

JOY:FULLY LUTHERAN

1 THESS 5:16-18

REJOICE / PRAY / GIVE THANKS



/ CONVENTION BIBLE STUDY / PARTICIPANT GUIDE

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Introduction

Joy:fully Lutheran.

Truth be told, there was a time when I just might have considered that an oxymoron.

Back in eighth grade or so, I remember attending some non-denominational event that featured a speaker with a reputation for firing up youth and their commitment to Jesus. He was an engaging sort: he made an impression upon me. In fact, these decades later I still remember one line from his personal testimony. He said, “I grew up Lutheran, but I got tired of feeling bad about my sins all the time.”

Thankfully, he didn’t mean he liked feeling good about his sins. But sadly, he apparently thought that Lutherans began the service by saying, “I am a poor, miserable sinner,” and then called it a day. It wasn’t the best review of my upbringing. All the same, he had an engaging style and played a mean guitar; and I’ve got to admit that my home church at the time seemed sort of embarrassed about being Lutheran. So, as that speaker urged us to commit ourselves more to Jesus that day, I resolved that I’d give his brand of theology a go for a little while.

I can say with certainty that the months that followed were some of the most joyless of my life. I’m not blaming the speaker. There were a ton of factors involved — not the least of which was that I was an eighth-grade kid going through puberty and coping badly with all the social awkwardness that it brings — but boy, howdy, deciding I wasn’t going to be poor and miserable anymore only left me poorer and ... “miserabler.”

It didn’t last forever. Time passed. I am pleased to report that I later resolved never to go through puberty again, and I have succeeded.

Even better, by the grace of God, I came to appreciate how joyful, peace-filled and comforting Lutheran theology is. Oddly enough (or perhaps not!) I came to realize this on one of the worst days of my life. That’s a story best told over a beer sometime, and I would even let you buy.

“Joy:fully Lutheran” makes total sense to me now: because joy is found where Christ is found, and Lutheran theology is all about being found in Christ, with Christ.

In the following lessons, we’re going to take a look at what it means to be joyfully Lutheran. We’ll start with sources of joy, then move on to joy in worship. Then we’ll take some time to look at finding joy during two unavoidable parts of life — your daily callings and times of trouble. We’ll finish with a look at the joy of the resurrection and eternal life.

In a world so joyless as this one, we have the message of Christ that gives grace and peace, enlightening hearts and enlivening souls. There are so many pressures to hide the Gospel under a bushel basket, or to downplay our confession of faith. It is time to do the opposite. Let us proclaim what we believe, loud and clear, knowing why we do so.

Let us be fully Lutheran, for there we will be joyfully Lutheran.

Timothy Pauls

GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH
BOISE, IDAHO
ADVENT, 2018

Lesson 1: Where True Joys are Found

Rejoice Always

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O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

— COLLECT FOR EASTER 5 (LSB Altar Book, p. 701)

Warm Up: Over the next five lessons, we will explore what it means to be joyfully Lutheran, seeking to expand upon St. Paul's instructions in 1 Thess. 5:16–18:

Rejoice always,
pray without ceasing,
give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Take a moment to reflect: what do these verses mean to you now? What do you think of when you hear them?

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If we're going to talk about being joyfully Lutheran, we should begin with the source of joy.

The collect for Easter 5 (above) is one of my favorites. We pray for true joys. Now, it's obvious that the opposite of "true" is "false," but "true" has a bigger meaning than that. It often includes the sense of "certain," "reliable" and "enduring." It can also mean "loyal," as in, "he was faithful and true."

True joy, then, is joy that is genuine, joy that endures, joy that is certain, joy that doesn't end. That's a tall order!

1. We want to identify true joy. But first, let's look at some examples of untrue joy. What might be an example of joy that is false, short-lived, uncertain or temporary?

2. If we're going to find true joy that is genuine, enduring, certain and faithful, we're going to have to look somewhere besides the things of this world. Our first stop is Gal. 5:22–23. Where do we find true joy?

Let's explore this true joy by means of the parables of Jesus in Luke 15.

3. In response to the grumbling of the Scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus tells three parables. What is the Pharisees' complaint — what issue is Jesus addressing (15:1–2)?

4. In response, Jesus first tells the parable of the lost sheep (LUKE 15:3–7). What does the shepherd do in verses 4–6? Who rejoices as a result? Jesus “decodes” the parable for us a bit in verse 7: who is the “shepherd”? Who are the “friends” and “neighbors”? Where are they and why do they rejoice?

5. Jesus next tells the parable of the lost coin (LUKE 15:8–10). What does the woman do in verses 8–9? Who rejoices? Jesus decodes this parable for us briefly in verse 10. Who is rejoicing, where and why?

