A Theology of Joy
Philliipans 4:11-13

I. Why we need this

1. Joy is something we are all looking for: in fact it is the driving force behind every decision you make

“All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.” (Blaise Pascal)

“If you make a decision that is immediately painful and uncomfortable and unsettling, I assure you it is because you believe that such a choice will generate more pleasure than not in the long term. In other words, you gladly forgo present pleasures if you believe the long-term benefits outweigh whatever short-term discomfort you might experience or sacrifice you might make. Likewise, you will ignore long-term consequences if you believe the immediate pleasures of a decision are worth the risk. You weigh...competing pleasures. Your will is energized based on your belief that one pleasure (whether immediate or long-term) is better than others. But in every case you choose and act with a view to increasing joy and avoiding pain.” (Sam Storms)

2. Joy is something we were made for

Satan isn’t responsible for this. God is. God made you this way so that you would choose Him and His soul-satisfying pleasures in lieu of those that pass with the using and ultimately leave you empty and miserable. (Storms)

Thought Questions: Why did God give you five senses? Why did He design things that are pleasurable? Why did He design things that are beautiful?

- The presence of our senses reveals design and intent
- We were created with senses because God has created us for joy and intends for us to experience joy.
- In fact, God’s goal is that your joy and my joy would be made complete

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:4)

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:11)
You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:11)

“Think about what David is saying. God is offering us a joy that infinitely transcends all other joys combined in the power and potential to satisfy, thrill, fill, and fulfill. He is talking about spiritual ecstasy, incomparable ecstasy, unparalleled ecstasy, and unfathomable ecstasy. And it is all to be found in only one place: in God’s presence, at His right hand. There is an unspoken premise apart from which this statement in Psalm 16: 11 makes no sense. There is a principle that one must assume to be true if this verse is to have any significance for us. It is this: Human beings desire optimum joy and unending pleasure— and it is good that they do! We must come to grips with the fact that the Bible unashamedly appeals to our desire for pleasure and happiness. And it does so because God built into us an undeniable, unrelenting, inescapable hunger for joy and satisfaction and delight.”  (Storms)

3. Joy is something that few are finding

If you were to use three words to describe your life right now, would joyful be one of those words?

4. There is a secret to joy

II. What the Bible Says About Joy

1. Joy cannot be found unless you are aiming at something other than joy.
   - “Blessed are the...” (Matthew 5)
   - Those who hunger and thirst for something other than blessedness
   - Specifically: Those who hunger and thirst for God

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. (Psalm 42:1-2)

2. Joy only comes in a right relationship with God (Psalm 16:11)

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

- There are two specific places of joy:
  - In God’s presence (literally- in your face)
  - At God’s right hand

- These can only be experienced through the Gospel
3. Joy only comes to those who believe the Gospel: Good news of great joy

- No man can see God and live (Exodus 33)
- Our natural standing before God is not one of honor, but of condemnation
- The message of the Gospel (Luke 2)
  - He got God’s judgment
  - So we might get His face

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-3)

4. For Christians, Joy is a command (4:4)

5. Joy is produced by the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17, Galatians 5)

5. Joy comes as we walk in obedience to God’s commands (1 John 1:4, Psalm 119)

- The World’s assumption about God’s commands
- A Christian understanding of God’s commands

Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the L ORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!

- Joy can only be found according to God’s design

What could the most merciful being have done more for our encouragement? All that He desires of us is that we would not be miserable, that we would not follow those courses which of themselves would end in misery, and that we would be happy. God, having a great desire to speak after the manner of man, that we should not be miserable but happy, has the mercy and goodness that He forwards us to it, to command us to do those things that will make us so. Should we not think Him a prince of extraordinary clemency, He a master of extraordinary goodness, He a father of great tenderness, who never commanded anything of His subjects, His servants, or His children, but what was for their good and advantage? But God is such a king, such a lord, such a father to us. (Jonathan Edwards)
6. **Joy is not circumstantial** (4:10-13, 2 Cor 6:10)

We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. (2 Corinthians 6:10)

7. **Joy is something that must be learned** (4:10-13)

8. **Joy is something that must be learned in difficulty** (4:10-13)

