



## TIME OF GRACE®

### *Evolution of Faith: To Inexpressible Joy*

#### Study Notes

#### *Summary*

Too often Christians see joy as something that has to wait until heaven. But Peter tells us that we can be filled with an inexpressible joy right here and right now as faith fills us with the joy of knowing Jesus as our Savior.

- **1 Peter 1:8,9:** Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.
- Salvation: To be rescued from \_\_\_\_\_.
- To God's elect who have been chosen. . . . God has given us new birth. . . . You are shielded by God's power. . . . You were redeemed. . . . You have been born again. . . . You have tasted that the Lord is good. . . . The one who trusts in Jesus will never be put to shame. . . . You are a chosen people. . . . You are a royal priesthood. . . . You are a holy nation. . . . You are God's special possession. . . . God called you into his wonderful light. . . . You have received mercy. . . . Christ suffered for you. . . . Jesus bore our sins on the cross. . . . By Jesus' wounds you have been healed. . . . You have returned to the Shepherd of your souls. . . . Christ suffered to bring you to God. . . . Baptism now saves you. . . . Baptism is the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. . . . Baptism saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. . . . The Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. . . . You will receive the crown of glory. . . . God cares for you. . . . God called you to his eternal glory. . . . God will restore you. . . . God will make you strong. . . . God will make you steadfast. . . . Peace to all of you who are in Christ (1 Peter, selected verses).
- Homework: \_\_\_\_\_ passages.

#### *Points to Ponder*

1. Put your name in place of the "yous/yours" in 1 Peter 1:3-9. Which phrase jumps out as particularly powerful?

2. Read about Paul's inexpressible joy in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. How did Paul feel about his weakness and suffering after getting a glimpse of Jesus? How does this apply to the tough situations you are facing in your life?
  
3. **Challenge:** When you are suffering this week, say, "STP." This stands for "Short-Term Pain." Remind yourself that this life is short, but because of Jesus, happiness is eternally long.

### *Homework for Next Week*

Read Mark 16:14-16.

*"When large numbers of people share their joy in common, the happiness of each is greater because each adds fuel to the other's flame."*

*—Augustine*

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Evolution of Faith: To Inexpressible Joy**  
1 Peter 1:8-9  
November 22, 2020

*Pastor Mike Novotny*

If this whole row actually represented the average American life of 79 years, this little piece would be two days. Can you imagine going through two days of sadness and then having - what, 27,738 days - of pure happiness? That'd be a pretty good life!

And wouldn't you love to have the kind of faith that is so enamored, infatuated and impressed with God that you could get through seasons of life and moments like that with the kind of joy and peace that you would love to have instead of this roller coaster, this up and down thing, that most of us call life? I would love to have a kind of faith like that; I'm sure most of you would, too. But you probably found out what I have; that sometimes life hits pretty hard. And we'd all love to say, "You know, sure, I'd love to have joy like that," but when push comes to shove and it hits you, that's when faith is really put to the test.

I was reminded of that just in the past few weeks. I gave a message on happiness a few weeks ago and a guy emailed me the day after and he said, "Hey, Pastor, thanks for the message. I really needed that but can you just tell me how?" Now lots of Christians would think you've just got to wait it out. You know, life is hard in this world. You have trouble. It's broken. The world fell into sin. It's not going to be better until Jesus comes back so just hold on for dear life until you take your last breath and then real joy can begin and that seems tempting and it would be good because God's going to fix it one day. But before you give into that thinking and that temptation, I want to share with you something that Jesus' friend Peter said. Because 2,000 years ago, the apostle Peter wrote this little letter that's way at the end of your Bible called 1 Peter and in that letter, Peter was writing to people who were getting smacked left and right in their lives. If you have a chance after church today, I mean, the whole letter is just 105 verses; you could read it in less than 10 minutes. And in chapter five, Peter talks about the devil who's prowling around like this roaring lion trying to devour his friends' faith. Then you back up to chapter four and Peter's talking about getting smacked by your friends. Apparently, his friends become Christians but not all of their friends were that excited about it. Peter says they were heaping abuse because they didn't want to sleep around like they used to and get drunk like they used to and talk like they used to. And then you back up to chapter three Peter says the relationships are really hard, there were some husbands who weren't being very gentle with their wives, there were some wives who cared more about the way they looked and they'd spend more time in front of a mirror instead of trying to serve and love and respect their husbands. There were some marriages that were mixed spiritually; women who believed in God but their husbands didn't. It was really tense and really tough. Then you back up to 1 Peter 2 and Peter says that work was really hard; apparently some of them had bosses that were like abusing them, verbally, physically, even though they hadn't don't anything wrong. It's like a book that's filled with pain and suffering. In fact, in 1 Peter, there's more pain per page than any other book in the Bible.

