

Today, we begin a sermon series titled “All the Feels: How God Created Me.” Have you ever wondered how your emotions are intertwined with your faith? This series will examine this connection, helping us understand our emotions better and find ways to draw strength and wisdom from Scripture.

For this, we will be using the movie *Inside Out* from Pixar as we navigate the different emotions we experience as humans. For those who haven’t seen it, “*Inside Out*” is an animated film that delves into the mind of a young girl named Riley, where five emotions—Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust—navigate her through life’s challenges. These emotions, as depicted in the movie, are not just random feelings but gifts from God, integral to our human experience. They also reflect God’s character, showcasing the complexity and depth of the human experience he created. Joy, for instance, represents the delight and happiness that come from God. Sadness highlights the compassion and empathy God feels for us. Anger shows God’s righteous indignation against injustice. Fear reminds us of God’s caution and wisdom. Disgust reflects his discernment in avoiding what is harmful.

Today, our focus is on the first emotion: Joy. Let’s watch this brief video of some key moments from the movie that highlight the character of Joy:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZVVo24xKKU>

This highlight video introduces us to the character named after the emotion: Joy. We will explore Joy more deeply in the next few weeks as we learn the other emotions. For now, we see that Joy is the leader of Riley’s emotions, always striving to keep Riley happy and maintain a positive outlook by making daily lists of all the things Riley should be happy about, even in difficult times, which raises some: What is the source of true joy? Is it merely about putting on a happy face during pain? What is joy itself?

The definition of joy is “a feeling of great pleasure and happiness.” We can experience joy from various activities, such as eating a favorite meal, taking a pleasant walk, receiving hugs and kisses, having meaningful conversations with loved ones or friends, or watching a favorite show. We get to enjoy these blessings because God intended for us to experience them. However, these moments of joy are fleeting and temporary. As a result, the pursuit of joy is an ongoing challenge.

There is, however, another kind of joy—one that is lasting and comes from having hope and peace. This joy makes all the other joys more meaningful. Even when we face challenges and painful situations, we can feel joyful because we trust that things will get better. This is hope. Also, when dealing with illness or hardship, we can find comfort in knowing God is with us, even in death. This deep, enduring joy is also a gift from God, providing us with a sense of peace.

The Bible tells us about this joy as a lasting joy that comes from within. It is not merely the result of favorable circumstances, checking boxes off our list, or material pleasures or gains (Joy-Riley will learn this towards the end of the movie).

As Christians, we understand this lasting joy stems from our faith in Jesus and his work within us. This joy is the fruit of the blessings we receive from God that take root in our hearts. The apostle Paul speaks of it in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.” Paul says joy is not dependent on our external conditions but on our relationship with Christ.

What does this mean? How can there always be joy? The Bible speaks of it explaining that it is rooted deeply within us by being anchored in our relationship with and who we are in Christ. This joy is resilient, enduring, and steadfast because it is based on something unchanging—the presence and promises of God. Paul understood this firsthand. Despite facing imprisonment, persecution, and numerous trials, he could still speak of rejoicing because his joy was rooted in Christ, not in his external situation.

But how do we get there? One of the profound truths about joy is that it often comes through our losses, not our gains. Before Paul was a jolly fella, he was a religious zealot and an angry man who persecuted the church and put many disciples of Jesus in jail. He even consented to killing some of them because of their faith. But he met Jesus, and everything changed. Years later, as he learned humility and embraced the grace of God, he let go of his hate and pride and became one of the most hardworking apostles in the history of the church, who wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always.”

How did this happen to him? He explained in the previous chapter, 3:4-7,

“If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.”

Paul experienced a transformation of himself, his values, and what was important to him in life. After being one of the most respected religious leaders among his peers, he realized that even after achieving such a great position, he was still empty. He learned that true joy comes not from what he possessed or achieved but from his relationship with Christ. He found joy by losing as he wrote, “Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.” What this means is that it is often through letting go of some of the stuff that we think is important (but it is just getting in the way) that we make space for true joy to flourish.

Do you have unhelpful stuff, people, a mindset, or unhealthy behaviors getting in your way to joy?

This idea of “gaining by losing” is further illustrated in the parable of the pearl of great price in Matthew 13:45-46, where Jesus said, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.” In this parable, Jesus uses the example of a merchant who sold everything he had to obtain a pearl of immense value. This act of letting go of all his other possessions enabled him to acquire something far more precious. Similarly, in our lives, holding tightly to unhealthy

behaviors, material possessions, achievements, or even past grievances can hinder us from being humble, grateful, and experiencing the fullness of joy that God intends for us.

Consider, for instance, the person who tirelessly works to achieve career success, sacrificing time with family and neglecting personal well-being. How about the individual who constantly chases after the latest gadgets and fashion trends, only to find that their happiness is fleeting and their desire for more never ends? Think about the friend who always seeks validation through social media, measuring their worth by the number of likes and comments, yet feeling empty and unfulfilled inside. Even the retiree who obsesses over maintaining a certain lifestyle and social status instead of embracing the freedom to enjoy simple pleasures and meaningful activities. But by releasing these things, making peace with them, or moving on from them, we open our hearts to the joy God wants to lead us to.

But once we let go, then what? Joy also comes from pursuing what truly matters in life—those things that are of eternal significance and align with God’s purpose for us. For instance, investing in meaningful relationships with family and friends brings joy as we create lasting memories and build a support network rooted in love and mutual care. Serving others and practicing generosity can also bring immense joy as we reflect God’s love and compassion in our actions. Additionally, pursuing personal growth and spiritual development through prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with other believers fosters joy from knowing we are growing closer to God and fulfilling his calling for our lives.

The underlying truth is that joy comes when we understand what is truly important in life. Getting caught up in the pursuit of success, wealth, and approval from others is easy. But these pursuits often lead to temporary happiness, not lasting joy. True, lasting joy is found in our relationship with Christ and being who we are meant to be, not from external achievements or constant validation of others. Just like the merchant let go of all his other possessions to acquire something far more precious and lasting, we, too, need to reflect on what that means to us and what it looks like. That is what Jesus meant when he said, **“For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?”** (Matthew 16:26). When I read this, I understand that we find true joy when we find ourselves in God.

So, as we reflect on this, I encourage you to consider what brings you joy. Just as Joy does in the movie, make a list of the things that bring you joy, but then evaluate them. Are they internal or external? Are they things you generate and control, or are they gifts from God? What is your motivation for doing what you do? Is it love, greed, or fear? Look at the hard things in your life—are they worth it? When hard things lead to good things, they are worth it. When hard things lead to meaningless outcomes, they strip joy from your life.

In conclusion, joy is a profound and essential part of our emotional makeup, a gift from God that flourishes when we align our lives with his purposes. It comes from the inside, from the work Christ is doing within us. It grows through our losses as we let go of what is not important and embrace what is. Joy thrives in gratitude, the pursuit of what truly matters, and the humble acknowledgment of our need for God. Let us seek this joy, not in fleeting pleasures, but in the lasting and transformative relationship with our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.