6. If you'll permit me a personal note here, I'll confess that I'm a lazy cheapskate; and in pondering these texts, I've put myself in the shoes of the shepherd and the woman. If I have to go find a sheep that was foolish enough to wander away, and I have to carry it back on my shoulders, there is no way I'm going to do it joyfully. Likewise, if I recover a lost coin, I'm not going to make a big deal with friends and neighbors because ... well, then I'd have to supply food and beverages, and I'd risk spending more money than the coin was worth. In other words, the shepherd and the woman seem way too joyful for me. But what does this tell you about the joy of heaven?

Now read Luke 15:11–32.

7. Summarize verses 11–16. What does the younger son request, and how awful a request is it? What does he do with his share, and what happens when it's gone? How is this similar to a sinner's natural treatment of God?

8. The son decides to risk going home, and so he composes a three-point speech in verses 17–19. Note the three parts.

9. When the father sees him coming (v. 20), what does he do? Why is this remarkable?

10. In verse 21, the son begins his three-point speech, but the father doesn't let him finish. Which parts does he allow his son to say, and which part is never said? Why? What does the father do now that this worthless son has come home (vv. 22–24)?

11. What does the parable *so far* teach about sinners and God's attitude toward them? (see 1 JOHN 1:8–9)

12. We still have the older son to deal with. Why is the older son angry (vv. 25–28)?

13. Summarize the older son’s angry speech in verses 29–30. Here’s the riddle: from the three-point speech of the younger son in verses 18–19 and the father’s remarks in 22–24, how is the older son thinking like his brother and not like his father?

14. How does the father respond to his older son (vv. 31–32)?

15. What do verses 25–32 teach us about sinners and God’s attitude toward them?

16. How does this parable end in verse 32, and how is this like the conclusion of the parables of the lost sheep (v. 7) and the lost coin (v. 10)?

17. A reason for joy: how can you be sure that you are a child in the household of God (GAL. 4:4–7)? How can you be certain that this has been done to you (JOHN 3:5)?

18. Remarkably, what is the reason that Jesus did this in Heb. 12:2?

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Why is there joy in heaven?

There is joy in heaven over you because Jesus came to earth; and when Jesus came to earth, He brought joy with Him for you. That joy is true joy — it is certain, reliable, faithful and enduring. It will not disappoint because the source is not your successes, your attitude or your emotional energy. Your source of true joy is the Son of God who, by His grace, has made you a beloved, baptized child of God.

Where Jesus is, you will find true joy. Don’t take this for granted! One of the great strengths of Lutheran theology is that it’s built upon Christ and saturated with Him ... which means that joy permeates all that we believe. This constant presence of Jesus in what we believe is one of the reasons why it makes perfect sense to be joyfully Lutheran.

Next time, then, we’ll look at His delivery of this joy to you. But before you go:

Rejoice! From this lesson or from the past few days, make a quick list of reasons for joy. These can be true and lasting joys from heaven, or joy in the gifts that God provides for this body and life.

Give thanks! From this lesson or from the past few days, make a quick list of reasons to give thanks to God.

Pray! Give praise and thanks to the Lord for the joys and gifts He has provided, and commend to Him all your worries and needs. Close with the Lord’s Prayer.

Sing! “As Rebels, Lord, Who Foolishly Have Wandered” (LSB 612) is a beautiful hymn based upon the joy of the prodigal son’s father — and your Heavenly Father’s love for you in Christ. Another great option is “God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It” (LSB 594).

Lesson 2: Joyful Worship

Pray without Ceasing

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What more can we do before God that is greater than these two services — the services of prayer and thanksgiving? In the first place, one must hear the Word, which is given to us by God. Here we do nothing, but we only take hold of what has been offered. In the second place, one must pray and implore God's help after the Word has been heard and taken hold of, and after getting this help one must give thanks and offer sacrifice. But we pray not only with the mouth or the voice but also with sobbing of the heart, with all our strength and members. This is prayer without ceasing.

— MARTIN LUTHER, AE 5:357

Warm Up: Today we're going to talk about joy in worship. Before we do, take a few minutes and think of as many hymns as you possibly can that include a form of the word "joy" or "rejoice."

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Is Lutheran worship joyful? It ought to be, sure, but this question may spur some debate. Some would say that traditional, liturgical worship doesn't lend itself to joy — as someone once quipped, who but Lutherans sing, "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus!" while sitting down? Others might say it's difficult to find joy when there's tension in the congregation because of financial problems, attendance numbers, disagreements or something else. You might find joy difficult to discover at church after a bad night of sleep or some personal trial, or because you'd rather be standing knee deep in a trout stream.

Perhaps, though, we're looking for the wrong sort of joy. Or maybe we're looking in the wrong places.