9. **Joy enables us to endure present suffering** (Hebrews 12:1-3, Jude 24)

...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:3)

10. **Joy is a present potential reality with future fulfillment**

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy (Jude 24)

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18)

Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

11. **Joy enables us to overcome sin** (Psalm 16:11, Mark 9)

If you make a decision that is immediately painful and uncomfortable and unsettling, I assure you it is because you believe that such a choice will generate more pleasure than not in the long term. In other words, you gladly forgo present pleasures if you believe the long-term benefits outweigh whatever short-term discomfort you might experience or sacrifice you might make. Likewise, you will ignore long-term consequences if you believe the immediate pleasures of a decision are worth the risk. You weigh...competing pleasures. Your will is energized based on your belief that one pleasure (whether immediate or long-term) is better than others. But in every case you choose and act with a view to increasing joy and avoiding pain. Satan isn’t responsible for this. God is. God made you this way so that you would choose Him and His soul-satisfying pleasures in lieu of those that pass with the using and ultimately leave you empty and miserable. (Sam Storms)
I rejoice, so don’t do any less

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In other words, your satisfaction in what the treasure is and does for you is the standard or gauge by which its glory (worth and value) is revealed. Hence, your pleasure is the measure of the treasure. Or again, the treasure, which is God, is most glorified in and by you when Storms, Sam (2012-01-03). Pleasures Evermore: The Life-Changing Power of Enjoying God (Experiencing God) (p. 39). Navpress. Kindle Edition.

Or consider another example. In May of 2000 my wife and I will celebrate our twenty-eighth wedding anniversary. Let’s suppose that I choose to send her two dozen roses. When I arrive home after work she greets me at the door with tears of joy streaming down her face and says, “Oh, Sam, they're the most beautiful roses I've ever seen. Thank you! I love you!” At that, I raise my hand to restrain her exuberance.
and say, “Think nothing of it. It is my duty as a husband.” I don’t know about you, but I seriously doubt that my anniversary is going to be much of a celebration! John Piper put it this way: Dutiful roses are a contradiction in terms. If I am not moved by a spontaneous affection for her as a person, the roses do not honor her. In fact they belittle her. They are a very thin covering for the fact that she does not have the worth or beauty in my eyes to kindle affection. All I can muster is a calculated expression of marital duty. Here’s my point: Duty discharged without delight dishonors God. Is duty important? It most certainly is. We have a responsibility to obey God’s commands and to fulfill His will. But if our motivation in doing so is merely duty and not also the delight that is the fruit and reward of obedience, God is not honored. 

In Psalm 16: 11 David says this about why he hungers and yearns for God: “Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; In Thy presence is fulness of joy; In Thy right hand there are pleasures evermore.” This is not merely a statement of fact. It is an incentive to pursue God. 

Think about what David is saying. God is offering us a joy that infinitely transcends all other joys combined in the power and potential to satisfy, thrill, fill, and fulfill. He is talking about spiritual ecstasy, incomparable ecstasy, unparalleled ecstasy, and unfathomable ecstasy. And it is all to be found in only one place: in God’s presence, at His right hand. There is an unspoken premise apart from which this statement in Psalm 16: 11 makes no sense. There is a principle that one must assume to be true if this verse is to have any significance for us. It is this: Human beings desire optimum joy and unending pleasure— and it is good that they do! We must come to grips with the fact that the Bible unashamedly appeals to our desire for pleasure and happiness. And it does so because God built into us an undeniable, unrelenting, inescapable hunger for joy and satisfaction and delight. 

One of the worst injustices the church has perpetrated against its members is proclaiming a message of the evil of desire. God. God created us with a longing to be thrilled, hungry for the joy of being fascinated. Yet we have told people to stop wanting and to stop yearning; we’ve urged them to ignore, suppress, or anesthetize their desire for happiness. And, if such teachings should fail, we have worked hard to make them feel the sting of guilt and shame. All this will do is drive passion underground, so to speak, only to have it erupt at some moment of weakness when temptation offers a fleeting fulfillment. The idea that holiness is antithetical to pleasure, that the pursuit of purity entails a suppression of one’s desire for enjoyment, is a serious distortion of Christian truth. We are told to crucify the desire for pleasure— to kill it, numb it, and renounce it. If that isn’t enough, we are told to try casting it out as if it were a demon or to simply pretend that it just doesn’t exist. The tragic result is that, for generations, Christians have lived in condemnation and self-contempt, not for sin,