But do you know what Peter talks about in the very first chapter of that letter? Joy. I mean, he's not naïve that life is going to smack you at work and at home; that the devil's going to prowl. Your own heart is going to mess with you and lie to you and deceive you. But in light of all of that, Peter still says there is a way to find joy. And not just a little bit of joy; this deep, glorious, inexpressible joy and that's what I want to share with you. And before you change the channel, before you walk out of church today and say, "I've just got to wait until I die and Jesus fixes it," I want you and I want me to listen to Peter because he said even now, even in a life like yours, joy and happiness is possible.

So if you have a Bible with you or device that you brought, let's turn our attention to 1 Peter 1 and we're going to kick things off today in verse eight. He writes this to his friends: "Though you have not seen Jesus, you love him; and even though you do not see Jesus now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy." That might be my favorite verse in the whole letter. I want you to notice the "when," the "how much" and the "what" of verse eight.

First of all, is the "when." You know, Peter's talking about this big, glorious, inexpressible joy. When does he say it's possible? Now. You know, he doesn't say, "One day you will be filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy." He says, "Right now, you Christians are filled." That's the "when."

Number two is the "how much." You notice the verb that Peter uses? He says, "Filled." He doesn't say, "Well, you've got a whole lot of pain and maybe God will give you a little bit of pleasure. Maybe there's 10 percent happiness that you can find in Jesus." He says, "If you're a cup, God wants to fill it up."

And then comes the best part; the "what." He calls it, "You are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy." Now, these are three amazing words. The word "joy" in Peter's original Greek language is the same word that he used two verses ago. Some of you might remember the dictionary definition for this word is to be filled with such happiness that your body starts to express itself in appropriate body movements. Like this is the kind of joy that makes you want to do the running man when you come into church; you're going to break out into the worm during the offering. It's like that much happiness that you have to dance except this time Peter makes it even happier. He calls it an "inexpressible joy." In the whole Greek New Testament, it's the only time this word is used because Peter's talking about this rare, unique kind of happiness that very few people have. A happiness that just can't like find the words to express itself. When someone's saying, "Why do you feel so good?" It's like, "Ah!" It's like when you fall in love for the first time, you try to tell your eight-year-old sister what it feels like. What words are you going to find? When you have your first baby and you're trying to tell your friends who don't have kids what it's like to hold your own child in your arms and they think they know but you're like – it's something so deep, something so beautiful and so good, Peter calls it "inexpressible joy." If that word wasn't enough, he adds "and glorious." The word "glorious" in the Bible means radiant or brilliant; something that's a really, really big deal. And you put it all together and Peter says, right now, you friends of mine who are going through tough jobs and tough relationships and tough things with your friends and you're under spiritual assault, right now you are filled up with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

So Peter's kind of talking about what his coworker, the apostle Paul, once felt. Now you might know the name Paul; he wrote about half the New Testament. But what really shaped Paul as a person and as a Christian was something that happened to him very, very early in his life after he met Jesus. Apparently, something crazy and supernatural happened to Paul where he had this vision that he couldn't quite explain but in this vision, he was caught up into heaven and he saw God. Now Paul kind of describes this experience in 2 Corinthians 12. He says this: "I was caught up to paradise and I heard inexpressible things; things that no one is permitted to tell." You know, Paul wanted to write a letter about what it was like to see Jesus and he said, "I mean, what I heard - the praises and the happiness and the presence of God - and there were no nouns or verbs or adjectives." Like his human experience did not permit him to tell people what it was like. It was inexpressible and it was glorious joy; that's what Peter's talking about - kind of.

Paul felt that way because he saw Jesus but did you catch what Peter's saying? He says, "Though you have not seen him." Now we'd say, "Okay, well, yeah, Paul, you can feel that way and, Peter, maybe you can feel that way cause you walked and talked with Jesus for three years. But I've," - any of you have coffee with Jesus this week? Any of you watching Netflix with Jesus? No, none of us have seen him or have had an experience like that. And yet, here's the really good news, Peter says, you people who haven't seen him can have the same kind of joy that fills you up with inexpressible happiness.