Speaking of trout streams and the like ... as the story goes, Martin Luther faced the same tepid argument that many pastors hear in our present day: "Pastor, since God is everywhere, then I can worship Him out in the trout stream (or the forest or my bed) instead of church, right?"

Luther supposedly responded, "Of course God is there. But He is not there *for you*."

I haven't been able to track down that story; and in my mind, I imagine the Reformer getting agitated and saying in a terrible German accent, "Und vat duss he gif you in ze traut stream? Traut, you [insert favorite Luther insult here]! Und vat does he gif you in church? His Son!"

I digress. As I said, I don't know if the story is true, but I do know that Luther wrote this: "[God] is present everywhere, but he does not wish that you grope for him everywhere. Grope rather where the Word is, and there you will lay hold of him in the right way." (AE 36:342)

We learned in Lesson 1 that true joy is found where Jesus is, so now we're going to see why Lutheran worship is joyful — *joy-filled!* To do so, we are going to look at five of the most commonly sung songs throughout the Church. Not every worship service will use them, but they do a great job of illustrating why Lutheran worship is a joyful thing indeed.

Song #1: Read Luke 17:11–19.

1. Who calls out to Jesus, and what do they cry? What do they have to give in exchange for Jesus' help?

2. What does Jesus do? How does He treat those who show no gratitude?

3. When you come to worship, are you like the ten at the beginning, or the Samaritan who comes back? Why?

4. Do we sing the lepers' cry as part of worship? Why? What reason for joy do we share with them?

Song #2: Read Luke 2:8–16.

5. What does the angel announce to the shepherds? What does the choir of angels sing afterwards?

6. Having heard the angels, what do the shepherds do in response? What do they have to give to Jesus?

7. When you come to worship, how are you like the shepherds as they make haste to Bethlehem?

8. Why would we sing the angels' song as part of worship? What reason for joy do you share with the angels?

Song #3, Part 1: Read Is. 6:1–3.

9. Where does this take place? Who is crying out? What are they calling to each other, and why are they doing it there and then?

10. What is the Lord doing in Isaiah 6 (see Ps. 103:19)?

Song #3, Part 2: Matt. 21:6–9

11. Why are the crowds crying out, and what are they shouting?

12. When you come to worship, how are you like the crowds?

13. Song #3, known as the *Sanctus*, combines two readings: an Old Testament vision that takes place in heaven and a New Testament text that takes place on earth. Why would we sing the song of the seraphim and the song of the Palm Sunday crowds in worship — and right before Holy Communion? What joy do we share with them?

Song #4: Read John 1:19–29.

14. Who do the priests and Levites think that John the Baptist might be? Who does John say that he is (v. 23), and what does this mean?

15. According to John, where is the Messiah in verse 26?

16. How do people find out the identity of the Messiah (29)? What is He called, and what does this mean?

17. Why is Jesus there — what has just happened to Him (see v. 32) and why?

18. Why would we sing John’s words in verse 29 as part of worship, just before the Lord’s Supper? What joy do we share with John?

Song #5: Read Luke 2:25–33

19. Whom does Simeon meet? Summarize his blessing.

20. Why would we sing Simeon’s blessing as part of worship — especially after we’ve just received the Lord’s Supper? What joy do we share with Simeon?

21. Take the joy of the lepers, the angels, the seraphim and Palm Sunday crowds, John the Baptist and Simeon, and summarize it in one sentence: “The joy we share with them is that ...

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True joys are found where Jesus is found, and Jesus is found in His Means of Grace. That’s what worship is all about: the Lord comes to us, forgiving our sins — and, of course, we respond with prayer, praise and thanks-giving. As Luther writes in the paragraph at the top of our lesson, this is the content of our unceasing prayer.

Now, I’ll admit that I’ve been to a few services that were less than emotionally inspiring, but that doesn’t mean that Jesus was less present or less joy-filled. It might mean that I had a bad night of sleep, or I was easily-distracted. It might mean that other sinners in the room were distracting. But that wasn’t the fault of the worship — it was the weakness of human flesh. Where the Word is preached in its truth and purity, and where the Sacraments are administered according to that Word, the Lord Jesus is present with all of His gifts to give.

This is also why joy can be found in worship even on the worst of days: if Christ is present to forgive your sins, then you know that the days of trouble are numbered. One way or another, He will deliver you.

It’s why one of my favorite verses is Ps. 16:11: “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

Indeed, because Christ is present to save in His Means of Grace, there is no better place in the world to be joyfully Lutheran than worship.

Of course, you can’t be at church all the time; next time, we’ll take a look at joy as you go about your daily callings. But before you go:

Rejoice! From this lesson or from the past few days, make a quick list of reasons for joy. These can be true

and lasting joys from heaven, or joy in the gifts that God provides for this body and life.

