Session 11 The Promise of Joy and the Illusion of Happiness (Jn. 15:11)

 *“Let me drink from the river of Your pleasures as I delight in Your beauty.” (Ps. 36:8; 37:4)*

1. Introduction

*Here on the notes it says Session 11, and that is because we have had four semesters of about 15 weeks, 15 classes each semester on John 13-17. We plan to have 100 messages total, and this is from a couple semesters ago. I pulled it out, and that is why it says Session 11. So, there is a little repetition from what I shared in the last session because those messages were given about a year apart. I am doing this for the new students. There is some repetition but remember, that is one of my most important spiritual gifts: repetition.*

*So, Father, I love Your leadership. Jesus, touch us again. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

* 1. John 13-17 is the greatest teaching by the greatest teacher in history. It is a most important passage for God’s people in the generation in which Jesus returns, when many will be troubled by dark emotions such as fear, shame, bitterness, grief, etc. Jesus promised to strengthen His people with supernatural joy to enable them to have a vibrant heart that overcomes sin and dark emotions.

11“These things I have spoken…that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” (Jn. 15:11)

*I love this sentence; I say it in almost every one of these 50 messages that we have given on John 13-17. I love this sentence: This is the greatest teaching by the greatest Teacher in history, John 13-17. It is a most important message for God’s people in the generation the Lord returns. So many dark emotions, but He has promised, in John 15:11, supernatural joy that is even stronger, that overcomes the dark emotions which will rise to a level never seen before in human history.*

* 1. Many define *joy* and *happiness* in different ways. I speak of *“divine joy”* as that which is imparted to us only as we relate to Jesus. I speak of “*natural* *happiness*” to describe the good feelings we have related to favorable circumstances—relationships, possessions, achievements, positions, etc.
	I value “natural happiness,” but the intense pursuit of it is an illusion rooted in idealism.

*Paragraph B. This session I want to talk about joy. I am calling it, “The Promise of Joy and the Illusion of Happiness.” There is a difference between joy and happiness. Of course, different people can define it in different ways, so there is no one standard definition. But the way I am using the terms tonight, I am distinguishing between divine joy that is supernaturally imparted by the Spirit only as we relate to Jesus, and then I am contrasting it with natural happiness which is the good feeling we have related to favorable circumstances, when relationships are going well, and possessions are blessed, and achievements are happening, on and on and on.*

*Now I really value natural happiness, but the intense pursuit of it is an illusion. I like it when it happens, but I see people, multitudes of people, and the common way of the human race is to pursue happiness passionately. It is an illusion that is rooted in idealism, meaning that it is a happiness that they will never, ever attain. I like to expose that illusion so we can line our life up with reality, so we can go on this real journey in the right direction towards joy.*

1. Review: Two truths, one command, and two promises (Jn. 15:9-11)
	1. In John 15:9, we see the *two most important truths* andthe *most important command* in the Bible.

9“As the Father loved Me, I have loved you; abide in My love. 10If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love…11These things I have spoken…that My joy may remain in you…” (Jn. 15:9-11)

*This is a review, not a review of this session but of a couple classes I gave about a year ago, so I will just be really brief on this review of John 15:9-11. These are three fantastic verses: 9, 10, and 11. There are two truths, one commandment, and two promises in these three verses. I will identify them, though I will not spend a lot of time on this, but I have taught a couple sessions on this if this strikes your heart and you want to go deeper. There are two truths, one commandment, and two promises in these three verses. This passage is one of my favorite passages in the Bible.*

*Let’s look at John 15:9. I consider this verse the two most important truths in the Bible. That is a big statement. I realize that. I have thought about this quite a while, and I stand with this. I believe these are the two most important truths in the Bible, and Jesus just whispers them, just hints, says them quickly, and moves on. And, I believe it is the most important commandment in the Bible, all contained in one verse, verse 9.*

* 1. ***Truth #1***: ***The Father’s love for Jesus*** (15:9a) points us to the reality of how God loves God.

*He says, “As the Father loved Me,” the way God loves God. Truth number 1. That is the fountain of all truth. It is the foundation of why we have security in our family forever in the kingdom of God: because God loves God. The implications of that truth are indescribably glorious. That is a vast truth. We call it the doctrine of the Trinity, but it is more than a doctrine. It is a reality established in eternity past that is guaranteed in eternity future. It is fantastic.*

* 1. ***Truth #2***: ***Jesus loves His people*** (15:9b) in the same intensity that the Father loves Him.

*Truth number 2. That is the way God loves people. And the most important commandment, “abide in this love” or stay locked into these two truths. That is what He means by “abide” in this verse. Stay focused on these two truths. A lot of believers move on quickly, and they just leave these truths into their past. They are kind of in their rear window as they are driving away.*

*Jesus said, “Live in these two truths.” Then He gave—verse 10—He gave another promise here. He said, “If you keep My commandment, you will abide in My love. And then, verse 11, He gave another promise, “My joy will be in you.” So, truth number 1, the way God loves God, big truth. Again, I took some sessions on that. I don’t want to go through that tonight. Truth number 2, that is the way He loves people. Fantastic!*

* 1. ***Abiding in love***: There is a human part (15:9c) and a divine part (15:10b) to *abiding in love*

*Now Paragraph D. I want you to pay attention to this for a moment if this is new to you. He used the phrase, “Abide in love,” in verse 9, and He used it again in verse 10, but He used the same phrase with two different emphases. You might miss it on a quick read. He is saying two different things. He is not saying the same thing. There is a human side to abiding in love, and there is a divine side. In verse 9 He is focused on the human side. Stay focused on these truths in verse 9. But in verse 10 He looks at the divine side. He says, “If you will obey God, you will abide in truth, you will abide in love, meaning there will be a breakthrough in your heart in due time. Verse 10 is actually not a commandment. It is a promise. He goes, “If you stay with it, your dull, weak heart will have a breakthrough. You actually will live in the conscious reality of the love of God. You will abide in love if you stay with it.*

*So, there are the commands and the promises. You can read those on your own, but it is a magnificent three verses. The reason I added it in the notes is create the context for the promise of joy, because the promise of having joy in verse 11 is in context to these three verses here.*

* + 1. ***Human side***(15:9c): Jesus commanded us to engage in the human part of *abiding in love*—
		by staying focused on searching out the two truths in 15:9a, and on talking to Him about them (saying, “Thank You, show me more” of specific truths) with a spirit of obedience (15:10a).
		2. ***Divine side***(15:10b):The Spirit imparts living understanding of God’s love that tenderizes the hearts of disciples so that they feel love from Him and love for Him and others. This speaks of a breakthrough of the heart—that we abide in or live in the conscious reality of God’s love.
	1. ***A command*** (15:9c): Jesus commanded us to ***abide in His love*** or to live focused on understanding and expressing it as we search out the two truths in 15:9a, b and speak to Him often about them.
	2. ***Promise #1*** (15:10b):Jesus promised that we ***will abide in His love****.* This is a promise of the Spirit granting a breakthrough in the hearts of obedient disciples so that they increase in understanding and even in feeling love from Him and love for Him and for others.
	3. ***Promise #2*** (15:11)*:* Jesus promised that His disciples would supernaturally ***receive His joy***.
1. Empowered by joy that transforms (Jn. 15:11)
	1. Jesus promised to strengthen His people supernaturally with His joy which enables them to have a vibrant heart that overcomes sin and dark emotions. Joy in this age is a down payment of eternal joy.