“Miss Maudie,” said Scout one evening, “do you think Boo Radley’s still alive?” “His name’s Arthur and he’s alive,” she said. She was rocking slowly in her big oak chair. “Do you smell my mimosa? It’s like angels’ breath this evening.” “Yessum. How do you know?” “Know what, child?” “That B— Mr. Arthur’s still alive?” “What a morbid question. But I suppose it’s a morbid subject. I know he’s alive, Jean Louise, because I haven’t seen him carried out yet.” “Maybe he died and they stuffed him up the chimney.” “Where did you get such a notion?” “That’s what Jem said he thought they did....” “Arthur Radley just stays in the house, that’s all,” said Miss Maudie. “Wouldn’t you stay in the house if you didn’t want to come out?” “Yessum, but I’d wanta come out. Why doesn’t he?” Miss Maudie’s eyes narrowed. “You know that story as well as I do.” “I never heard why, though. Nobody ever told me why.” Miss Maudie settled her bridgework. “You know old Mr. Radley was a foot-washing Baptist —” “That’s what you are, ain’t it?” “My shell’s not that hard, child. I’m just a Baptist.” “Don’t you believe in foot-washing?” “We do. At home in the bathtub.” “But we can’t have communion with you all —” Apparently deciding that it was easier to define primitive baptism than closed communion, Miss Maudie said: “Footwashers believe anything that’s pleasure is a sin. Did you know some of ’em came out of the woods one Saturday and passed by this place and told me me and my flowers were going to hell?” “Your flowers, too?” “Yes, ma’am. They’d burn right with me. They thought I spent too much time in God’s outdoors and not enough time inside the house reading the Bible.” Storms, Sam (2012-01-03). Pleasures Evermore: The Life-Changing Power of Enjoying God (Experiencing God) (p. 45). Navpress. Kindle Edition.

presence. The sacred romance, they explain, calls to us every moment of our lives. It whispers to us on the wind, invites us through the laughter of good friends, reaches out to us through the touch of someone we love. We’ve heard it in our favorite music, sensed it at the birth of our first child, been drawn to it while watching the shimmer of a sunset on the ocean. It is even present in times of great personal suffering— the illness of a child, the loss of a marriage, the death of a friend.
Something calls to us through experiences like these and rouses an inexpressible longing deep within our heart, wakening in us a yearning for intimacy, beauty, and adventure. This longing is the most powerful part of any human personality. It fuels our search for meaning, for wholeness, for a sense of being truly alive. However we may describe this deep desire, it is the most important thing about us, our heart of hearts, the passion of our life. And the voice that calls to us in this place is none other than the voice of God. 9 It is Buddhism, not Christianity, that condemns desire. One of the four “noble truths” of Buddhist philosophy is that the cause of suffering is desire. When your desire is not satisfied, you suffer. The way to put an end to suffering, therefore, is to snuff out desire. Instead of increasing satisfaction, work at decreasing desire. Reduce your longings to a minimum and the pain of dissatisfaction will disappear. Such a view is decidedly nonChristian. Storms, Sam (2012-01-03). Pleasures Evermore: The Life-Changing Power of Enjoying God (Experiencing God) (p. 47). Navpress. Kindle Edition. Storms, Sam (2012-01-03). Pleasures Evermore: The Life-Changing Power of Enjoying God (Experiencing God) (pp. 46-47). Navpress. Kindle Edition.

Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form we are, in a sense, on the Enemy’s ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures; all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy [God] has produced, at times, or ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden ... An ever-increasing craving for an ever-diminishing pleasure is the formula ... To get the man’s soul and give Him nothing in return — that is what really gladdens our Father’s [Satan’s] heart. 10 Storms, Sam (2012-01-03). Pleasures Evermore: The Life-Changing Power of Enjoying God (Experiencing God) (pp. 47-48). Navpress. Kindle Edition.