Give thanks! From this lesson or from the past few days, make a quick list of reasons to give thanks to God.

Pray! Give praise and thanks to the Lord for the joys and gifts He has provided, and commend to Him all your worries and needs. Close with the Lord’s Prayer.

Sing! “The Gifts Christ Freely Gives” (*LSB* 602) certainly rejoices in the Lord’s presence in His Means of Grace. “Once He Came in Blessing” (*LSB* 333) is a classic Advent hymn, but it’s also a profound song about worship until the Lord returns in glory.

Lesson 3: Joyful Vocations

Give Thanks in All Circumstances

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Then go joyfully to your work, singing a hymn, like that of the Ten Commandments, or whatever your devotion may suggest.

— MARTIN LUTHER, (Small Catechism, Daily Prayers)

Warm Up: To get things rolling, take a few minutes and think of every Bible verse you can that has some form of the words “joy” or “rejoice.”

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We often look ahead to special events, like holidays and birthdays, because we anticipate that they will be times of joyful celebration. But not every day is a holiday, we can't always be on vacation, and I know plenty of retirees who say they're just as busy as ever — except there's no day off! Is there joy in the normal day? The pesky day job? The average Wednesday? (Personally, I have yet to figure out Wednesdays.)

Are we overlooking immense amounts of joy and numerous causes for rejoicing?

When Luther writes in the Small Catechism about beginning your day with prayer, he counsels you to ... I tell you what: try it right here, right now.

- First, make the sign of the cross and say, “In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.”
- Second, say the Apostles’ Creed.
- Third, pray the Lord’s Prayer.
- Finally, says Luther, pray this “little prayer:” “I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen¹”

Then, says Luther, go joyfully to your work.

¹ Small Catechism, Daily Prayers: Morning Prayer, page 30

1. If you're now to go joyfully about your work, it would seem that these four parts of Luther's morning prayer are meant to give you joy. Let's take a look: what about the Invocation, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and morning prayer might make you joyful?

To set the stage for talking further about our daily callings, read Eccl. 5:10–20.

2. What is *not* the end goal or great reward of labor (10–11)? Is this surprising?

3. What does the Preacher — the author of Ecclesiastes (1:1) — call these things? What are their limits?

4. The Preacher writes that it is good to “find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life” (18), whether one is wealthy or poor. Why?

5. In fact, what happens to those who rejoice in work and God who gives it? (19)

Every day, every old normal day, you have things to do; and if you make a list of those things, you'll find that they're related to your vocations, or callings. Your vocations are those stations in life in which God has placed you. The Table of Duties in the Small Catechism lists the following callings: pastors, hearers of the Word,

government officials, citizens, husbands, wives, parents, children, workers, bosses, youth, widows and everyone.

6. We can take these various callings and group them under three estates. What are they? Read the following verses: what does God give in each of the following verses?

a. Gen. 2:15

b. Gen. 2:16–17

c. Gen. 2:24

7. Look at each of these three estates (and the Table of Duties). Can you make a list of the calling(s) you hold in each?

8. Different callings have purposes, rules, responsibilities and rewards. For instance, consider a man who is a son, a husband and a computer programmer. How are these vocations different?

9. All of these callings find their origin in Genesis 2. Look at the timing! When are these given? What hasn't happened yet? Are these estates given to be *enjoyed*?

10. Given the answer to the previous question, imagine these estates in a perfect world. What is meant to be enjoyable about labor, church and marriage?

11. Read Gen. 3:14–24, where the Lord announces the consequences of the fall into sin. Does each of the three estates suffer because of the fall — can you point out specific words regarding each? Does the Lord provide reason for joy even as He announces the consequences of sin?

12. Sin has certainly marred the estates that God established in the garden of Eden, and this in turn will afflict every calling that you ever have. Read, for instance, Col. 3:5. How might these sins affect labor, church and marriage/family?

13. Despite so many temptations and attacks of the devil, is it still possible to find joy, enjoy and rejoice in the various callings that God has given you? Read Matt. 22:36–39; Col. 3:23–24 and Eph. 6:5–7. Consider this: all three of these passages primarily are Law; our callings are where God places us to keep the Law, no matter how imperfectly. Think back to question 10 and how all of these callings were meant to be: what can you salvage in a sinful world?

14. Recalling the life of joy in lesson 1, what might you do to live joyfully in your callings? What gifts of God are you quick to overlook? What sins especially threaten your joy? Recalling lesson 2 and Luther's morning prayer, what is the remedy for these sins?

15. One more to ponder as you go: how might you bring joy to others in your various callings this week? The more specifically you can think of people and actions, the better!