9“As the Father loved Me, I have loved you…10keep My commands…you will abide in My love… 11These things I have spoken…that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”
(Jn. 15:9-11)

*Look at Roman numeral 3. We are going to read the passage again. I love to read these three verses. You cannot read them enough. I want everybody really familiar with John 15: 9, 10, and 11. When I look back over 50 years of preaching the Word on a weekly basis, I have preached on John 15:9-11 more than any one verse in all of my 50 years. This is the verse I repeated the most. I only say that so some of you would ask, “Why would that be the verse you have used the most?” And this is why I think it is that important: it is monumental in its applications and how vast and glorious these two truths are and this commandment is. Anyway, let’s read it again.*

*“As the Father loved Me, I have loved you.” If you stay in a spirit of obedience, verse 10, you will have a breakthrough in this love. You will live in the reality of it. You will feel the power of it if you stay with it.*

*“These things,” verse 11, “I have spoken to you.” He said, in effect, “I have given you these truths because I want My joy to be in you, and I want My joy to become your joy.” Those are overlapping realities, but they each have distinction, and we will look at those in a few moments. But remember the power of this promise, “My joy will be with you,” is in context to the 12 problems of troubles they would face and the end-time Church, too. The promise is that we can have joy even in the face of those 12 troubling realities that we looked at in the last session.*

* 1. ***These things***: Jesus was emphasizing that the truths in 15:1-10 were essential to empowering them to receive joy. “These things” refers to 15:1-10 with a special emphasis on what He said in 15:9-10. Our ability to receive God’s joy is anchored in our understanding of and our on-going conversation with the Spirit—about how the Father loves Jesus and how Jesus loves us (15:9). The combination of experiencing His love (15:9) and walking in obedience (15:10) results in joy (15:11).

*Paragraph B. In verse 11, Jesus says, “These things.” He is actually emphasizing all that He said in verses 1-10 because, chapter 15:1, He begins a new subject. But “these things” is a special emphasis on verse 9, 10, and 11. So, when He said, “I told you these things, so you will have a breakthrough of joy,” because He is God, and He said that, the thing we do not want to do is move on and forget what He just said. He said, “This is the way for joy in the generation of the greatest crisis in human history. But you have to listen to what I just told you.” He is really applying verses 1-10.*

*In our 50 sessions, we spent a couple sessions on verse 1 and 2,then a few on verse 3 and 4 ,and then on 4 and 5 etc. But I think there is a special emphasis on these verses 9, 10, and 11. These two truths, this one command, and these two promises.*

* 1. The overarching theme of John 13-17 is found in 14:1 when Jesus commanded the disciples not to allow trouble to dominate their heart (14:1). There are human dynamics involved as indicated by His command to ***“let not…”***Jesus promised to release His joy (15:11) and peace into the hearts of those who continue not to allow trouble to dominate their heart (14:27).

1“Let not your heart be troubled…believe in God, believe also in Me…27My peace I give to you…
Let not your heart be troubled…” (Jn. 14:1, 27)

*Paragraph C. Again, I am repeating—I say this in a number of the sessions—the overarching theme of these five chapters, 13-17, is found in chapter 14 verse 1. In our last session earlier in this conference, we already looked at that a little bit, so I will be ever so brief. “Let not your heart be troubled; I will give you supernatural peace,” He says in verse 27. In effect, “But do not let your heart be troubled. Do not let trouble dominate your heart. Take a stand, rise up, and when trouble starts to dominate you, replace those thoughts with truths and promises, and enter into conversation with the Lord, and I will put a check on that trouble dominating you. I will give you joy and peace in a supernatural way.”*

* 1. John 13-17 tells how to engage our troubled hearts to overcome *fear,* *shame,* *bitterness, grief, etc*.
	In these 5 chapters, Jesus gives us line-upon-line insight into God’s heart (about 25 truths and promises) that equip us to overcome painful, dangerous, or dark emotions and/or mindsets.
	The main emphasis is not how to become safe physically and financially but to be safe spiritually.

*The point I am making over and over and over is that there are human dynamics, and we have to do our part. We have to not let trouble run its course in us. Then again, in so many believers, when depression hits, grief hits, shame hits, they ride the storm out for a few weeks or a few months. No! Do not do that! It is your destiny, it is your inheritance, to have victory over those troubling emotions that are common to all of us.*

* 1. Jesus is the best teacher on how to overcome a troubled heart. If we engage often with the truths and promises in John 13-17, we will have joy. Many sincere believers are confused as to why they do not have joy. I would ask them how often these truths regularly get in their conversation with Jesus.

20“…give attention to My words…21Keep them in the midst of your heart; 22for they are life to those who find them…23Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.” (Prov. 4:20-23)

*Paragraph E. This is obvious, but it is fun to say: Jesus is the best Teacher on how to overcome a troubled heart. He knows the way of victory for a troubled heart. If there is anyone you want to listen to for counsel, it is His words in John 13-17.*

* 1. ***That My joy may remain in you***: Jesus promised to strengthen His disciples by imparting His joy in them to enable them to have a vibrant heart in the face of pressures and temptations (15:11 [2x]; 16:20, 21, 22, 24; 17:13). Joy is a feeling of pleasure or delight that things are good or are working for our future good—according to how God defines good. We experience joy as the truths of God’s Word is the lens by which we define good and view our life both in this age and in the age to come.

11“These things I have spoken…that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” (Jn. 15:11)

*Paragraph F. Let’s look at the promise again, “My joy will remain in you.” Beloved, put your name on this promise. Determine that this is yours. There was a time when this verse became more than a promise; it became a part of my personal destiny. Like, “Now wait a second, this is not meant for me to say, ‘Cool.’ This is meant for me to actually put my name on it.”*

*And every one of you can do that. I am on a mission to get people to put their name on John 15:11. Then they are going to say, “Okay, I am going to engage with ‘these things’ to have this promise of joy. What a glorious reality!*

*Now joy, the definition of joy. I looked it up in the dictionary. People asked me, “What dictionary?”*

*Joy is the feeling of pleasure or delight—this is my added edition.—that things are good. When we know that under God’s leadership, things are good now or they are working for our good according to how God defines good. That is a key phrase. We experience joy as the truth of God’s Word becomes the lens through which we define good.*

*A lot of people would define good like: if they win the trophy, that is good. I would say, “Well, that is not bad. That is not exactly where joy is linked–to that good. It might not be.” Good is whatever God says it is. That is the lens by how we define good and the pleasure and that good is happening, or we can see it that God is working for that good to be released in our life in this age or even in the age to come. If I can see that good in the trajectory of my life, I have a pleasure in my life. I do not have the full possession of that event or that circumstance, but it is coming. It is coming. Again, when we define good through the lens of God’s Word. That is the key phrase there. It might take you a little bit of time to think on that for a little while at a later time.*

* 1. Some are confused about biblical joy, thinking of it as temporary “euphoric high” paralleling what occurs with drugs. Jesus said that His joy “remains”—it is more than a temporary “euphoric high” but it is to “remain” as a regular part of a believer’s life. Some think of joy mostly in terms of the Spirit making them laugh at a church service or when jumping with joy to an upbeat worship song.