Which begs the huge question, right? Okay, how? Just like that guy emailed me, I want that, Peter. I want to be filled up, I want joy and happiness, that big, that glorious, that good. So how does it happen? And thankfully, Peter gives us an answer. Look at verse nine from 1 Peter 1. He says, "Though you have not seen him, you love him; even though you do not see Jesus now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for," - here's the explanation - "you are receiving the end result of your faith; the salvation of your souls."

When we say Jesus saved me. I'm saved my grace, by God's undeserved love. Well, most of your friends would say this - and they're right - they'd say it means Jesus rescued us from the danger of sin. He saved me from my sins, right? You Christians would agree with that, wouldn't you? You'd say, I know I struggle with the stuff, I can be petty, I can be jealous, and when people come at me or they question me, man, there's just like this defensiveness that comes out way, way too quickly. I find it real easy to vent about people and to talk about people when they're not around. But when I find out that those people are doing the same thing to me, I get really mad because I know it's not loving and it's not kind. So thank God, Jesus saved and rescued me from the danger of sin. It's good; it's just not enough. Because you have to ask the question: Well, why is sin so bad? Why would it be so terrible to die with defensiveness or pride or jealousy on your record? And I think most Christians would say, "Well, because the Bible says if God looks at you and he sees sin, you can't go to heaven. You end up in hell." And I would ask, "Well, why's that so bad?" Some people don't believe in God, they're living it up in hell, they're partying, right? Christians say, "Well, no, no, no, because in heaven, God is there and in hell, God isn't there." I'd say, "Okay, well, why is that so bad? Some people live their whole lives without God and they're pretty happy and they're pretty content." And that's when we finally get to the answer. Why is sin so bad? Why is it so terrible to be in hell? Why is it so unthinkable to be apart from God for all eternity? And the answer to that is what I want you to

write inside your service programs. The real definition of salvation is to be rescued from sadness.

What it is like to be in hell is inescapable sadness. See, God is the giver of every ounce of happiness you or I can experience. And even if we're living it up and we're sinning, even if we don't believe in God, even if we're the most staunch atheists, in this life God is so kind and he's so generous that he allows us to be happy while we're here on planet earth. But if we die and God sees sin and he says, "Depart from me," what instantly happens and what happens forever and ever and ever is sadness. There's no friendship in hell because friendship brings happiness. There's no feeling safe or comfortable in hell because that's happiness. There's no feeling good about yourself, good about the people that you're with, because that's happiness.

But to be with God in heaven, when we say that Jesus saved me, I am receiving the salvation of my soul, it means that starting now and for all eternity, God has rescued me from everything sad and he's given me everything good. That if you believe in Jesus, what you are receiving right now - you don't have to wait for it; Peter says you are receiving it in the present - is to be rescued from your sadness. You might feel sad because you're alone but Jesus is saying, "No, I died for you so you'd never be alone; that God would be with you always." And you go to work and you get criticized and people point out all your faults and it makes you sad but then you remember Jesus and there's a God who's not judging or condemning or pointing fingers or bringing up the past. Instead, he praises and he affirms and he delights in us. When we start to get in part what we will for all eternity, to be accepted and included and loved and praised and blessed and forgiven, that is what Jesus came to give. Not just to save us from sin in general but to save us from sin that leads to eternal sadness. Instead, to give us his righteousness so that we can end up in eternal gladness.

And the more you think about that, the more you remember that this is yours and it will never, ever end, the happier you will feel. Which is why I bought this rope. The other day, I went on Amazon and I bought 1,000 foot rope and I want you to imagine today this rope represents your life, okay? This rope is really long, alright? Let's get this out of here. Here we go. This is your - oh, no, I got it - here it is. No, this is your life. This one inch of blue tape represents your life.

I want to ask you right now: What has your life been like? Have you had a really, really good life? I mean, not perfect but your family was good and your parents were loving; nothing too tragic really happened to you. You've got a decent job, you fell in love, you had kids, and some of the days were hard and sleepless nights, but you know, some of you have had a life like this. Some of you had a life that's, you know, kind of been in the middle. You've been in court, maybe you've been divorced, maybe you've miscarried. Maybe your parent's marriage didn't make it and you've had some good moments and some good friends, but some really difficult days that you've been through. And some of you have just been through some really tragic times. You've battled depression for years and your dad was an alcoholic and your mom didn't defend you from the abuse. Some of you have had a really, really tough time and you spent a lot of nights weeping and asking God to make it better.