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In 1 Kings 8, at long last, it was time to dedicate the temple. It had been 500 years since the Exodus, 100 years since Saul was anointed to be the first king of Israel. After Saul, King David had tried to build the temple, but the Lord forbade him; and it was finally given to King Solomon to build and dedicate the House of God. On this day as numerous sacrifices were offered, the priests placed the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place. Then they had to make a quick exit, because the glory of the Lord filled the room: God Most High had arrived to dwell with His people.

Solomon offered prayers that are recorded in 1 Kings 8. He gave thanks that the Lord was faithful to His promises, and then he returned to the same theme repeatedly: again and again, he called upon the Lord to hear the prayers of His penitent people. Then he turned and blessed the people, saying in part, "Blessed be the Lord who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant" (1 KINGS 8:56).

The rest of the day included thousands of sacrifices, and the people feasted for seven days. The chapter ends with this cheery description: “**On the eighth day he sent the people away, and they blessed the king and went to their homes joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had shown to David his servant and to Israel his people**” (1 KINGS 8:66).

The people went back to their homes — back to their callings and pesky day jobs and the daily grind, joyful and glad of heart for all the Lord’s goodness. Their joy was rooted in God’s grace and mercy.

So it is for you and me. Every day will have its share of thorns and thistles in a sinful world; but the Lord still visits us — not in a cloud of glory, but by means of words, water, bread and wine. And the Lord still gives us opportunities to labor and love — and all because He has already labored and loved us to the cross and grave, and back again. Whatever the day and the outcome of our labors, we remain His. His gifts of grace and vocation are a big part of what it means to be joyfully Lutheran. What joy indeed!

It’s inevitable that as you go about your callings in a sinful world, though, that sometimes things will go terribly wrong. That’s why next time we’ll talk about joy and suffering ... and maybe even joy *in* suffering. But before you go:

Rejoice! From this lesson or from the past few days of your callings, make a quick list of reasons for joy. These can be true and lasting joys from heaven, or joy in the gifts that God provides for this body and life.

Give thanks! From this lesson or from the past few days of your callings, make a quick list of reasons to give thanks to God.

Pray! Give praise and thanks to the Lord for the joys and gifts He has provided (including that pesky day job!) and commend to Him all your worries and needs. Close with the Lord’s Prayer.

Sing! “With the Lord Begin Your Task” (LSB 869) kicks off a day with a healthy dose of Christ and vocation. Meanwhile, “O Christ, Who Called the Twelve” (LSB 856) declares the joy that Christians carry the light of Jesus with them throughout their callings.

Lesson 4: Joy in Suffering

For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

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*Why should cross and trial grieve me?
Christ is near, with His cheer;
Never will He leave me.
Who can rob me of the heaven
That God's Son for me won
When His life was given?*

— PAUL GERHARDT (LSB 756:1)

Warm Up: One of the most joyful expressions in Scripture is the word “Alleluia.” How many hymns can you name that have the word “Alleluia” or “Hallelujah” in them?

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We’re constantly tempted to believe that, since we’re Christians, we shouldn’t suffer. Maybe we avoid that temptation most days; but when suffering does come along, we’re still quick to ask, “Why is this happening to me?” Where God remains silent, the sinful nature is quick to come up with answers that are completely false, like, “God doesn’t care,” or “God is out to get you,” or “You must not have enough faith.” This last one is part of what we’d call a theology of glory, that your life will be glorious and trouble-free if you only believe in Jesus enough. That’s a particularly attractive but hideous lie.

In contrast to a theology of glory, Luther argued for a theology of the cross. In part, this teaches the obvious truth that Christians suffer. It shouldn’t surprise us: we follow in the steps of the One who suffered far worse for our sins on the cross. Sometimes Christians suffer because they are Christians, as in times of persecution. Sometimes they suffer because of sins they commit, sometimes because of sins committed against them. Sometimes it’s just because they still have sin-afflicted bodies on this side of the resurrection, susceptible to illness, age and failure.

The devil wants to use suffering to rob us of God’s gifts of faith and hope and peace. And what about joy? Is there room for joy in suffering? Sooner or later, we each must face this question in practice, so let’s arm ourselves with the Word of the Lord now.

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In the first four chapters of Romans, St. Paul has painstakingly built the case that despite our sinfulness, we are declared righteous for the sake of Jesus. For a quick summary of those chapters, two verses will do the job: read Rom. 3:23–24.

1. Paul writes that “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” What does it mean to fall short of God’s glory?

2. Paul also writes that, “All ... are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” What does “justified” mean, and how is it surprisingly accomplished for us?

With that wondrous, joyful news of our redemption in Christ, let’s turn to Rom. 5:1–12.

