

A Prayer That Promises Joy

by Carter Conlon

This sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God's guidance in prayer, asking for what we truly need rather than what we think we need. It contrasts the stories of Solomon and Nehemiah, highlighting the significance of asking God for wisdom and the heart to obey Him. The message encourages seeking the joy that comes from God, which is everlasting and cannot be taken away by circumstances.

Scripture: John 16:24, Nehemiah 8:10, Proverbs 2:6, Ecclesiastes 1:2, James 4:3, Hebrews 4:16, Psalm 16:11, Psalm 30:5, Psalm 126:5, 1 John 5:14

Topics: "Seeking God's Guidance", "Wisdom in Prayer"

Description

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Transcript

Not only will I recover it all, I'll get some stuff I never had in the beginning. It's almost like that game show, I'll trade up, I'll trade up for what God has for me from what I, everything I thought I had. As I said this morning, it's just so good to be here again to fill the pulpit this morning for Pastor Tim Delena, and I do hope you're thankful for a pastor with a great big vision, and a man who holds to the word of God, comes in here on Saturday night and lays hands on every seat in this house and prays for you.

He said God, he tells me I pray, he said God bless the person that will be sitting in this seat with the knowledge of who you are, strengthen them, save them, set them free, and bring them into the fullness of what you have for their lives, and so I thank God for that. Great, great privilege to be here. I've had the privilege of being here, this will be my 30th year I guess this year.

Some of you weren't born then when we first stood on the pulpit, and I can tell you after all these years that God is faithful. God is so, so, so faithful. In the kingdoms of this world, you start at the pinnacle, it could be the pinnacle of your dream, your career, your relationships, and everything kind of goes downhill.

In God's kingdom, it's the opposite. You start from where you are, and it all, it keeps increasing, and the promise of God is that the glory of the latter house will be greater than the former, and of course you are the temple of God, you're the dwelling place of God, so there's this ever-increasing glory in the hearts and

lives of those who belong to Jesus Christ. So the Bible says, as we behold him, that's Jesus Christ, that means in the totality of the victory he won for us, we are changed from image to image and glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of God.

So there's this never-ending change going on in my life and in your life. If you walk in God's way, what an incredible journey this is. Make the choice, if you've not made the choice before, make the choice now and say, I'm going God's way.

We have watched the faithfulness of God. This is a church that really shouldn't be. David Wilkerson, the founding pastor, told me, he said, when they first came to Times Square, all the church gurus and the prognosticators, I call it, told them, you can't have a church without a parking lot.

It's in the Bible if you... No, I'm just kidding, it's not there. I remember thinking, where do you find that in your Bible that you can't have a church without a parking lot? You know, of course back there they had to park their donkeys and camels and such like, to worship. And then they told him, they said, you can't possibly have a church with so many cultures and keep it together in unity.

And here we are, 35 years later, still worshipping God. I've had the privilege of seeing people walk into this sanctuary over the years, not believers in Jesus Christ, and burst out crying, saying, this must be what heaven looks like. There's no chance this could be happening without the presence of God being here.

These people could not worship together in the same building if God's presence was not here among us. So it's been a marvelous journey, but we're heading into that place now where the glory of the latter house is greater than the former. I believe that.

The beam that has shone from this lighthouse for 35 years is now going farther. It's going into the Spanish world. It's going into the Asian world.

It's going into India. It's going all over the world. I just saw myself preaching in Spanish the other day.

Somebody sent it to me on YouTube. I didn't know I could speak Spanish that well. I had no idea.

But with God, all things are still possible. Thank God. Now I want you to give me your best ears today, okay? The best listening ear that you have, because I want to talk to you about a prayer that promises joy.

If you pray this prayer, Jesus said, the end result is a promise of joy. And surely we need joy now. We need joy in the house of God.

As the world is descending into confusion and sorrow, God's people are not destined to go that same direction. We are growing more and more into the image of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And we're not heading into despair.

We're heading into an eternity with God. And as we approach that eternity, there should be an ever-increasing joy growing in your heart and in my heart. And I can honestly tell you it is growing in my heart.