*Paragraph G. Now some people confuse biblical joy, I mean, they do not really use this language, but when you push them a little bit and say, “Well, what really is joy?” they admit, “I do not know.” Some of them think of it as some temporary euphoric high, like “When I have joy, I am just ecstatic.”*

*I say, “Well, you might have a moment or two here and there, but that is not mostly what this promise is about.” I am not saying there cannot be those moments over the course of walking with the Lord over a decade, but that is not the profound thing that He is talking about. He is not talking about a temporary, euphoric high because He said this joy is going to remain. It is not going to be 24/7 every minute of every day, but it is going to be a regular part of your daily life.*

*So, it is not like you are walking around feeling, “I am total joy.” If that is your vision, you are going to be disappointed.*

*Other people, when they think of joy, and I appreciate this, they think of, “Well, in lasting joy, you have a church service, and a bunch of people start laughing, and you have got joy.” Or they sing an upbeat song with the worship team, and people scream and jump, and they say, “That is joy!”*

*A little bit, but that is not mostly what He is talking about. He is not talking about laughing at a church service, although I have seen this, and I have had the joy of the Lord, with laughing like that. But when Jesus said you will have joy in the midst of these 12 types of problems, He is talking about much more than laughing a few times a year in a church service when the Spirit comes. He is talking about more than jumping for the last twelve minutes of a worship set. Yay! Smoke and light, and that is joy.*

*It has to hold you steady when these 12 troubles come. That is what joy is. I am not down on those other things because I appreciate those, but I am saying that there is a much bigger vision of what joy is. So, do not sell out for a low standard or even a false standard of some euphoric high that you are going to live in. He said that this joy will remain in you as a regular part of your lifestyle, of your emotional make-up, and it will stay with you. And again, it does not mean you will have it 24 hours a day. It just means you will have it on a regular basic throughout your regular life.*

* 1. David wrote of the fullness of joy at God’s throne (Ps. 16:11). God’s throne is the epicenter of joy in the universe; those near to it are filled with joy and experience pleasures (spiritual and physical). David prayed to drink from the river of His pleasures (Ps. 36:8). This occurs as the Spirit reveals the Father and the Son to us. The Spirit reveals the things of Jesus’ heart to His people (Jn. 16:14).

11…In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Ps. 16:11)

14“He [the Spirit] will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.” (Jn. 16:14)

*David wrote about the fullness of joy at the throne of God. This is a fantastic revelation. He said, “In Your presence”—Psalm 16—“is the very epicenter of joy. It is the throne of God.” At the very throne of God is the epicenter of pleasure.*

*That is a wonderful revelation, that pleasure and joy exist in the human experience because it exists in God’s personality. Joy is a significant reality in God’s eternal plan. It is not just something to get us through the hard times at the end of the age. We will live in joy, but not just joy, pleasure. Currently Satan counterfeits pleasure, but there are godly pleasures spiritual and physical that will be eternal. I mean, our whole future is absolutely inundated with joy for billions of years.*

*So, no matter what challenges we face in this life for a very short time, we are getting a fantastic deal with God. We are getting a lot better treatment than we ever could have dreamed of or ever could have deserved, but the enemy will come and tell you God is treating you unfairly, that He has abandoned you, because the enemy does not want you to connect to the big storyline of your life story. He does not want connected with that.*

*Beloved, you are going to live billions of years in joy and pleasure. Yes, there are challenges and setbacks in this life, and that is the theater which we display our love for God, but you only have that tension for a few years of your eternal existence, your few years on the earth. Maybe 70 years, maybe 80 years, but compared to billions, you only get to love God in the presence of pressure for a moment in your eternal existence. And that is the theater where our love for God is seen in this age. And it is actually a privilege to love God in that way.*

*One of the verses that we quote a lot, I have as one of the themes of this series is Psalm 36:8. I have it at the top of every handout. King David prayed that he would “drink from the river of God’s pleasure.” I mean, what a sentence! To drink from the river of God’s pleasure. What does that mean? Well, in this age, when God reveals God—when the Holy Spirit reveals the Father and the Son—when God reveals God to the human heart, that is the most intense pleasure we can experience in our human experience in this age. There is no greater pleasure than when God the Spirit gives us a spark of insight of the glory of the Father and the Son and their wisdom, their love, and their beauty. It is above every other pleasure available. David said, “I want to drink from that river” in this life, and then obviously, forever and ever in the life to come. When the Spirit takes the things that belong to Jesus, and He lets those sparks of insight touch our heart, there is nothing equal to it in this age or in the age to come.*

* 1. Joy is found in discovering that ***“He is enough for me”***—that is, to relate to Him and live for Him.
	*“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”* **John Piper**

*Paragraph I. Joy is found in discovering—I found this as a discovery, not an instantaneous discovery, over time—He is enough. He really is enough. I do not have to win the trophy. I do not have to get the award. I do not have to accomplish the big impact. Relating to Him and living for Him, even if my life is little and is unknown by anybody, but I am relating to Him, and it is real, and I am living for Him, that is enough. Even if the money does not come through, even if the healing that we want does not come through, the breakthrough of ministry does not come through, and the open door of advancement does not come through, He is enough! When that touches us, that little bit of truth touches us, there is joy in our hearts. There is this incredible sense of well-bring.*

*My favorite John Piper quote—I love John Piper—my favorite quote of his is that “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.” What a sentence! What a glorious statement! God is most glorified in us, even in difficulty, trouble, tribulations, He is glorified in us when we are satisfied in Him. Even in the midst of trouble. Not just in trouble, but because we are satisfied in Him.*

*We are facing trouble, and the people around us look at us, and we make Jesus look attractive to them. They ask, “What is it that you know about an invisible God that I do not know about? How could you possibly have contentment and a sense of well-being with this circumstance?” Because I am living with Him and for Him and connecting with Him. They ask, “Who?” Jesus. “Well, come on. I am a Christian too. Be real.” We make Jesus look attractive to believers and unbelievers when we are satisfied in Him, especially when we are in the midst of difficulty.*

* 1. ***God’s joy in us includes***—1) the *pleasure of interacting with Jesus* (Ps. 16:8; 36:8; Jn. 3:29; 16:14);
	2) *a* *sense of well-being* with confidence in His leadership—a quiet spirit (Rom. 8:28; 1 Pet. 3:4);
	3) our *hope of future glory* inliving and ruling with Him forever (Rom. 5:2; 8:18; 1 Cor. 2:9)— knowing that He esteems our small acts of obedience with eternal rewards (Mt. 25:21; 1 Cor. 3:14);
	4) *God hearing and delighting in our prayers* that are in His will (Prov. 15:8; Jn. 16:24; 1 Jn. 3:22); 5) joy that results from *loving and helping people to love* Jesus (1 Thes. 2:16; 2 Jn. 12; 3 Jn. 4).