3. Read Rom. 5:1–2. Before St. Paul speaks of suffering, he lays some groundwork by describing us in four different ways.

a. Paul first reminds us that “We have been justified by faith.” When it is given us to suffer, what help is it that we have been justified by faith?

b. Paul writes that “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). The key word here is “peace:” often, people understand peace to mean the absence of strife, but what does it mean here? How does this comfort and reassure us when we must endure hardship?

c. Paul writes that “We have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Rom. 5:2). The sense of “access” is along the lines of having access to a king’s court and help. What is the joy of the “access by faith”? Is there a comfort in the fact that we “stand” (see Eph. 6:13)?

d. Paul writes that “We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2). What is this glory, and how does it offer comfort in a time of affliction?

e. Bonus question! We’ve encountered “glory” and “peace” together before in this Bible study. When — and why?

Read Rom. 5:3–5.

4. Paul writes “We rejoice in our sufferings” (Rom. 5:3). (By the way, the word “rejoice” actually has the meaning of “joyfully boast.”) However, Paul doesn’t say that sufferings are the cause of joy. Do we really boast that we are suffering, or are we boasting about something else? For instance, when the disciples are caught in a storm in Luke 8:22–25, it can rightly be said that they are in the midst of the sea; but it is far better news that they are in a boat in the sea. It’s even better news that they are in the boat with Jesus! When Paul says we rejoice — joyfully boast — in our sufferings, what precisely are we joyfully boasting about?

5. Paul writes that “suffering produces endurance.” How is this true?

6. Paul writes that “endurance produces character.” The word “character” has the sense of “tested-ness,” along the lines of gold that has been tested by fire. How does endurance produce character? What is found to be “gold” in times of such refining, and what is not?

7. Paul writes that “character produces hope.” What is the hope, and how does character produce it?

8. Paul writes that “hope does not put us to shame.” Most likely, he’s talking about the Last Day. What does he mean?

9. Paul writes that our hope is certain because “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (ROM. 5:5). Hmm ... we’re getting very Trinitarian here: The Father has poured out the Spirit on us for Jesus’ sake. When did this take place? See Titus 3:5–6.

10. We’d better stop here for a moment and make sure we’ve got an important point right. True or false: suffering strengthens faith. Explain your answer.

11. Read Rom. 5:6–9, where Paul quickly goes back to the Gospel. Why is this so important to keep in mind when considering times of suffering? To put it another way, how might you respond to a suffering Christian who says, “I think God is out to get me!”?

12. Read Heb. 12:5–6. What is one of the reasons that God allows suffering?

13. Summing up, from what you’ve studied in this lesson, what are some reasons for joyful boasting even during times of suffering?

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A few years back, I visited a member who was setting his affairs in order as he’d recently been diagnosed with terminal cancer. We talked about what doctors had said he could expect in his remaining days; and I offered, “You can also expect something else: between now and then, the devil is going to dig up every last sin and parade it in front of your eyes to make you think that God couldn’t love you.”

The man's response was quick and full of feeling: "What do you mean he's 'going to'? He's already begun!" When death and devil partner together to torment, even the strongest of Christians sees how weak he is.

It's here that the comfort of the Gospel becomes apparent: if Christ has indeed taken our sins to the cross, there are none left to incur God's wrath. If we are forgiven, there is nothing to prevent God's love and salvation. Thus, Luther was known to mock the devil at times, thanking him for reminding him of his sins — and thus reminding him of his need for Jesus; and he was known to mock death, pointing out that it was Christ's captive whom He used to deliver His people to heaven. This is a hope and a joy that doesn't disappoint, and I've had the pleasure of knowing Christians who were quite joyful to speak of Christ — and poke death in the eye — with some of their final breaths.

Christ has died and Christ is risen: this is the joy that endures in suffering. And because Christ is raised from the dead, He will raise you up to the kingdom of heaven where suffering and sorrow are no more. Luther's theology of the cross is another reason why it's a delight to be joyfully Lutheran, because you don't measure God's love for you by how much you are, or aren't, suffering. You know of God's love for you because He's given His Son to die on the cross, and keeps visiting with grace in His Word and Sacraments. What certainty! What joy!

As we saw above, suffering doesn't last forever; and we look forward to the resurrection of the body and everlasting life. We look forward to eternal joy, and so we'll pick that up in our next lesson. But before you go:

Rejoice! From this study, or from past experiences of suffering, what joys might you find in suffering? For what might you praise God?

Give thanks! From this study, or reflecting upon past experiences of suffering, what might you give thanks to God for?

Pray! With joyful praise and thanks to God for His kindness and mercy, pray also for those who are currently suffering and in need of help.