The problem is not that we desire. The problem is that we desire sin rather than God. The problem on planet Earth is not that people hedonistically pursue pleasure. The problem is that they rebelliously and foolishly refuse to find it in the one place where it may be genuinely and eternally found — in God’s presence (see Psalm 16: 11). Do
With that crucial warning in mind, let us again heed the psalmist’s exhortation to “delight” ourselves “in the LORD” (37: 4). This is not optional. It is a command. We are not told merely to “delight” ourselves, for that would be secular hedonism. We are told to “delight” ourselves “in the LORD”! Yet once more we read that “they [that is, you] drink their fill of the abundance of Thy house; and Thou dost give them to drink of the river of Thy delights” (36: 8). Storms, Sam (2012-01-03). Pleasures Evermore: The Life-Changing Power of Enjoying God (Experiencing God) (p. 50). Navpress. Kindle Edition.

The reason why addictions are so powerful is that they tap into that place in our hearts that was made for transcendent communion and spiritual romance. These addictive habits either dull and deaden our yearnings for a satisfaction we fear we’ll never find or they provide an alternative counterfeit fulfillment that we think will bring long-term happiness, counterfeits like cocaine, overeating, illicit affairs, busyness, efficiency, image, or obsession with physical beauty. They all find their power in the inescapable yearning of the human heart to be fascinated and pleased and enthralled. Our hearts will invariably lead us either to the fleeting pleasures of addiction or to God. Storms, Sam (2012-01-03). Pleasures Evermore: The Life-Changing Power of Enjoying God (Experiencing God) (p. 51). Navpress. Kindle Edition.

None of this is to suggest that life will not be hard. I am not at all saying that enjoying God or finding satisfaction in Him guarantees worldly ease and physical comfort. Often, precisely the opposite is true. Someone once said that joy is not necessarily the absence of suffering, it is the presence of God. Storms, Sam (2012-01-03). Pleasures Evermore: The Life-Changing Power of Enjoying God (Experiencing God) (p. 52). Navpress. Kindle Edition.

“sometimes we must accept temporal pain and suffering in order to maximize our joy in eternity. I regard this as an investment with a wildly maximized rate of return.” I couldn’t agree more! The key is in the purpose statement: It is in order to maximize eternal joy that we often must willingly embrace temporal discomfort. No one better exemplified this than Jesus “who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12: 2). Storms, Sam (2012-01-03). Pleasures Evermore: The Life-Changing Power of Enjoying God (Experiencing God) (p. 53). Navpress. Kindle Edition.

People have often read Psalm 119 and come away utterly confused. They simply cannot fathom how David is able to speak of the “law” and “precepts” and “requirements” and “rules” of God with a smile on his face. What pleasure can possibly be found in a seemingly endless list of “do’s and don’t’s”? That’s an easy question to answer once you realize that nowhere does the goodness and generosity and grace of God shine forth with greater brilliance than in His commands. Edwards explains: Storms, Sam (2012-01-03). Pleasures Evermore: The Life-Changing Power of Enjoying God (Experiencing God) (pp. 74-75). Navpress. Kindle Edition.

In a fascinating little phrase, John Piper unites for us the two most powerful forces in the universe, namely, God’s passion to be glorified and your passion to be satisfied: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” 16 The glorious good news is that, contrary to what the church has been told for centuries, these are not mutually exclusive passions. The glory of God and the gladness of your heart go together like love and marriage, like a horse and carriage! If that is the case, then my principal motivation in life must be to increase my pleasure in God. In fact, my prayer every day is “Oh, God, mobilize all your power on my behalf to maximize my pleasure and delight in You.” Don’t misunderstand what I’m suggesting. I’m not saying that pleasure is put above God, nor that pleasure is God. I’m saying that our pleasure must be in God. The pleasure or satisfaction we seek is God Himself. God is not a tool for finding pleasure. God is not the shovel, so to speak, with which we dig for buried jewels. God is Himself that treasure. The Christian’s pursuit of happiness is consummated when we find in God our all in all. He and He alone is our exceeding great reward. He is not a means to a higher end. He is the end. So, let me say it again: God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to do everything we can to increase, expand, and intensify our pleasure and happiness in God. Storms, Sam