9…“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Cor. 2:9)

*Paragraph J. I am not going to go through this, but I have listed five areas of spiritual pleasure that the Bible talks about, and we have joy connected with these five areas of spiritual pleasure. Each one of them could deserve developing, and it would be good to take an entire message to take these five things and unpack them. Many of these are right from the words of Jesus or the apostles.*

*Well,* ***number one****, the joy, the pleasure of interacting with Jesus. You know, the David statement, “I drink from the river of Your pleasure.”*

*Or the Jesus statement, “The Spirit will tell you about Me. If you will talk to the Spirit, He will tell you about Me and do something big in you when you talk to Him” because the Spirit knows everything there is to know about Jesus, and He would love to tell you about Jesus if you will talk to Him about Jesus, with your Bible open.*

*I love to talk to the Holy Spirit and say, “You know more than anybody knows about Him, and I want to know more.”*

*“Well, then ask Me, I will give you more. But I wait for you to ask Me.”*

***Number two*** *is joy as a deep sense of well-being. We have a confidence in His leadership that things are working for our good forever. It is that sense of well-being that God is watching, and even in the midst of trouble it is working for our good. In 1 Peter, the Bible calls that a “gentle and quiet spirit.” When it says a quiet spirit, it is not talking about personality types. It is talking about a spirit not troubled with fear. A quiet spirit as Peter said—I have the verse right there—in 1 Peter 3:4 he said, “It is very precious to God. And it is incorruptibly beautiful. It is incorruptible beauty.”*

*When a believer in this age has trouble around them, but they have this sense of well-being, “You are watching me. Your leadership is perfect. It is rough right now, but it is working for my good. I am in Your hands.” That is called a quiet spirit. And that is called incorruptible beauty that is very precious to God in 1 Peter 3:4. That is fantastic.*

*This sense of well-being, Paul said it in another way. 1 Corinthians 2, he said, “No eye has seen. No ear has heard. It has never entered into the imagination of man: the intensity of goodness and pleasure God has planned for you for billions of years.” You can take Walt Disney and put him together with Spielberg and put him together with the other five guys and take it times 100, and it has never entered the heart of a man how far God is going to take us in terms of our pleasure and our goodness in His presence for billions of years. I mean, beloved, we are getting a good deal! The devil wants to convince you that if there is trouble, you are mistreated, your body feels horrible, the money is not there, your ministry is not working, that God has mistreated you, and you are forgotten. Do not buy it! Do not buy it. Connect to the big picture of your life story. And right there, 1 Corinthians 2:9.*

***Number three****: The future hope of glory. We are going to rule with Him forever in the New Jerusalem. Eternal rewards. Joy is connected to that. Because, actually, just the Tuesday before this John 13 meeting, Jesus told them, in Matthew 25:21, that you will enter into the joy of your Lord when He shows you how much He gives you for a very little faithfulness in very little areas. You just stay faithful in the little area He gave you, and you are going to have great joy to see how that is going to turn out for you.*

***Number four****: how God delights in our prayers that He sees and hears. There is joy. Jesus said, “When the Father answers you, your joy will be full.” So, He connects joy to that.*

*Then,* ***number five****: the apostles connected with the joy that is the result of loving and helping people to love Jesus. The apostles said, “Our joy consists in the fruit of the people we have helped during our journey to love Jesus, and just the love that is growing in them. We have joy in seeing love in them. We have joy in knowing we helped them love Jesus. Our labors contribute to what is most important to God.”*

*Over the years, I have talked to some folks who said, “Your words touched me and made me love God more.” I think that is such a joyful thing, and you do not have to be a preacher or have a public ministry to do that. Your words to people, when you help someone else love God, and watch their joy and their love mature, there is a joy you have in seeing that you have touched and witnessed and contributed to something very important to God.*

* 1. ***Your joy may be full***: Our experience of God’s joy comes as regular momentary impartations of the Spirit. In time, His joy becomes the lens by which we view our life so that it progressively becomes “our joy” or part of our mindset and emotional make up. His joy sparks our heart until joy becomes more dominant in our heart than dark emotions. Our joy can grow to the “full maturity” that God ordained for this age. Our joy now is not full in the absolute sense since it will increase in heaven.

*Paragraph K. Jesus said, “I want My joy to be in you, and I want your joy to remain full.” For the word for “full,” you could put the idea that your joy would become mature. I think that would be a good way to understand it. Here is how I understand this: Jesus touches our heart with joy, momentary inspirations of joy. I am reading the Word, or I am talking to Him, or things happen, and it is just those few moments when I can see more than I normally do, and I feel His pleasure, His leadership, His eyes are on me. Though that does not stay all day every day, it remains in the sense that it is a regular part of my walk with God, but it is not all day, every day. It is a moment here, a few moments there.*

*But when that joy that touches us becomes the lens through which we view our life, it progressively becomes our joy, meaning our mindset and our emotional make-up. Joy becomes a part of our mindset. It is not just a couple moments of the Lord touching you. It actually changes your emotional makeup. Your mindset is now rooted in that.*

*Most people’s mindset, by nature, our mindset is rooted in rejection, failure, and shame. You know, when we hear something that is hard to believe will turn out right, we think it probably is going to be bad, and we are probably going to fail; it is probably going to go wrong. But when our mindset shifts through the lens of God’s truth, that is when His joy is now part of your emotional make-up. He calls it, “Now it is your joy.”*

*I have a few more sentences on it. It sparks our heart. First moments, then it becomes the dominant way we do life, and it is more dominant than the dark emotions of rejection and fear and despair. And it is not just a positive thinking. It is literally that you feel that way, and your first thoughts when things happen is that God is working, and He is on your side. Because in the early days, your first thought was, “I am abandoned, forsaken, God does not even know I am here. Everything is bad.”*

*The Lord says, as it were, “Stay with it because My joy will become your joy. You will view life through a different lens, and it will be a part of your emotional make-up.” What a glorious reality.*

* 1. There are human and divine components involved in receiving God’s joy. The ***human side*** includesconversation with God around biblical truths and promises, plus setting our primary life goals in agreement with that which *lasts forever* and with that which *God calls great* (Mt. 5:19) such as walking in love, purity, humility, generosity, gratitude, faithfulness, etc. The ***divine side*** consists of theSpirit’s activity inspiring the mind and heart of a believer with understanding and peace. Joy is associated with the confidence that our pursuit of greatness is in agreement with what God calls great and rewards eternally—a greatness without regard to temporal circumstances or achievements.