Sing! When it comes to a meditation of Christ-centered faith in suffering, it's hard to beat "Why Should Cross and Trouble Grieve Me?" (*LSB* 756). It's also a great time to sing, "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less" (*LSB* 575/576).

Lesson 5: Joyful Expectation

... It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

(PHIL. 1:20–21)

Warm Up: We've started sessions brainstorming hymns about joy. This time, what hymns do you think of when you want to sing of hope?

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“The hope of the righteous brings joy” (PROV. 10:28).

Scientists speak of potential (stored) energy and kinetic (moving) energy. For instance, a bow has a lot of potential energy when the bowstring is drawn; and when the string is released, the kinetic energy sends the arrow toward the target. I think of hope and joy similarly: the hope that we have is joy stored up, just waiting to be released ... and imagine what that joy will be like on the Last Day.

I keep this in mind because I go to more funerals than most people. Call it an occupational hazard or part of the privilege of escorting God's people from cradle

to grave (I consider it the latter). We always say the Apostles' Creed, and I always get a little louder for the line, “I believe in ... the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” There's the hope, and thus the joy. Take that, death.

In Lesson 4, we found that it is possible to be joyful even in suffering. How about in the face of death — can joy and mourning co-exist? For the Christian, the answer is “yes, absolutely yes,” because we know that death is not the end. Death is a conquered enemy, and the risen Lord Jesus uses it to deliver us out of this dying world to His eternal kingdom.

The end is not the end! The Lord will return to raise up and gather all of His people. That day will be a day of indescribable joy. For now, in grief, joy may be in the form of hope and waiting to be unleashed. But the hope of the righteous brings joy.

Let's take a look.

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1. Read 1 Thess. 4:9–12. This may seem like a strange place to start: what does it have to do with the end of the world and the hope of heaven? (Hint: remember Lesson 3 and check out a similar situation in MARK 13:9–13.)

Read 1 Thess. 4:13–14.

2. What is the obstacle to joy in verse 13, and why does hope (and potential joy) remain, anyway? What is the joy about Jesus in verse 14, and what is the joy about those who have died in the faith — what does Paul call death in these verses?

3. Is there comfort in Christ for Christians who are given to mourn the death of unbelievers? Even if they cannot grieve with hope for the one who has died, what sort of hope might they still have?

4. Read 1 Thess. 4:15–17. There are all sorts of reasons for joy in these verses about the Last Day. For instance, what joy might you find in the following phrases:

a. “This we declare to you by a word from the Lord.”

b. “We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord.”

c. “Those who have fallen asleep.”

d. “The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.”

e. “The dead in Christ will rise first.”

f. “Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

g. “And so we will always be with the Lord.”

Stick a bookmark in 1 Thessalonians 4, and let's check out this multitude from another angle — when they have arrived in heaven! Read Rev. 7:9–17.

5. How are they described in verse 9? Are there reasons to rejoice here?

6. The crowd is waving palm branches in verse 9; and in verse 10 they declare, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” We came across another crowd with palms and shouts in Matt. 21:6–9 during our study on worship in Lesson 2. The crowds of Matthew 21 and Revelation 7 have some common themes with your congregation here and now: can you identify the joyful parallels?

7. How are the people described in Rev. 7:14?

8. Read verses 16–17, as well as in Rev. 21:4. What isn't found in this multitude?

9. Think about friends and loved ones who have died in the faith: what do these verses say about them? Be personal about this: for instance, I think of my father-in-law, a pious believer who died after years of immobility and loss of speech due to Parkinson's. In that multitude in Revelation, he can stand, even leap for joy; and his voice is among those who shout, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to

the Lamb!” After seeing him in various stages of that wretched, relentless disease, I can't help but rejoice for him now. Who do you think of?

10. Think about your own health. Perhaps you have some chronic pain, nagging injuries, mental illness, etc. What does the resurrection mean for you?

11. Think about what it means for you and that fellow congregation member that, try as you might, you just can't get along with. What joy does the resurrection promise?

12. Think about what this means for those who mourn. What joy does the resurrection promise?

Now, back to 1 Thessalonians!

First Thessalonians 4:18 and 5:11 both instruct, “Therefore encourage one another.” In between (5:1–10), we're told how to live in anticipation of the Last Day, no matter when it appears.

13. Read 1 Thess. 5:1–10. How are unbelievers described? How are believers described? What do these descriptions mean?

14. Given these descriptions, what will life be like in the world until the Lord suddenly returns?

15. First Thessalonians 5:12–15 counsel Christians how to live together in a congregation in these last days. What are the main points?