I really don't know about the quality of your life but what I do know is the quantity; that it's really not that much. That even if your life for 80 years is agonizing, do you know how much of

your life will be sad because of what Jesus did? I mean, when God looks down on you, he doesn't just see this little inch or, you know, this 10 years of life that you've lived. This is what God sees. Do you know that one inch of a 1,000-foot rope is not one percent or .1 percent or .01 percent? It's .008 percent. If this whole rope actually represented the average American life of 79 years, this little piece would be two days. Can you imagine going through two days of sadness and then having, what, 27,738 days of pure happiness? That'd be a pretty good life. And Jesus came into the world to make sure the only sadness you would ever experience would be here and now and then there would just be happiness and inexpressible joy forever and ever and ever. And the more you step back and think about that, like, I'm halfway dead. You know, I'm a guy in his late 30's, so statistically, I'm right here; I'm like half an inch from never feeling sad again. You know, some of you - sorry, you're like right here. I mean, even if you're young and life has been hard and you're just starting out, I mean, look at this from God's perspective, when he sees you dancing and celebrating, it's not that he doesn't care about your pain; it's that he fixed it. And from what he sees, he sees you celebrating forever and ever and ever.

So here's what would be just ridiculous: To stop believing in God because there's an inch of sadness. Some of you have been tempted by that, right? You know people that have walked away from God. "How could a God exist? My dad took off on me and my mom died when I was 15 and now my little brother is sick. How can there even be a God?" And God says, "No, no, no. That's so small to me. Don't throw away an eternity of inexpressible and glorious joy because it's been hard. It's going to get better; a lot better." That would be like saying your boss is a terrible person because he paid for six months of vacation on a tropical island and you have to stand in line for 10 minutes. This would be like never having a child because you have to push for two hours but for when that beautiful, healthy baby comes your way, we know that if something good is coming it's worth suffering in the beginning. And maybe your life has been like that. God says, "Don't leave me behind. Even if it's difficult. Even if you have to hold on. Even if it feels like labor pains for a decade or two or four or eight, when you think about what you're receiving; an inexpressible and glorious joy."

My favorite part though is the verb. All this happiness is what you "receive." Remember Peter's words? He doesn't say this kind of joy is what you earn. It's not what you deserve. He says it's what you receive. Do you know what kind of things you receive? Presents. You don't have to work for them. You don't deserve them. Someone just gives it to you. And Peter says all of this happiness and all of this joy, you just receive it because of what Jesus did.

You know, I love - that's what the book of 1 Peter is actually about. About 15 years ago, I bought this Bible that I've kept on and I've written little notes in the margins and to help me understand each book, I'd try to come up with a really simple phrase to describe the big idea. And how you'd go back to my office and you'd find my worn Bible and you'd open to 1 Peter, you'd find my two-word summary that I wrote years and years ago. The summary was "suffer well." I looked at all the suffering, all the abuse, all the pain, and I said, you know, the book of 1 Peter is really about how to suffer well. When life is hard, how do you hold on? But now that I've reread the book of 1 Peter, I realize that I was kind of wrong. I counted up all the words that have to do with pain and suffering; there were 19 of them total. But the second time I read through, I decided to count the number of times that we find incredible blessings because of what Jesus has done. And do you know what I found? I found this: I found Peter saying to God's



elect, you've been chosen. God has given us new birth. You're shielded by God's power. You were redeemed, born again. You've tasted that the Lord is good. The one who trusts in Jesus will never be put to shame. You're a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. God's special possession. God called you into his wonderful life. You have received mercy. Christ suffered for you. He bore our sins on the cross. By Jesus' wounds, you have been healed. You have returned to the shepherd of your souls. Christ suffered to bring you to God. Baptism now saves you. Baptism is the pledge of a clear conscience towards God. Baptism saves you by the resurrection of Jesus. The spirit of glory and of God rests on you. You will receive the crown of glory. God cares for you. God called you to his eternal glory. God will restore you. God will make you strong. God will make you steadfast. Peace to all of you who are in Jesus Christ. And that; that's not about suffering well. That's about rejoicing because of all the blessings that we have that Jesus gave. In fact, I found out that the book of 1 Peter has 105 verses and there are 43 blessings that are yours right now because of what Jesus has done. That's like Peter can't even go two sentences without saying, "Oh yeah! And do you remember what Jesus did?" And the more he focuses on that, the more his friends - despite the rough marriages, despite the problems at work - they can look up to heaven and they can remember I have something worth celebrating today.