I'm getting closer than I've ever been before. And there's an expectancy, there's an excitement, not just about eternity, but about everything that God is doing today. And the fact that there is a prayer we can pray that promises joy.

So Father, I thank you, God, for the anointing of your Holy Spirit today, Lord, for I recognize that every time we turn to your Word, if you don't build this house, we labor in vain. And so I'm absolutely uninterested in empty labor, and so are these people. So we ask you, Holy Spirit, to build inside of us an understanding of the truth that we're about to hear.

Cause us, Lord, to pray in a manner that will allow you to answer the way you told your early disciples, your early church, that if you'll pray, if you'll ask this, I promise you joy. So Father, I thank you, God, for all that you're going to do. Give me the grace to disappear today and hide behind your cross so that I might not be seen, but you might be seen.

Cause my voice to dissipate and let yours be heard. Speak to every heart, O Holy Spirit of the living God, anoint the Word and speak to every heart, and bring us to the place where you desire us to be. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen and amen. John chapter 16, Jesus is talking to His disciples. They can't really hear it at this point, but He's talking to them about what's about to transpire.

He's about to go to the cross. It's going to look like their hopes have died. It can happen that way to all of us in the church of Jesus Christ from time to time.

We have certain aspirations and hopes and dreams and things that we feel walking with the Messiah should bring into our lives. And everybody in that room would have a perspective on what it meant to have the Messiah with them, from the Old Testament, from their own hearts, whatever it is. Some thought He was going to conquer the Roman Empire.

Others thought there's going to be this endless supply of bread. Whatever it is that they thought, it was about to fall through their fingers. Their own thoughts were about to give way to the actual plan of God.

And they were going to have sorrow. He says in verse 22 of John 16, Therefore now you have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. And in that day you will ask Me nothing.

Now that doesn't mean we're not going to pray. It means that in that day you're going to understand things you don't understand now. In that day there's going to be an understanding given to you of what's being accomplished for you on the cross in the days ahead.

Then He makes this incredible promise to these disciples, which applies to us, most assuredly or truly. Now, God never has to say most assuredly to anything. When He speaks, it's absolute truth.

He cannot lie. He can't exaggerate, can't embellish, but He says it for emphasis. In other words, listen to this.

I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive that your joy might be full.

I can just imagine how incredulous it must have seemed for the disciples to be listening to these words, and they're saying, well, what do you mean we've asked for nothing up to this point? We've asked you for bread. We've asked you to teach us how to pray. I could go through, and there's a lot of things that they'd asked Him.

As a matter of fact, James and John would probably be standing there saying, well, we asked you if we could sit on your right hand and on your left, and you basically told us no. And now you're telling us to ask whatever we want in your name, and you're going to give it to us. In Mark chapter 10 verse 35, it says, Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.

Obviously they had heard something along these lines, and He said to them, Well, what do you want Me to do for you? And they said, Grant us that we may sit, one on your right hand and the other on your left, in your glory. But Jesus said to them, You do not know what you ask. You do not know what you're asking for.

And then He goes on and says, It's not Mine to give it to you. It's the Father's choice, and it's beyond this moment that we're now in, you know. In James chapter 4 and verse 3, the brother of Jesus, James, says, You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss that you may spend it on your pleasures.

You ask, but you're asking way beneath what God wants to give you. You're asking for things that you think that you need and will make you successful and fulfilled and happy. And everyone here, you know what I'm talking about.

We've all done this. If you could just have that relationship, if you could just get out of that relationship, if you could just have that job, if you could just get out of that job, if you could have that career, you could have that home, if you could be in this place, if you could have that promotion at work. And we're bringing these things to God, and we're wondering, Why is He not answering our prayer? But He said through James, Because you're asking to spend it on yourself.

You're asking for something that is so far beneath what I have for you, and you think that this will make you successful, fulfilled, and happy. But He said, I want you to ask for what I know will satisfy you and will give you a lasting joy, not just a temporary one. Because all the things of this world that we can ask for are only temporary joys.

