



# JOY

## ADVENT | Week 3

What the world needs is joy. At some level, we all know that, but really internalizing that truth changes the way we see the world around us and the people living in it. Ultimately, just about every activity we pursue and every relationship we nurture is in the pursuit of joy. We want to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. And yet, we never seem to succeed. It's just not enough.

But we are a species that was created intentionally by a loving God to resemble and reflect Him in this broken world. This Creator God is a God of joy because He lacks nothing. That's instructive. The sovereign God of the cosmos is full of joy—and His great desire for every human heart is that they experience joy as well. What if we really lacked for...nothing?

Joy is the outcome of fulfillment.

“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11, ESV). God the Father sent the Son so that the redeemed would actually “enjoy this life with Jesus’ enjoying.” He wants His joy to be our joy. What God has is enough; He is fulfilled. What He has given us is enough, even in the midst of a corrupt context. We are fulfilled, and the free gift of grace is not merely everlasting life, but never-ending joy!

It's like the great old hymn, *Joy to The World* by Isaac Watts reminds us:

No more let sins and sorrows grow,	Far as the curse is found
Nor thorns infest the ground;	Far as the curse is found
He comes to make His blessings flow	Far as, far as, the curse is found.

The ground we walk on has been cursed because of sin. But the King of glory has reversed the curse and made joy available to all mankind. May we all experience and appreciate true and lasting fulfillment this Advent season. Joy to the world!

## The Voices that Bring Lasting Joy

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“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”

**Isaiah 40:1–11 (ESV)**

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When is it most difficult to have joy? Think of a time when you were not joyful. Most often it is when circumstances are not moving in our favor or when we experience need or failure. Everyone will experience some form of failure each day, some small and some large. Perhaps the “failure” is simple, like forgetting to get milk at the store and having to drive all the way back. Other failures are more difficult and impact our relationships, such as losing our temper and being impatient with our children or spouse. Failures at work can impact our livelihood financially.

One of the greatest and most impactful failures we experience is with sin. Sins can bring devastating consequences that impact every area of our lives. No matter the failures we experience, they can make it difficult to capture joy.

In Isaiah 40:1-11 the remnant of Israel is still living in exile in Babylon. They are far away from their homeland and perhaps many family members and friends. Their situation is marked by failure and sin, and joy is lost. Through this passage they hear four voices that come as encouragement in hopes of restoring their joy.

Warren W. Wiersbe explains the four voices that are seen in this passage:

**Voice #1—Voice of Pardon (vv. 1-2):** Israel has sinned greatly against God through idolatry, injustice, and immorality. But the voice of God reminds them that they are still His people, and that He loves them. Though God would discipline them, He would never leave or forsake them. The voice reminds them that God is a God that can pardon any sin if they will turn to Him in repentance.

**Voice #2—Voice of Guidance (vv. 3-5):** Although they were in exile, the remnant of Israel would soon return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and temple. God knew during that time fear and anxiety would creep in to rob their joy. But the voice of God once again reminds them that they were not going alone. As they returned, the Lord would go before them and open the way.

**Voice #3—Voice of Promise (vv. 6-8):** The nations that stood against Israel were slowly fading. Assyria was gone and Babylon was soon to follow like grass that withers and fades away. Many things can fade in life – health, wealth, relationships, security. The voice of God reminds them that the Word of God would always remain. As they begin their journey home, Israel could rest completely in God’s promises.

**Voice #4—Voice of Peace (vv. 9-11):** It had been years since the children of Israel had experienced peace. They had been conquered, taken from their homeland, and were living among their enemies. Now they would finally be released from their bondage. As they came out of the valley and climbed to the mountaintop once again, they would be able to experience God’s victory over their enemy and peace in the land God had given them.

As believers we also live in a hostile land. The Bible tells us that this world is not our home and that we will experience many different trials and failures. Whether we are struggling against broken relationships, financial failures, or even exhausting battles with sin we can find great encouragement from these voices.

Perhaps the voice you need to hear is that God can and will pardon that sin that seems to have taken hold in your life. Perhaps it is the voice of guidance because there are many decisions you are facing. Perhaps it is the voice of promise because of the things you are trusting in are all falling apart. Perhaps it is the voice of peace because this is lacking in many areas of your life.

Whatever your need or circumstances, listen to the voice of God, who sent His Son because He loves you and wants to give you lasting joy.

### Further Reflection | Individual Study Questions

1. What battles are you facing right now that are robbing you of joy?
2. Which of the voices do you desperately need to hear from today?
3. Who in your life could you be a voice of encouragement to?

### Further Reflection | Individual Study Questions

1. What are some struggles that we face as a family?
2. Why do these struggles rob us of joy?
3. Which of these voices would help us fight for joy?
4. How could we be a voice of encouragement as a family?

### Listen to | “*Comfort ye*” by George Frideric Handel (1741)

The song, *Comfort ye*, from Handel’s *Messiah*, is Isaiah 40:1-11 set to music. As a family, listen to the song and discuss its tone: Is it light and joyful, calm and peaceful, sad or somber?

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