*Paragraph L. There are human—obviously—and divine components involved in joy. The human side—I have already said it a couple times tonight—is that conversation. We take these 25 or 30 truths in John 13-17, and again, I am never limiting it those truths to those five chapters. I will take anywhere in the Bible, God’s truth and God’s promises, but there is something special about those five chapters because He really lays it one, two, three, four, five, especially after He told them all the troubles they were going to face. So, the human side: we engage in that conversation. We say, “Thank You, show me more.” A little more than that, but that is a good beginning.*

*But do not forget about this thing here: we set our primary life goals in agreement with that which lasts forever and that which God calls great. This is really important. This is basically the heart of what I am saying tonight, That is a big statement here. What do I mean by setting our primary life goals in agreement with that which lasts forever, and that which God calls great? I remember in my early days with the Lord, my primary life goals as an on-fire believer were believing God for revival and witnessing to people. What I wanted was favorable circumstances. I wanted a blessed family, blessed kingdom friendships, a healthy body, a ministry that made impact, enough money to supply it. Those were my goals, those four or five things.*

*And there was a time, I remember vividly—I will not go into the story right now, but I will tell a little bit of the story in a few minutes—that the Lord said, “Those are good things, but I want you to take those things and make them your secondary life goals. Make connecting with Me your primary goal.”*

*And at first, I thought, “Oh, okay, but aren’t those four or five things good?” Yes, those are good. Wanting to have good family and kingdom relationships, financial blessing, healthy body, ministry with impact, those kinds of favorable circumstances are good. But there is a shift when they become number two, and your primary goal is “I want to do things that last beyond the grave, and I want to do things that God, on the final day, will call great.” Because, in Matthew 5:19, He was talking about people in the resurrection, talking about people in the kingdom, and said, “Some will be called least,” Matthew 5:19, “and some will be called great.” We are talking about people in the resurrection, in the New Jerusalem. God will say of some lifestyles: your life choices were great. And He will say to others that are in the kingdom, your life choices were least compared to theirs.*

*Some of the people of whom He will call their life choices great will be people nobody ever heard of. They never had a big impact. They never were known by anybody. But they were choosing what lasts forever and what God calls great. I have a whole list of things that God calls great: walking in love which, in essence, means to walk in purity, humility, generosity, gratitude, diligence. Those choices, those virtues, are what God calls great. God does not call great if I touch a million people. What He says is great is not the size of my ministry impact but the size of my heart response to Him. That is what He calls great.*

*When Billy Graham stands before the Lord, you know, Jesus is not going to say, “Father, I think that is Billy Graham! That is amazing! Look, he filled up stadiums.” Billy Graham will be evaluated exactly like you and me, by the response of his heart, not the size of his impact. So, there was a time when I determined I was going to line up my life goals with that which goes past the grave and which God calls great.*

*Then there is a divine side of God’s joy, and that is when the Spirit touches and inspires our minds and our hearts. In Paragraph L. here, I wrote that joy is associated with—catch this, these are kind of awkward sentences you have to think on for a minute—joy is associated with the assurance that our pursuit of greatness is in agreement with what God calls great and rewards eternally. It is the same thing I said a minute ago. The more I have the assurance that my choices will last beyond the grave and that God will call them great choices, and I have that assurance in this age, I could have all kinds of setbacks and problems, but I have joy because that is where it is found, right there. And this greatness and this joy is without any regard to temporal circumstances. You can be in a prison. You can be rejected. You could be martyred. But if you have that assurance, even a little bit, you have something that is alive in your heart that is priceless. And that is within the reach of every human being who chooses to go after it.*

1. “Natural happiness” and “Divine joy”

*Roman numeral 4. Now I am going to tease out a little more about this natural happiness. Again, I am just using this term. It is not like this is the standard definition of happiness. I am calling it natural happiness to set it in contrast with divine joy. Again, somebody else might use the terms differently, and that is fine.*

* 1. We naturally seek “the illusion” of gaining deep satisfaction via having favorable circumstances.
	*There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person, and it can never be filled by any created thing. It can only be filled by God, made known through Jesus Christ.”* **(Blaise Pascal)**

*We naturally see the illusion of gaining satisfaction through favorable circumstances. We are born with that mindset. If we get the award, if the cool people like us, if lots of money comes, if lots of people are impacted, hey, I am happy. That does not make you happy. The pursuit of it kind of makes you happy while you are pursuing it, but it is an illusion. It does not satisfy the human heart. I love favorable circumstances—give me a double portion—but I do not have an illusion that they will keep my heart strong in joy. I like them, but I do not believe in them. I do not trust them as the strength of my heart because I know they will not sustain my heart or anybody else’s heart.*

*The famous statement in Paragraph A: There is a God-shaped vacuum—you have heard many people talk about this. It is a well-known statement—there is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every human that could never be fulfilled by a created thing, that could only be fulfilled by God through Jesus Christ. A very well-known statement.*

*I remember looking at an interview of Tom Brady, the famous quarterback, the great quarterback. This was about ten years ago or more. He had won three Super Bowls; he has won seven now. They interviewed him, this quarterback, I think it was in 2009. And Tom Brady said, “Why do I have three Super Bowl rings?”—he has seven now—“There has to be more. There has to be more. I love this, but there has got to be more.” He said, “I think, ‘God, there has to be more.’”*

*The interviewer asked, “What is the more?”*

*Tom Brady said, “I wish I knew what it was.”*

*He and his wife according to the internet are worth $700 million. They have every award, every “every,” but “There has to be more than this.” I mean, there are quite a few people on the earth that have favorable circumstances, who are in that real high 1/1000th of 1% of the human race. None of them are satisfied in their heart. It is impossible to do it.*

*The sooner we break our agreement with the illusion of natural happiness to bring something that will keep our heart strong, the sooner we break our agreement with that illusion, the quicker we will get on that trajectory to divine joy. But it will not happen on its own. It happens by choices. We make a decision. That is why I care so much about this message.*

* 1. Nothing can fill the “God-shaped vacuum” in our heart that was designed by God to be fulfilled only in context to a deep relationship with Him. A person can have a great family, amazing friends, abundant finances, good health, and a growing ministry but still lack a deep sense of joy. I am grateful for temporary good feelings related to favorable circumstances, but I know that they are temporary, and I do not trust them to give joy and strength to my heart (Neh. 8:10)

10“Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” (Neh. 8:10)

*Paragraph B. Nothing can fill the God-shaped vacuum designed by God to be filled only by Him. I have been in ministry for over 45 years as a full-time pastor, and I have witnessed this. You can have a great family, I mean a really cool family, amazing friends, abundant finances, unusual achievements, I mean the biggest fastest kingdom business, fastest in ministry, whatever, whatever, good health, growing ministry, and still not have joy. And you can think, “Man, I should be happy, but I go to bed at night, and something is wrong.”*

*God designed us with the God-shaped vacuum. He does not want anything to fill that. Again, I am grateful for temporary good feelings. I love good circumstances, but I know they are temporary, and I do not trust them to give strength to my heart. I know that if I had a million dollars, the biggest ministry in the world, the happiest family, it will never keep my heart strong in the face of these 12 things that are emerging in the earth. It has to be the joy of the Lord. It is the only possible way.*

*But the benefit I have that some do not have is that I am positive of that. I have settled that. That does not mean I still don’t need to learn more and be renewed in it, but I am not chasing some illusion out there that if I get a bigger ministry, a bigger this, a bigger that, somehow something will be better inside me. It will not, believe me.*

* 1. I feel urgent to expose this illusion in light of the false voices that are deceiving many (Mt. 24:11). Some of these false voices are social commentators who promote false narratives about how the human heart works and how people are fulfilled. The false message promoted by many marketing teams and social commentators dominate the global conversation today. The message marketed most is that *“you must wholeheartedly pursue what you think will make you happy*.”