And they always do start on a pinnacle and kind of degenerate, you know, into something. We get bored. Our human tendency is to get bored.

If we could just get that job, how happy we would be. And we go into the interview, and we promise the sun and the moon and the stars, I'll be the best employee you ever had. Within three months, we're looking at our watch, wondering how we can get out with nobody noticing us.

We thought it would make us happy. We thought we would be successful. We thought it would bring such joy into our hearts.

That's why I always tell young people, If you don't pray before you get married, I promise you, you'll pray after. I promise you. You'll wail and cry and fast.

Oh yes, pray before. Save yourself a little bit of heartache, because God has something better for you than what you think you have for yourself. Now, I want to take a look at a man in the Scripture called Solomon in 2 Chronicles chapter 1. Now, Solomon, I want to look at him as a type of a new believer.

Solomon is the son of David, and everything he has has been handed to him. He hasn't had to work for anything. It's all been given to him.

Look at this building, for example. This was the labor, the prayers, the pacing. All that had to be done was done by somebody else.

And we entered into this incredible, beautiful place as a result of somebody else's labor. In a sense it was handed to us. And even our salvation, we didn't do the work for it.

Somebody else did the work. The Son of God did. And those who came after Him who got this message to us, some of them in the shedding of their own blood, in the loss of their own freedoms.

In the beating, in the case of the Apostle Paul, of their own bodies. This message did not come to us without a cost being paid by somebody. But we've inherited it today.

So here we are in this beautiful place as Solomon once was. He had a new and a solid future, and everything seemed to be given to him on a silver platter, and it looked so promising for the future. It says in 2 Chronicles chapter 1 verse 1, Now Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and the Lord God was with him and exalted him exceedingly.

So many of us can say that today. We are finding this strength that God promises those who belong to Him. I'm not what I want to be.

I'm not where God wants to take me in fullness, but I'm better than I was at least, and I'm getting stronger. Maybe the depression that was part of your character is not there as much as it used to be, and you're looking forward to the day when it doesn't plague your mind or your heart any longer. And the Lord his God was with him, so you know that too as well.

And even your friends, the Scripture says, and God exalted him exceedingly, even your friends are beginning to notice the change in you. You're more kind than you used to be. You don't lie nearly as much as you did in the past.

You're not perfect yet, but hey, you're getting there by the grace of God. You don't get angry as quick as you used to get, and you find yourself being more generous or more of a listener than you used to be. And people are starting to comment, and your only answer is that it's because of the presence of God in my life that I'm becoming the person that I wasn't before.

As the Scripture says, if anyone's in Christ, he becomes or she becomes a new creation. The old things that governed your life lose their hold. They pass away, and all things become new.

In verse 6, it talks about Solomon who went there to the bronze altar before the Lord, which was at the tabernacle of meeting, and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it. So Solomon is really taken with this new calling on his life, and he's grateful, and he's coming into the temple, and he's offering this incredible sacrifice of praise and prayer, which we are. That's what you're doing here on Sunday at one o'clock here in Times Square when you could be doing so many other things.

You've come into the house of God, and what a wonderful offering of praise there's been today. I used to be a shepherd, and when I'd go in the barn, I would know the condition of the sheep by the sound. You can hear it.

I can't explain it. You can just hear it. You know if there's a problem, or you know if all is well just by the sound, and I heard a sound today, all day today, the sound of praise, the sound of worship, the sound of

hope, the sound of a future.

There's a sound here. You know, we're all on this journey together, and maybe you're in your boat, and there's a storm around you, but there's still a sound of confidence in God, and I love that sound when I come into the house of God. And then in verse 7, it says, on that night, God appeared to Solomon and said to him, Ask, what shall I give you? Imagine that.

You imagine having God appear in your bedroom tonight. Just think about that, going home, and He says to you, Ask, what do you want Me to give you? You know, that's not as far-fetched as it seems, because that was our opening text. Up till now you've asked for nothing in My name.

