

JOY

Eugene Peterson paraphrases John 15: 9 – 11 in The Message: **"I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love. That's what I've done— kept my Father's commands and made myself at home in his love. I've told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature."**

The prayer of our Lord is that we would keep His commands for a distinct purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature.

Peter spoke of this joy in 1 Peter 1:8-9: **"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy."**

There is much talk about peace, joy and love during this special season of the year. We sing Joy to the World and we bless people with a joyful greeting. I was taken by surprise when the cashier at WAL MART wished me a Merry Christmas and I understand that Target has lifted their band on wishing customers a Merry Christmas. In this passage our Lord wishes for us **that [His] joy might [our] joy, and [our] joy wholly mature.** What would happen if we gave ourselves to the joy of which our Lord speaks? What would it look like to be at home in his love? What does it mean to be wholly mature?

JESUS FIRST

When pressed by a religious scholar to name the greatest commandment of God, Jesus replied: **'Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.'** Matt 22:37 (MSG)

Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" confronted us with the shame of nominal Christianity.

How can we casually love such a Savior?

How can we compartmentalize Him to just another aspect of our lives?

Isaac Watts put it best in his timeless hymn, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross:

**Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.**

What would happen in our individual lives, in our families, in our churches and communities if we put Jesus above all things?

I believe there would be a renewal of passionate joy that would ignite a holy fire in our lives, homes and churches. Like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus we would say **"Didn't we feel on fire. Were not our hearts burning within us?"**

Joseph Stowell tells of having dinner with Billy Graham at a dinner for the staff and board of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

Billy was eighty at the time and Dr. Stowell asked him a question: “Of all your experiences in ministry, what have you enjoyed most?” “Was it you time spent with presidents and heads of state? Or was it....”

Before he could finish his next sentence Billy Graham responded: “None of that, by far the greatest joy of my life has been my fellowship with Jesus. Hearing Him speak to me, having Him guide me, sensing His presence with me and His power through me. This has been the highest pleasure of my life!”

PREFERRING OTHERS

Jesus continued his response to the religious scholar by saying: **“But there is a second [commandment] to set alongside it: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.’”** Matt 22:39 (MSG)

The command of our Lord is to be others focused, to see the world through the eyes and heart of God.

Self-centeredness is a great hindrance to the joy of the Lord individually and corporately.

When an individual or a church is consumed with self-interests they will miss the joy that comes through ministry to others.

However, when a person or a people begin to focus on ministry to those around them – they will keep our Lord’s commands, and will remain intimately at home in His love.

SHOW VIDEO CLIP Christmas 365

LETTING GO OF YOURSELF

Jesus said: **“If you grasp and cling to life on your terms, you'll lose it, but if you let that life go, you'll get life on God's terms.”** Luke 17:33 (MSG)

In the book, “In the Name of Jesus”, author Henri Nouwen writes:

“Here we touch the most important quality of Christian leadership. It is not a leadership of power and control, but a leadership of powerlessness and humility in which the suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ, is made manifest. I am speaking of a leadership in which power is constantly abandoned in favor of love. It is a true spiritual leadership. Powerlessness and humility in the spiritual life do not refer to people who have no spine and who let everyone else make decisions for them. They refer to people who are so deeply in love with Jesus that they are ready to follow him wherever he guides them, always trusting that, with him, they will find life and find it abundantly.”

It is a demanding challenge to let go of your personal desires and ways and to embrace the will and path of God. But we are a holiness people.

We believe that the Holy Spirit seeks to do in us a second work of grace, cleansing us from all sin; renewing us in the image of God: empowering us to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves; and producing in us the character of Christ.

As holiness people JOY should flow from our lives. As holiness people we must be so deeply in love with Jesus that we are ready to follow him wherever he guides us, always trusting that, with him, we will find life and find it abundantly.

A classic film of the Christmas Season is It's A Wonderful Life. You know the film and the story.

The hero, of course, is **George Bailey** (Stewart), a man who never quite makes it out of his quiet birthplace of **Bedford Falls**.

As a young man he dreams of shaking the dust from his shoes and traveling to far-off lands, but one thing and then another keeps him at home--especially his responsibility to the family savings and loan association, which is the only thing standing between Bedford Falls and the greed of **Mr. Potter** (Lionel Barrymore), the greedy local banker.

George marries his high school sweetheart (Donna Reed, in her first starring role), settles down to raise a family, and helps half the poor folks in town buy homes where they can raise their own.

Then, when George's absentminded uncle (Thomas Mitchell) misplaces some bank funds during the Christmas season, it looks as if the evil Potter will have his way after all. George loses hope and becomes unpleasant and uncaring.

In despair, and he is standing on a bridge contemplating suicide when an Angel 2nd Class named Clarence (Henry Travers) saves him and shows him what life in Bedford Falls would have been like without him.

The classic Christmas Film closes with the town rallying to help George in his hour of need. He had spent his life forgetting himself, serving, giving, loving, and caring for others. Now he reaped what he had sown.

FILM CLIP – It's A Wonderful Life.

I pray this season will be a time of JOY in your life. We will love the Lord our God with all our passion and prayer and intelligence and we will love others as well as we love ourselves.