11Then many false prophets [social commentors] will rise up and deceive many. (Mt. 24:11)

*Paragraph C. I feel urgency to expose this illusion of happiness because there are so many voices in the culture that are deceiving people. On the Tuesday of that last week in Matthew 24, Jesus spoke of “many false prophets.” Sometimes we think of a false prophet as some guy with horns that is just purely demonic, you know, in some demonic activity, and there undoubtedly will be them, but I think the majority of the false prophets are the social commentators. They are people that are giving their commentary on society. A lot of them are good-looking people, great people skills, great social media. Wow! They are so winsome! But they are false voices. They are promoting false narratives about how the human heart works. They are telling people how to be fulfilled. It is not the right path. It is opposite of the path God says. It is a false voice; it is a false narrative.*

*False messages are being promoted by many marketing people across the earth. Many social commentators. It is dominating the global conversation today. The message that is most marketed across the earth today: “You must pursue what you think will make you happy.” That message is everywhere. Everywhere, “You must, with all of your heart. You only have one chance. Go hard after it. That is the only way you will be happy.” It is a total lie!*

*That is the guaranteed way* ***not*** *to be happy. I assure you. Lining up with what lasts beyond the grave and what God calls great is the* ***only*** *way to be happy, in conversation with Jesus Christ. That is a fact of life.*

* 1. The result is multitudes who are constantly seeking to change their circumstance—they change jobs, occupation, houses, cities, ministries, friends, and now their gender in pursuit of being happy. Only one Man has the one reliable pathway to joy and fulfillment–He shared it in John 13-17.

*Paragraph D. So, the result of this phenomenon—I mean, it has been there forever throughout history, but the social media in the last 20 years—the dominant voice in the culture, “Do what makes you happy,” and all these experts tell you how to do it, the result is multitudes always seeking to change. I mean, constantly making a change. Not that you are never supposed to make a change. Sometimes, the Lord does that. But now it’s every couple years change your job. Every couple years change your occupation. Change houses every couple years. Change cities. Change ministries. Change friends. Now, the idea is to change your gender. And maybe you will be happy. And it is all about the pursuit to be happy. Let’s go somewhere else.*

*God does send people to other jobs and other houses. That does really happen. But the problem is that when you go somewhere else, you bring you with you. I mean, it is real. You bring you and your paradigm with you. And that new city, that new ministry, that new friend, that new, that new, that new, it will not touch your heart if you do not line up with these things that Jesus is saying.*

*What I like to say—it is really fun to say this—there is only one Man who has the reliable pathway to joy. There is only one Man, and He has shared it in John 13-17. That is why I am so fanatical about these five chapters. He said, “I told you these things so your weak heart in the presence of these 12 pressures can have a joy that remains. And I know what I am talking about,” He could have said.*

*Many people, I am talking about believers, go from disappointment to disappointment. They change it, try again—and I am all for trying thing—but it is fundamentally the wrong conversation. They need to have the John 13-17 conversation and then make changes, and they do not always know if it is right or wrong—sometimes there is a risk involved—but changing with the wrong mindset is not going to work.*

* 1. I urge you to let go of *“the illusion of natural happiness”* and make a decision not to look for deep fulfillment in favorable circumstances. I made a very conscience decision to shift my focus from looking to happiness in good circumstances to finding genuine joy in my relationship with Jesus.
	The shift started in 1973 when, at age 18, I witnessed the anguish of my 17-year-old brother who broke his neck, leaving him totally paralyzed for the next 33 years (he died in 2007).

*Paragraph E. So, part of my message tonight is: I am urging people as I taught it to our students about a month ago: I am urging you, I am contending with you to let go of the illusion of finding natural happiness. I urge you to let go of it. Make a decision not to look for it in favorable circumstances. I mean, take the favorable ones, but do not think they are going to make joy happen. Take them. I would take easy over hard any day, but I do not think it is going to make me happy.*

*I made a very conscious decision—and I will share just a little bit as I bring this to a close in a moment here—I made a conscious decision to shift my focus from looking to find happiness in good circumstances to finding it genuinely in my relationship with the Lord. And the shift started, I mean, it was a long time ago in my relationship with the Lord. I am 67 now, so 50 years ago when I was 18, that would be 17, and I was 18, so 49 years ago. I was in college, and I got this horrible news. A lot of folks around here know a little bit of my family story. I was 18 years old, and my 17-year-old brother broke his neck in a high school football game. I was playing college football, I had a scholarship, I was on my way to med school, and I was doing ministry. I was teaching Bible studies and witnessing to people, just a happy little Christian guy on the campus. Yeah! And all that stuff.*

*I got this phone call. “Okay,” my father said, “your brother broke his neck.”*

*“What do you mean he broke his neck? What does that mean?” Well, it ended up he was paralyzed for 33 years, I mean, couldn’t even move his shoulders, complete paralytic for 33 years. What happened was they moved him to one of the best rehab places, they said, in the world. I have never fact checked it, but that is what they told us. It was in Denver, Colorado. Craig Rehab Center. And they had 88 beds, a three-story facility, supposed to be just expert rehabilitation for young people who were freshly paralyzed. And, because they only had 88 beds and most people that are totally paralyzed, back then, I do not know about today, but it gave them a short lifespan. They gave him an 8-year lifespan. And because the lifespan was so short, they did not take older people. Everybody in that rehab center was from 15 to 25, almost everybody, because they said we cannot really afford to give a bed—the waiting list to get in that place was so long—they could not give a bed to an older person. They wanted to give it to a younger person.*

*So, I was there, and I was there for maybe nine months, I do not know for sure, nearly a year, nine months or something like that. I was living in the apartment next door to him. I quit school and moved there to learn how to take care of him. This is not a big sob story about me quitting school. Some people say, “Oh, that was…” No. That is not the point. Here is the point. When I was at that rehab center, I was there 12 hours a day, probably more because I lived in the apartment next door. He was 17, and I was 18. I was learning to take care of him for when he would go home in six or nine months whatever it was. In 1973, in those days when the Jesus movement was happening, I witnessed to every other person I saw. If I saw a human being in a store, in a park, on the street, I witnessed to them. I mean, everybody did it in the 70s. That was not so special.*