Ask, and you will receive that your joy might be full. I want to suggest to you that the same God that appeared to Solomon is speaking to you and to me and telling us, Ask, ask for what you want in My Father's name, and I'll give it to you that your joy might be full. Here's where it gets interesting.

In verse 10, Solomon said, Give me wisdom and knowledge that I may go out and come in before this people, for who can judge this great people of yours? So, Solomon, he asked actually for a good thing. He said, God, there's... I have to be able to judge between evil and good. I have to be able to know how to do... This is a huge crowd of people coming into this temple, and I need to know how to... Not only the religious part, but the governing of the nation.

I need... I need this gifting of wisdom. The interesting thing is Solomon asked for a good thing, but not everything that he would need to finish with joy. You can ask for a good thing, but the good thing can be not everything that you need to finish your journey.

Getting married is a good thing. Having provision is a good thing. And there's other things that I can talk to you about that are good things, but it might not be what you need to finish your journey.

Look at in Ecclesiastes, the end of Solomon's life. The wisest man who ever lived. That's what the Scripture says.

Apart from the Son of God, there's never been and never will be, according to the Scripture, a man with the wisdom of Solomon. But his life finished in an absolute train wreck. In Ecclesiastes 1.1, he says, the words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. Vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity. So he says this five times.

In other words, the end of my life, empty, empty, empty, empty, empty. Everything I've done, he says, there's no profit to what I have done. Going further, in chapter 2 and verse 10 and 11, he said, whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them.

I did not withhold from my heart any pleasure. My heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked... In other words, I was happy, I was doing things and even using the giftings of God in my life to do them.

You know, the Bible does tell us he built aqueducts, he loved husbandry, he had cattle, he had choirs, he did all kinds of stuff, and everything brought only a temporary joy, which began to dissipate, I'm sure, and then he would do something new. And he said this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done, and on the labor in which I had toiled, and indeed all was vanity and

grasping for the wind, and there was no profit under the sun.

I was the wisest man who's ever lived, and everything I put my hand to was empty. I thought wisdom would satisfy me, and at the end I realized I was grasping for the wind. I was grasping for a joy that doesn't come from anything in this world.

It doesn't come from achievements in this world. It doesn't come from cattle or choirs or aqueducts or vineyards or all these other things I did, and so I'm grasping for this joy that could have been mine if I had asked for the right thing. And he gets to the end of his journey and says there was no profit under the sun.

In other words, everything I set my hand to, can you imagine getting to the end of your life and saying everything I set my hand to was so worthless? The wisest man who ever lived. There's nobody here smarter than Solomon, and you never will be. You can study for the rest of your life, and you'll never even come close to the intelligence he had.

Verse 15, he says, then I said in my heart, as it happens to the fool, it also happened to me. So why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, this also is vanity. In other words, it's useless that I've had wisdom, because it doesn't make any difference.

The fool dies just the way I die, so what's the point of even being wise? In verse 17 of chapter 2 of Ecclesiastes, he says, therefore I hated life, because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me. All is vanity and grasping for the wind. Can you imagine being around this guy at the end of his life? Can you imagine his family listening to him? No wonder he had a weak son that divided the nation.

If this is the testimony of this man who is the wisest man who ever lived, the man who had the glory of God come down in the temple, the man who had God Himself come into his bedroom and said, ask me for what you wanted, I will give it to you. You can imagine at the end of his life he's just saying, it's useless, it's empty, it's dry, it's pointless. I can just... Can you imagine being around that man's deathbed, and you're part of his family? What do you think happens to that family at the end of his life when he makes such pronouncements? Now here's the point.

You see, he asked for what he thought he needed, but he did not ask for that which he really did. He asked for wisdom, but he didn't ask for the heart to obey it. And he could have.

The amazing thing is that God would have given it to him if he would have had the sense to say, God, give me wisdom and give me a heart to obey it. You know, I thank God that Pastor Tim has been standing in this pulpit and he's been expounding for 26 weeks on what the Bible says, and we have rejoiced together in it. But I tell you, if you don't have a heart to follow it, knowledge itself is not going to keep you.