In this quick look at 1 Thess. 4:13–5:15, we’ve heard a stunning description of the Lord’s return on the Last Day, what we face as Christians in the world until then, and a description of how we are to live together and love one another. As we join the saints in praying, “Come quickly, Lord!” we do so in hope and joyful anticipation because Christ is coming back.

In the meantime we keep receiving the Lord’s gifts in His Means of Grace, keep going about our callings, and yes, we endure suffering. How does Paul counsel us to live in the next three verses?

Rejoice always,
pray without ceasing,
give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
(1 THESS. 5:16–18)

16. The warmup for Lesson 1 asked you to reflect upon this text. How would you explain those verses now?

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For some more concluding words, see “A Parting Thought” after this lesson; but before you go:

Rejoice! From this lesson or from the past few days,

make a quick list of specific reasons to rejoice in the hope of heaven. It might be relief from affliction, the anticipation of being with Christ and those who have died in the faith, etc.

Give thanks! Reflecting upon God’s promises, give thanks for His promises that bring you comfort and joy now. Remembering friends and loved ones who have died in the faith, give thanks to God for His faithfulness to them.

Pray! Including the thanks and the causes for rejoicing you’ve just listed, ask the Lord for help to live as Christians until the Lord returns. Close with the Lord’s Prayer.

Sing! I’ve always got a soft spot for “For All the Saints,” (*LSB* 677), remembering the faithful departed and smiling at the line, “we feebly struggle, they in glory shine.” Another underrated hymn that reflects the now and the not yet is “Oh, How Blest Are They” (*LSB* 679).

A Parting Thought

*Weeping may tarry for the night, but
joy comes with the morning.*

(Ps. 30:5)

I'll be honest. Some days, I'm not feeling the joy.

There's a lot in life that will sap your energy and rob you of joy, after all. Throw in some grief, some stress and a trial or two, and a feeling of joy is hard to come by.

But here's the thing: we walk by faith, not by sight (2 COR. 5:7). By faith, we know that where Christ is, there is joy.

That's why I'm going to maintain that to be fully Lutheran is to be joyfully Lutheran. As we've highlighted five different aspects of our faith and life, there are some distinctions in our doctrine that should fill our lives with extra joy: there are some differences, perhaps subtle, from other Christians, that give us a joyful advantage.

Take lesson one, that true joys are found where Christ is. I have friends who believe in Jesus, but tend to live out their faith practically as if He has done His part on the cross, and now it's up to them to maintain their life and joy until He returns. According to Scripture, though, Jesus is far more involved in our daily lives — I often compare Him to a bridegroom visiting his bride to ensure her wellbeing until the wedding day arrives (REV. 19:7). Our lives of daily repentance are lives of joy, knowing that Jesus constantly attends us to forgive our sins and be our strength.

Or take lesson 2, in which we looked at joyful worship. You have this supreme joy that you know exactly where and when Christ visits you — in His Word and Sacraments. Rather than rely on feelings or try to decode circumstances around you to discern God's favor, you can say things like, "I know that the Lord just visited and forgave me, because He gave me His body and blood!" That's still a certainty on the worst of days. Many believers lack the certainty provided by the Means of Grace.

Consider lesson 3, where we looked at vocation. I have a few Christian friends who are worried that they're not doing enough for Jesus because their daily responsibilities "get in the way," and thus they're nervous that they're disappointing the Lord. In the Lutheran doctrine of vocation, according to God's Word your daily responsibilities *are* what you do for Jesus. He delights in what you do!

As we mentioned in lesson 4, it's always tempting to believe that suffering means we don't have enough faith, and I have encountered those who believe this to be true. As one of the terrible consequences, they believe that God is the farthest away when they are suffering and need Him most. How different, and more joyful, for you: even in the worst of trials, the Lord is as near — with grace and help — as His Word and His Supper.

Finally, all Christians look to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come, and to seeing the risen Jesus in His glory. You have this additional comfort that many do not: you know the truth that, though you do not yet see Jesus, He is present with you in His Means of Grace until that Last Day.

Sum it up and behold your life in Christ! Set free from sin, you go about your daily life with the certainty that God favors you and delights in your callings. You live with the certainty that you're forgiven, that Christ is as near as His Means of Grace, that heaven is yours if the world ends before this sentence does. In a world of darkness, you're walking around like you're going to live forever — because in Christ, you are! All this is cause for joy, and you're only getting started, because weeping remains for the night, and joy comes in the morning. When the Last Day dawns, all sorrow and suffering will be former things that have passed away. Ah, but joy? There will always be much rejoicing in heaven.

All Christians share this joy to one extent or another, but I would maintain that this joy is no more apparent than in what we believe as Lutherans, built upon the Word of God.

Thus I will say once again: let us be fully Lutheran, for then we will be joyfully Lutheran.

— [Pastor Tim Pauls](#)