*So, I was in this rehab center, and I was witnessing to the nurses and the doctors, but here is the point I am making. Probably every month, because there were 88 beds, some 20-year-old guy who has been there for four months, his time was up, and he moved back home. A new guy came in. So, about every month, though that is not exactly the time frame, there was a new family that came into that rehab center in the fresh trauma that two to three weeks ago, their son or daughter was totally paralyzed. I mean, the trauma of that is beyond anything you can imagine if you have never lived in that world. So, every month was a new family arriving, kind of “deer in the headlights,” their life is wrecked, their kid is wrecked. Most of them were car wrecks, diving accidents, or skiing accidents. And they were traumatized beyond measure. So, every month I was meeting another family because I was there 12 hours a day. I was kind of the unofficial, not really, but unofficial chaplain. The nurse on floor 3, “Hey, Mike, would you do that Bible study up here? A new family came in.”*

*I would go up there and try to talk to them, but here is the point. My life shifted. I realized, “Wait a second. There is something that has to work in the kingdom for paralyzed people because the crisis is so great.” My version of Christianity was play a little college football, I got accepted to med school, and I was going to go do all that. I did not want to be a preacher. I wanted to be a doctor and witness to people in some foreign country. And I thought I would be a happy doctor.*

*And the Lord said, “That is good. That is good. But you have to anchor to something way deeper if you are going to have something to help these people.” I was facing it every single day, the crisis.*

*Then, things got worse. Nine months later, we were still in the rehab center. I got a phone call, and my 45-year-old father suddenly died of a heart attack. So, my mother—I was not thinking about me right then, and that is my own story for another time—but my mother was 38 years old. She had 7 children from ages 10 to 19. She had like 7 teenagers. She had no insurance and a 9th grade education. And her husband died. She had no job, no insurance, a paralyzed son. She was in utter despair at 38 years old. And my sisters, my five sisters, were in utter despair because now they don’t have a father. They have a paralyzed brother. They are all 12, 13, 14, 15. Nobody know anything of what is going on.*

*So, I think, “I have got to figure out what works for them.” What works for these paralyzed people in this rehab center? Because, once you are in that world—those of you who have family members in that situation—I have been to rehab centers back and forth over many years because you have got to go back for this, and you have to go back for that. There is a whole community of people in any city who know about paralysis. It is a whole world in itself. And my point is not to go into all that. My point is, I was interfacing with that regularly, so my paradigm was shifting. I was not even choosing to shift it. I was just thinking what I had been aiming for was not that great. I had to find something that is transcendent, something bigger than having a football scholarship, and going to med school, and having a happy medical ministry. I had to go way deeper than that, though I appreciate that. It was good. I have a number of friends who are in that position.*

*Again, I did not have a thought about being a preacher at that time in my life. So, on top of it, I had two prophetic dreams, my first two. They were dreams, more than dreams. I do not want to go into that. My first two I ever had in my life was that year, age 18, and then the second one when I was 23. And, in both of them, I saw the judgment seat of Christ. I didn’t even know about prophetic dreams. I didn’t even know anyone who ever had one. And I was standing there in some situation, and the Lord showed me the seriousness when I stand before Him and He will judge and evaluate my life based on how the choices I have made. I have given messages when I tell about them; I do not want to go into it right now.*

*The idea I am getting at here is that I had to figure out what was real and what was not real. So then, while we were at the hospital or sometime afterwards, one of the neuro surgeons, the guy who fixes all the paralytics, got in a plane accident, and he broke his neck. My dad died at 45. He was a world champion boxer, an international boxing champion. He went to the Olympics in great shape, but he died of a heart attack. My brother breaks his neck. The neuro surgeon breaks his neck.*

*I ask, “What is real? What does not change? What lasts?” Then I have these two prophetic encounters or these “dreams plus some” of the judgment seat of Christ. And all of a sudden, my mind was shifting. I was not even doing it on purpose. I was not doing it out of some great nobility. I was doing it out of despair because I had to figure out something because my youth-group Christianity was not going to hold up under this. It was not going to work. I was only 18 or 19. I might live to be 60 or something, oh my gosh! Well, I am 67, so I passed that. At that age, I thought I would never make it to 60, but anyway.*

* 1. My life paradigm began changing. I had two prophetic dreams about the judgment seat of Christ at ages 18 and 23. The first dream stirred me to study Ecclesiastes and Revelation to see “eternity.”

12Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13each one’s work will…be revealed by fire…14If anyone’s work…endures, he will receive a reward. 15If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he will be saved. (1 Cor. 3:12-15)

*Paragraph F. Here is the passage on the judgment seat, that I could have eternal rewards, not by having a big ministry, but by making godly choices in secret. Not that other people would know them, but choices that were from the heart, not just choices for political or for public appearance. They had to be from the heart. And you can read that there. You can have rewards that can last forever. That was a remarkable deal.*

*So, what happened after this “judgment seat of Christ” experience, I was in Colorado at this rehab center, and I was running with all these paralyzed people, and my father died, the neuro surgeon had the plane wreck, somehow—this is the strangest thing, but I am real glad now—I got captured by the book of Ecclesiastes. And some of you know Ecclesiastes. King Solomon had everything. The book is 12 chapters. I read Ecclesiastes, and it is almost embarrassing to say this, that was the first book of the Bible that I studied line by line for a whole year. It ought to have been John or Matthew or something. Ecclesiastes! Give me a break! But somehow, everything looked vain to me. Nothing looked real. And I said, “I have to figure this out.”*

*Now, just a little humor here: I feel sorry for all those people in those Bible studies at the rehab center because that was what I was talking about, saying, “It is all vain anyway! It is all going to burn.”*

*“Gee whiz, can’t you give us something better?”*

 *I overdid it, but I don’t think anybody will remember it now. I was so captured by the book of Ecclesiastes for a year. And the other book was the book of Revelation. Not for the end times. I did not care about the end times. I read Revelation and Ecclesiastes for a year, studied them with commentaries, because I wanted to see eternity. So, I didn’t really read the book of Revelation to see the end-time story. I wanted to see eternity. I had to get above the cloud. I had to get above the storm, or this was not going to work.*

* 1. Solomon seemingly had everything including a powerful intellect, abundant prosperity, the highest position of power in the nation, accomplishments that brought him fame and admiration including “sexual freedom” (700 wives and 300 concubines), and yet he said, *“All is vanity”* (Ecc. 1:2).