There has to be a heart to follow it. There has to be something inside that says, God, if only when God appeared to me, he could have said, God, I want wisdom to come in and go out, and give me the heart of my father David. Or give me a heart to love you.

That's what I've been praying in the last couple of years. God, give me a heart to love you all of my days. Don't let my devotion for you become less than it ever has been.

As a matter of fact, God, increase it as I get older. Don't let me decline. Don't let me rest on former words.

Don't let me pursue empty things. Oh, God. Oh, God.

Oh, God. The Lord was trying to speak to him. He was even used of God and given inspiration to write the inspired word of God by the Holy Spirit.

But he wasn't listening to what God was trying to speak to him. Let me prove it to you. Book of Proverbs, chapters 2 to 7. Chapter 2, my son, receive my words.

Chapter 3, my son, do not forget my law. Chapter 4, verse 13, take firm hold of instruction. Do not let her go.

Chapter 5, my son, pay attention to my wisdom. Chapter 6, beware of being spiritually seduced. Chapter 7, my son, keep my words.

Here he is writing it, but he has no heart to follow it. His whole life, if you read Proverbs 2 to 7, his whole life and downfall is actually outlined by his own hand. He wrote his own journey down.

Isn't it amazing? But didn't have a heart to obey what he knew. You see, God knew his future. God knew what he would need.

Solomon thought that wisdom would keep him, but it won't keep us without a heart to obey it. If only he had asked. You know, Jesus said, up till now, you've asked for nothing in my name.

You've asked for status. You've asked for bread. You've asked for power.

You've asked for position. But I want you to ask for what will keep you. You know, I don't know.

I don't know what I'm going to need six months from now, and neither do you. You know, we're sitting relatively comfortable. We're kind of a little bit dismayed at the shakings in the world today, but we have dreams and aspirations, and we have all these thoughts about what the future is going to hold, and we're asking in line with our own thoughts.

But listen to me, my brother and my sister. You might be running for your life in six months. You don't know.

You don't know what's going to happen. We don't know what's going to be unleashed on this world, but I'll tell you who does know. God knows.

God knows. God knows. God knows what you and I are going to need six months from now, because He's not bound by time like we are.

He heals our past. He's here right now in our present, and He's already in our future. He knows what you're going to face a year from now.

He knows what's going to happen in the future, and He knows what you're going to need. I want you to contrast Solomon to a man called Nehemiah, an incredible man in the Old Testament. He was a butler.

Now, he's not handed a palace by a king that was his father. He's just a regular guy. He's serving in the king of Medo-Persia.

He's the guy that brings in the sandwiches and the drinks, right? And he's the guy that has to take the first bite and the first sip, because everybody's trying to kill the king all the time. So, a very high-risk profession that he's in at the time. He's a type of a person who's just starting out, as you and I are on this journey, well, you more than me, but starting out on this journey in life, this journey of walking with God.

And he gets a calling from God that's way outside of the box of his experience and ability. I mean, he's a butler, and he gets a call of God to go back into Israel and rebuild around Jerusalem a wall that has fallen down. And he's sent into a place of rubble and ruin to do something that can only be done by the hand of God.

The guy is not an architect. He's a leader, yes, no doubt about that, but he's only been leading butlers, you understand, and people that are doing dishes and serving dinner and stuff like that. He's not an architect, and why would anybody even believe him when he got there? Imagine you being there in Jerusalem, and the wall is all busted down, the gates are burned with fire, and this guy shows up and says, hey, be of good cheer, I'm here, you know, the butler.

Would you like a sandwich? Anybody like a drink? I'm the guy that God sent to rebuild the wall. Well, see, that's what happens in our lives. God calls us usually outside of our comfort zone and our own abilities.

And so he eventually stands before the king of Medo-Persia, who has this incredible resource, and I want to look at it as a type of prayer, OK? He's standing before the king, and the king's favor moves towards him, and he says to him, what do you want? Now, if he was living by his own thought, and if he didn't take the time to pray, he would have said, well, I need six cement trucks, I need two architects, I need trowels, I need cement, I need all this stuff, because he would have tried to figure what he's going to need to do this particular work that he was given to do. But he didn't do that. The Scripture tells us in Nehemiah chapter 2, the king said to me, verse 4, what do you request? So I prayed to the God of heaven.