So here's my homework for all of you who would love to have more joy and happiness in your life. It's a simple to do; I want you to write this down so you remember to do it this week. I simply want you to personalize passages. Have any of you ever gotten a personalized Bible before? Maybe on your confirmation day, Grandma gets you a Bible with your name engraved on the cover? I don't want you to put your name on the cover of your Bible. I want you to put your name on the pages of your Bible. If I go back to those promises in 1 Peter, what would it be like to put your name in some of those passages? You know, to Mark, who's been elected and chosen? To Laurie, who has been given new birth. Gary is shielded by God's power and Carrie was redeemed. Megan has been born again and Mark has tasted that the Lord is good. Roxanne, the one who trusts in Jesus will never be put to shame. Denise is a chosen person. We are a royal priesthood. Kim is a holy nation. Tom is God's special possession. God called Emme into his wonderful life. Jeremy has received mercy. Christ suffered for John. What would it be like when you read these passages, not as written to some strangers in some foreign place long ago, but think of it as written to you. That because of Jesus, he's so good and he's so loving and he gave his life on the cross that this is true of you. I bet if you pause long enough to remember those passages and what they mean, something would happen in your heart and you'd start to be filled with the glorious and an inexpressible joy.

And if you do, you might feel like I do when I look at this. A few years ago, my wife and I decided to start a bookmark collection. Sounds pretty awesome, doesn't it? I was thinking, that sounds like something a middle-aged Caucasian couple would do. I thought, "Oh my goodness, yeah, that's what I've become." We get these bookmarks whenever my wife and I go on an adventure and every time we pull this out of a book, it reminds us of the places we've been and the things we've experienced and it makes us instantly happy. Ask my wife about our bookmark from Crif Dogs; this secret, gourmet hotdog place in New York City and she'll smile. Ask her about our bookmark from Tojo's; this 4'2" sushi master from Vancouver who served us the greatest meal we've ever had. Whenever we see little Tojo's cartoon bookmark, it makes us happy. But I don't think anything makes us as happy as this. This is a bookmark we picked up



from our hotel when we stayed in Thailand a few weeks ago. And the picture was actually taken from the place where we spent almost all of the four days that we were on that island. Right next to the water, private beach, waves licking up the edge of the smooth rock. This little couch where we'd come in our swimsuits and we'd sit down with our good books and we would just read and we were in paradise. This army of little crabs came walking across the rock. This incredible person who worked at the hotel would come with skewers of fresh fruit and drinks. And we didn't want to leave.

And now here we are in Wisconsin. But sometimes at night when I open the Bible and we do a devotion together, this bookmark's sitting in there and it instantly makes me think and makes me happy. Now you don't have to be jealous of me and my wife; this was four days and we had to pay for it. If you open your Bible, you'll find out that there's a forever that you didn't have to pay for. Something that makes a 1,000-foot rope look small in comparison; that forever and ever and ever you will be filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. And that feeling doesn't have to wait; it can start right now.

Let's pray.

Dear God, thank you so much for writing all these things down in the Bible. I can't imagine being part of a faith where we had to guess what you feel, what you think, and what you've done. I love the promises of the Scriptures; that we can run to them, we can personalize them, and we can hold onto them and find what this world can't give. And so, I pray, God, not just for happiness but for happiness that is the end result of knowing who you are and what you've done.

I pray for everyone who's praying with me right now, heavenly Father. I know there's some people going through some really difficult stuff. It almost seems insulting to tell them to rejoice on a day like today but you're the God who wrote down, "This is the day that God has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." And we want to, God, but we're going to need your help. So God, when we're struggling, when we're grieving, when we're sick, when things are uncertain, when we don't know if the marriage is going to make it, when we don't know if we're going to make it, would you open our eyes to see a picture of paradise? What Paul saw; help us to see something so good and so glorious, it's inexpressible and our emotions and our hearts change.

God, we would love to be the kind of people that have the kind of peace and joy that's infectious. God, it's rare in our world but we would love to have it and we would love to share it. So would you help us in the days to come? Would you bless us with an evolution of our faith? By the grace of God, we are not what we were and we pray the same would be true tomorrow; that by the grace of God we would be someone different. We pray this all, Jesus, in your beautiful and your saving name because of that, we've been saved from sadness. And all God's people who wanted this kind of joy, who agree, they join their voices and they said, "Amen."