision (March 2000), p. 12

viii Hiebert, p. 67

ix Adapted from MacArthur, p. 43

x Warren W. Wiersbe, 1 Peter: Be Hopeful (David C Cook, 1982), p. 37