Have you ever thought about praying about what you should pray for? That's the point. We think we know, like Solomon, what we should pray for, but do we have the courage to draw back and say, God, I don't know what I'm going to need a year from now, but you do, so would you show me what to pray for? That was the difference between Nehemiah and Solomon. God knew what he was going to need.

We don't even know where we're going, let alone know what we need when we get there. I have no idea. I have no idea where I'm going to be a year from now, and neither do you.

You think you do, but you don't. As I said this morning, one nuclear bomb can change your whole day. You and I don't know what the future's going to hold.

We have no idea, but God's already there, and God already knows what you're going to need. God already knows. There are some here who are going to need courage.

Maybe you don't need it now, but you're going to need it then. Some are going to have to have the ability to forgive. You don't need it right now, but you're going to need it then.

Some are going to have to have giftings of the Holy Spirit to be able to stand and lead a confused generation into the safety of Christ. You don't need it right now, but you're going to need it then. Back in 2001, about three months before 9-11, for those that were here, the Lord started to speak to us, and we began to hear His voice warning us that there was going to be some kind of a crisis in New York City.

We canceled our missions conference, our women's conference, all of our guest speakers. We began to meet nightly, and the Lord told us to prepare the church from the book of Hebrews, the verse that says, Come boldly to the throne of grace to find help in your time of need. And I remember standing in this pulpit and saying, Folks, we're going to have to get our strength now.

We're going to have to find out what we need now. We're going to have to get right with God now. We're going to have to get courage now, because the day is coming.

People soon will be running in the streets terrified, and we have to be not found among them, but we have to be found ready to minister to them when this fear hits our city. When 9-11 came, I remember one of the executives in New York City is clearly, as if it happened an hour ago, coming into the annex and rolling up his sleeves. He was actually rolling his shirt sleeves up saying, Pastor, I'm here to help.

Tell me what to do. And people came from all over who are part of this church saying, We're here to help. Tell us what to do.

I told them to go across the street. Buy all the food and water you can get from the stores across the street, because very soon they're going to shutter the stores, which they did, because they were afraid of looting and such like. And we were prepared.

We were ready to receive people into this house, to house them, to feed them, whatever we had to do, because we had had the courage to say, God, show us what we're going to need for the future. Show us. Show us.

Now, I'm not suggesting in every case it's going to be a crisis. Don't misunderstand what I'm saying. But God knows what you will need, because he's already where you're going, and he knows what you'll need when you get there.

Praise be to God. This is the prayer that he said, Up till this time, you've asked nothing in my name. In other words, you've asked nothing along the lines of what I want to give you.

You haven't really asked me for what you need. You've asked for what you think you need. James and John, you want power.

Others, you want bread. Others, you're asking for things that are simply temporary, and they won't keep you to the end. But now, because of the cross, I'm going to the cross.

And after that victory is won, there are things available for you that you're going to need to get through to the end of this journey. So ask now that your joy might be full. Praise be to God.

You can imagine, like Solomon gets to the end, and his life is just a train wreck. And everybody around him, you know, God blessed him, but it must have been discouraging. This man who knew the glory of God, this man who had God appear to him, and he obviously told people that, this man who was given this incredible wisdom dies so despondent, dies saying everything is for nothing, dies with a total absence of joy in his life.

How discouraging that would be. You imagine if you and I finish our journey like that, how discouraging it would be for our families and our friends and others that we told about Jesus, but yet we get to the end and we're just wringing our hands with regret because we didn't have the chance to ask God for what He

knew we needed. And so me and I are at the end of a miraculous journey.

He just went into a total disaster area, which humanity is today. Humanity is just a pile of rubble. I'm trying to be kind, but that's the reality of it.