2…“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. 3What profit has a man from all his labor…?
8…The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.” (Ecc. 1:2-3, 8 )

1I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with…pleasure”…2What does it accomplish?...
4I made my works great, I built myself houses…8I also gathered for myself silver and gold…
11I looked on all the works that my hands had done…all was vanity… (Ecc. 2:1-11)

11…He has put eternity in their hearts…14whatever God does [values], it shall be forever…
that men should fear before Him…15and God requires an account of what is past. (Ecc. 3:11-15)

13Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments…
14God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing… (Ecc. 12:13-14)

*Paragraph G. I really got into Song of Solomon later, but I liked Ecclesiastes first. And so, Solomon had everything. Most of you know this anyway. Then he said, ”Nothing matters if it does not last past the grave. Nothing does.”*

*I thought, “Wow! He had everything.”*

*The wealthiest man, the most handsome man, had all the pleasures imaginable and he said, chapter 1, verse 8, “‘The eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear with hearing,’” meaning no sinful pleasure could satisfy me. I have the best music, the best experiences, the best scene, the best resort on the sea, everything. Nothing could fill my heart.” He said in chapter two, “My heart, I will test you with pleasure. Come, heart. Let’s try everything.” Nothing worked.*

*Ecclesiastes 3, here is his problem. He finally figured out the source of his turmoil. And if you figure this out, you will save yourself a lot of time. God put eternity in his heart. He said, “Oh, I get it. There is a longing for something past the grave or I can never be satisfied.”*

*The other man, Pascal, called it the God-shaped vacuum. Ecclesiastes, God put eternity in our hearts. If I do not do things that last past the grave, it feels empty. Not that it is entirely empty, but it is not enough is the point. Then he realized, “God put eternity in my heart, that whatever God does, in other words, what God values lasts forever.”*

*That captured me. I had to find out what God values. I had to figure out, how my brother can be paralyzed—and we had many talks about this for 33 years. His name is Pat—I said, “Pat, you can obey God as much as I can. Yes, I am teaching conferences and building the Church. That is not what God is going to talk to me about. You cannot move and yet obey your assignment in God just like I can and get the same reward I can.” And we talked about that many times. I finally figured out that is the way forward. If you do your assignment from the heart with gratitude and generosity and love and humility before God, then it lasts forever.*

*Then, in Ecclesiastes 12, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.” He says, “Fear God. Obey Him. God will bring every single thing you do into an evaluation at the end.”*

*I thought, “Man, I am 18, and I have had these judgment seat of Christ experiences. The surgeon died, my dad died, and nothing is stable.” I thought, “I am going to anchor myself into another age. That is the only way possible.”*

*I will tell you one more story, and then I will bring it to an end. I love this story. It was a few years ago, I do not know, maybe five or ten years ago. These three brothers came, and they had graduated from IHOPU. And “Hey, Mike!” and we sit down and have a coffee. They were all in their mid or late 20s. And they were telling me their ministry is exploding. They were so happy. And then they ask me the bomb question, and it shocked them when I gave them the answer. They said, “It is so fun, it is so exciting, God is moving! Don’t you wish you were in your 20s?”*

*I said, “Absolutely not.” I was in my 50s then and I am 67 now.*

*They said, “You don’t?”*

*I said, “No, not at all.”*

*They said, “Why?”*

*I said, “Because you think life is a party on a cruise ship. I know life is a war and a marathon race, but you don’t, but one day you will. You have some serious “ouchies” facing you to break your agreement with the delusion you are living in. I am on a marathon pace. I am on mile 20. You think I would wish I could go back to mile 6? Are you kidding me?”*

*These guys said, “Man, this is intense. In the name of Jesus, we ask joy to hit this guy!”*

*I said, “No. You are living in an illusion. I love your heart, but the sooner you get off that cruise ship, that party ship, and figure out you are in a war and a race—though you are not racing someone else—you are racing, and the enemy is wanting to take you out. And your race is to do the will of God to the end. That is the race you are on. And you don’t know that.”*

*These guys said, “We have to go somewhere. We love you, Mike! See ya, bro.”*

*I said, “Well, at least I told you the truth!”*

* 1. For God’s promise of joy to be true—it must be attainable for all people; it must result in enjoying God; it must be connected to goodness that last forever; and it cannot be stopped by our enemies.
	2. As I began to grasp that God sees, esteems, and eternally rewards my love and obedience and as
	I experienced more of His love and better understood my life with Him in the age to come, then God’s joy began to increase in my life in a more consistent way. Thus, I determined to make my main life pursuit to grow in the grace that would empower me to love God and to be faithful to Him.

*Worship team, come on up. Here is the deal. This is what I want to tell young people all the time, The sooner you decide you are going to live for divine joy in His presence and break your agreement with the illusion of happiness, the sooner you will be on the trajectory of having a satisfied heart with true joy in the face of escalating pressures.*

*Amen and amen. Let’s stand before the Lord.*

*I am going to call some of you tonight to make a choice tonight. You are going to shift. You do not have to wait until you go to a rehab center for a year or whatever tragedy it is. Why not see it now? I might have saved you a few years here. If you make that choice, you will not do great at it at first, because when I made that choice, it was not in one day. I was not even trying to make the choice. Just a year or two later, I looked back and said, “I made it. I shifted. I shifted over.” The sooner you do it—it takes a little while to do it—the sooner you are on that trajectory to really finding something deep in God.*

*So, Father, we stand before You right now, and I ask that the spirit of wisdom and the fear of God would touch young hearts and old hearts too, all over this room and all over the internet those watching, the spirit of wisdom.*

*I have spoken to you—I do not want to be too bold, but it is true. I have spoken to you tonight from the spirit of wisdom and the spirit of the fear of the Lord. God is contending for your greatness. I am contending for your greatness by this message. Your greatness in God’s sight. But nobody can make this choice besides you. And you make the choice a thousand times a thousand, not one time:*

*Jesus, You are worthy. I want to shift over to Your way.*

*I want to call a prayer time for folks for whom this is the first time you are saying, “I am thinking tonight I am going to be making different decisions. I do not know how well I will do right now, but I want to make a choice. I have never chosen. I have never thought about this. And I would like prayer for that choice tonight.” If you would like prayer, I invite you to come stand on this front line of this carpet. I have to renew this choice all the time. I am not talking about renewing it. This is the first time you are making it deliberately. Come stand on this dark carpet and then the next line, so we have room.*

*I am going to invite about 50 of you all over of the room whether you are from Kansas City or not—if you pray for people back home, in your ministry back home—we want to lay hands on people and just ask for grace to strengthen their heart.*

*When I first began to make these choices, I was nervous, because I did not know if they were real. I did not know if they would work. I was a little nervous, so I can understand the feeling. And it does not “take” right away. It takes a little while before it takes. But let’s lay hands on them and just ask God to put grace on their heart.*

*God, release grace to strengthen their heart.*

*Those on the web stream, grace on your heart! Right now, in those homes, in those dorm rooms, in those family rooms right now, those hotel rooms, we pray for grace on the heart. God really matters past the grave.*

*God, release a spirit of power across this room. I ask for the Holy Spirit sealing of hearts tonight. Come and mark the heart with joy to be filled with the promise of the Holy Spirit. I ask for prophetic dreams this week, this month.*