The confusion, the anger, the division at every level. He goes into this mass of rubble and miraculously in a short season rebuilds this wall round about Jerusalem and inspires the people around him to start building. And then they open the Word of God in Nehemiah chapter 8, and the people begin weeping because they suddenly realize what had happened and why they had gone into such captivity, and they realize what they lost because of the neglect of the Word of God and the things of God.

And there's a weeping breaks out among the people. Oh God, what have we done? But Nehemiah, he doesn't join them. He doesn't join their chorus of all is empty and all is vain and all was for nothing and everything we pursued.

He doesn't. He said, go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions for those for whom nothing is prepared. For this day is holy to our Lord.

Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. And Nehemiah was telling them, oh God, it's God's joy to take you in your weakness and make you strong. It's God's joy to give you the power to rebuild what you thought was lost.

It's God's joy to make what we sang about today, I shall recover it all, a reality, not just a song on Sunday, but an absolute reality in all of our lives. It's God's joy to bring you home. It's God's joy to restore you.

It's God's joy to put a new song in your heart that many will see and fear and trust in the Lord. It's the joy of God. It's the joy of God to give you the spoils of the victory of the cross of Jesus Christ.

It's the joy of God to give you a new mind, a new heart, a new spirit, a new future. It's the joy of God to take you right to the end with a song in your heart that this world can't take away from you. It's the joy of God to give it to you.

Don't be sorry, he said. Go to your friends, bring them to your house, celebrate together, drink the fat, eat the sweet. The joy of the Lord is your strength.

Hallelujah to the Lamb of God. Hallelujah. Let me finish with these two verses.

At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sought out the Levites in all their places to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgiving, with singing, with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and harps. Also on that day, verse 43, they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy. The women and children also rejoiced so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.

As this world is degenerating into ever-increasing sorrow, we, as the church of Jesus Christ, are going to be going from image to image and glory to glory and joy to joy by the knowledge and strength and power of our God within us. Oh, hallelujah, hallelujah. Hallelujah, hallelujah.

Glory, glory, glory, glory. We're not going the direction this world is going. We're going the other way.

We're marching to Zion, beautiful, beautiful Zion, with a song of victory in our hearts, a belch in our step, and a strength in our bodies that can only come from Almighty God. We're going there with a trust in God that says, God, I don't know what awaits me, but I know you are there, and I know your strength will keep me. Your power will be what keeps my heart and my mind and my family.

And when I get to the end of my days, this is my prayer, and my family are gathered around my bed. I'm going to have a shout of joy in my heart. I'm going to look at my grandchildren and say, serve God, walk with God, live for God.

God will not fail you. God will keep you. I don't want a single if only in my life, not one if only in my life.

No, no, no, no, no. I'm asking now. I'm asking now, because I don't know what I'm going to need, but God knows.

God knows what I will need. Give me the courage, Lord, to let my own thoughts of what will make me happy, to push them to the side and say, Lord, you know what will. You know there's a kind of a joy that doesn't come from anything around me.

It doesn't come from a house, a job, a retirement plan. It doesn't even come from having health. It comes from you.

You said up to this time, you've not asked me for anything. I think if Jesus himself were standing here, he might just say the same words to many of us today. You've asked for a lot of things, but you haven't asked for anything.

There's something so much bigger than you can understand that I want to give you. And what I give you comes with a promise of joy. Hallelujah.

That can't be taken from you. It can't be taken from you by circumstance. It can't be taken from you by anything this world is going to throw at you.

It's the joy that Paul and Silas had when they're beaten to a pulp and they're chained to a cold slab in an inner prison, and they start praising God, and the whole place starts shaking, and the doors open, and the chains fall off. It's that kind of joy. So much bigger.

So much bigger. You know, if I was to give an altar call today, it would be simple. It'd be like, God, I thought I knew what would make me happy, but I realize today I don't.

Oh, it'll make me happy temporarily, but it doesn't last. I want the joy that can't be taken away. I want the joy that you speak about.

And so, would you give me the courage to pray about what I should pray about? I want you to think about that. Really give that some serious thought. Would you give me the courage to pray about what I should pray about? Not assuming that I know what I need, but God, you know what I need.

What should I be praying about? What should I be asking you for? And I can just see Nehemiah. He closes his eyes, and he backs up just for a moment, and the king is watching him, and he just says, God, I don't know what I need. And then when he opens his eyes, it's just all there.

It just all unfolds. God said, this is what you're going to need. And with these things, you're going to see a miracle.

In 52 days, you're going to do what can't humanly be done. And when it's dedicated, the people will be inclined to want to weep, but you're going to lead them into joy, because you're going to understand how good God has been to them and wants to be to them. Praise be to God.

Praise be to God. That's what God wants to do for you. You know, you might not have a family right now, but you will.

You have the family of God, and you have close people around you, and you've got most here today have nephews and nieces and such like. If you take this journey, you're going to cause everybody around you to start to sing. Everybody around you.

I'm telling you, as much as gloom is infectious, joy is even more infectious, especially the joy that comes from God. The joy that comes from confidence in God. Confidence in God.

Confidence in God. Father, thank you. God, thank you.

Your presence is here. Help us. Help me to take seriously what we've heard today.

I want the joy that you speak about. I don't want the temporary joy of this world and what looks like success. I want the joy that you promised would be mine.

For today, there's some of you here that I'm going to give an altar call, and for those who don't understand that, an altar call is just me getting up and moving forward physically to say, I agree with this, and I want this. It's not magical. It's not mystical.

It's just step number one. It's just moving towards what I hear, and there's a witness in my heart. This is right.

And so it's just a matter of—it's a sign of just getting up and just saying, God, I'm in. And if you're here today and you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, I'd like you to come too as well because we're going to pray for you and with you that your heart would open to the freedom from judgment, really, that God is offering you. To take you out of a place of darkness into a place of life and light and give you a hope and a future, not just here but forever in heaven.

Don't turn that down. Don't turn that down. That's the worst mistake you'll ever make in your life.

Don't turn it down. It's God's offer of forgiveness, being restored back to Him again. So we're going to stand.

What we do, if God's speaking to you and you have the courage to say, Lord, what do you want me to pray for? Just come, and we're going to pray together. Please, let's stand together. Let's stand.

As we sing this one song, just slide out of your seat and make your way down, please. Up in the balcony, go to either exit. I just want to be with you, just want to be with you.

I just want to be with you, just want to be with you. King of glory, fill this place. I just want to be with you.

I just want to be with you. King of glory, fill this place. I just want to be with you.

I just want to be with you. I just want to be with you. I just want to be with you.

Every man, bow down and say you are God. Every man, bow down and say you are King. So let's start right now.

I just want to be with you. King of glory, fill this place. I just want to be with you.

If you're here today and you've never really given your life to Jesus Christ, you've come to church, which is a good thing, and you have somewhat of a desire to be a different or a better person, but you recognize this day that you can't be that in your own strength. There's something that God has to do in you. It starts by opening your heart, recognizing you can't save yourself, but God provided a remedy for that and that he sent his Son to take your place on a cross.

And so the punishment that you and I deserve for the way we had lived, he took upon himself. Talk about mercy. Talk about graciousness.

God. God taking my place. All he asked me to do is to open my heart and to accept his offer.

When he stretched his arms out on the cross, he made an offer of forgiveness to whoever wanted to come, could be forgiven. Find a reason to live on the earth and to find a divine purpose that he has for your life and then offer you an eternity in heaven with him when it's all over. If you'd like to be part of the prayer that we're going to pray together, would you just raise your hand wherever you are? God bless you all over.

Thank you so much. Thank you so much for raising your hands. Thank you.

Thank you. God bless you. Thank you so much.

Let's pray together for those that are coming into the kingdom of God for the first time today. Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for loving me enough that you came to get me because I couldn't get back to you. So you went to a cross and you paid the price for the wrong I have done so that I can be forgiven.

Today, I open my heart to you. I invite you into my life to be my Lord, my Savior, my God. From this day forward, I will follow you.

Thank you for loving me. Thank you for saving me. In Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. Praise God.

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