

# Happiness in the Midst of Pain

## By J. P. Moreland

[Musical Introduction]

Worship Leader:

Before you sit, please pray with me. Heavenly Father, this morning I ask that we would be filled with knowledge of Your will, that we may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to You, being fruitful in every good work, increasing in knowledge of God; continually work in our hearts, mold us, shape us, break us. God, I ask that You'd be glorified this morning. In Your heavenly Son's name. Amen. Have a seat.

Announcer:

A few announcements. The Torrey theater is presenting Macbeth this month (audience woo-hooing) starting on Friday. It's gonna be November 5th, 6th and 7th; and then the following weekend Saturday, Sunday, the 13th and the 14th. Evening shows start at eight o'clock, and ticket prices are five dollars for student, seven dollars for adults. In regards to spring break missions trips, the Honduras is having an informational meeting November the 8th at 9:30 in the science building 1-1-2, 112. And apps are available in SMU. Also, Utah missions trip apps are due Monday, so you need to get those in.

This next coming Tuesday is the passion rally. Passion already came once earlier this semester. They're coming back. They want to come back. And so that'll be Tuesday night at 8:00. It will be an alternate chapel. You will get chapel credit for coming. And that'll be in Sutherland. That's at

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8 o'clock next Tuesday. Also, Christmas time is coming and one of the things you can get involved in to show love to others is in Operation Christmas Child. What it is is you fill a shoebox full of Christmas gifts and it's given to an underprivileged children- child in different places throughout the world. It's a really neat experience, a really great chance to give back to humanity in a sense and help out. There'll be a table outside; and if you're interested in that.

This morning, as we continue on, Faculty week is Dr. J.P. Moreland. And this last five weeks in October, he just finished a series after Sinspiration. And if I can say one thing about Dr. Moreland after that is that he has an incredible burden for us in that he wants us to know God and to change this world for the cause of Christ. And I'm so thankful that he is here at Biola, that I get to listen to him. I'm very thankful that he is here this morning. So please welcome Dr. Moreland. (audience cheering)

J.P. Moreland:

As he worked through this situation-. I've heard from a number of you in the last six weeks, and I know that many of you come here this morning with real heavy hearts. I know that. I know that if I could sit down and talk with each one of you, that there are a number of you here this morning that are deeply in the middle of guy-girl relationship problems that are very frustrating. Some of you have recently broken up. Others of you would like to break up and can't. Some of you-. This is not a good time for some of you to be going like that hahaha (audience laughing). Bad move. Bad move. Gosh, did you see Joe down there, he was going like that.

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Some of you have family problems; I just heard recently where one of you has a family that's in the middle of a divorce unknown to you. At this age, I think some of you get in touch with the fact that you're not as physically attractive as you'd like to be. Maybe when you were younger, your hope was that you would grow up to be- to look a certain way. And now you're coming to grips with the fact that you aren't as physically attractive as you wished you'd been when you were younger. And as a result of that, you don't get the eye contact. You don't get the attention. You don't get noticed in social situations like people that maybe you feel are a little more attractive. And you're coming to terms with the disappointments that come in life.

Now, the thing I want to say to you this morning is this: you will never be a success at life and you're never going to be happy, if you base all your happiness on solving your problems, because you're never going to solve all your problems. And you've got to take a different strategy. You cannot try to be happy by solving your difficulties only. Instead, you've got to also try to learn how to be joyful and hopeful in the midst of your heartache.

Question is, how do you do that? How can you literally become good- and you can become good at this folks with practice? How can you become good at learning to maintain a sense of joy and strength and peace and hopefulness like my friend did in the midst of an unbelievable, chaotic situation? How can you learn this in the middle of your problems and not when you get rid of your problems? There is my favorite passage of Scripture on this question, and I'm going to ask you to turn to it. I'd like to give you some advice this morning. It's in the Book of Lamentations in the Old Testament. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Lamentations. No, you are more sophisticated than that. You know that's not true.

Lamentations Chapter 3. This was written by the prophet Jeremiah. And by the way, he was a prophet, not a bullfrog as the Three Dog Night said he was. And he certainly wasn't a good friend of mine either. I didn't know the man, but he was a prophet. It is-. Some of you are just now waking up and you caught the joke. OK. I know that that era of music may be a little premature for some of you so. The older people are catching it in any case.

Jeremiah, I can't go into detail, but in this situation, Jeremiah had seen something happen in his life that is probably worse than anybody in this room had seen. He had actually seen some of his own friends' children had their heads smashed against rocks by enemy soldiers that came to town. He'd witnessed a group of people who came into his town, took friends, took some of his friends' little babies, and snapped the back of their necks with their hands and splattered them against rocks. And then mocked the God of Israel and claimed that the god of the Assyrians and the Babylonians was more powerful than the God of Israel. And to put it- to put it briefly, Jeremiah was in the midst of disillusionment about his Christian faith. And he was not at all sure that Christianity worked.

And in fact, if you look at verse 17 and 18 of chapter 3, we get a real sense for where this man's soul was at. In verse 17 he says, "My soul has even been rejected from peace." There's no peace at all in me, he says. "I have forgotten what it's like to be happy." It had been so long since this man had been happy, he forgot what it was like. Verse 18, "So I said, 'my strength is completely dried up.'" I've got no strength left. "And so has my hope in the Lord." He was at a point where

he'd even lost confidence that God could or would do anything to help him. He'd lost his entire sense of happiness.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever been to the point where you forgot what it's like to be happy? You've been so struggling with an issue that it's so worn you down that when you get up in the morning, you don't even have to try to think about the problem, it's just there with you all the time. And the effect of that kind of thing, day in and day out, produces a person's heart in which there's no peace, there's no sense of happiness, and God becomes bitter to you. Earlier in this chapter, Jeremiah even says that God seems to him like a lion who's just lying in wait to rip him apart. And he says the bad thing about God is - God is real good at knowing how to rip people apart because He's pretty smart.

Now, obviously, Jeremiah's view of God is not the way God really is, but this is how he was feeling. And I know as sure as I'm standing here that there are times in your life when you see- if you were- to be honest, you would say Christianity doesn't work. And that's where this man is. Now I'm here to tell you as a 51-year-old man who's known Jesus Christ now for 31 years, that Christianity does work. And I'm saying that not simply on the basis of the authority of this Book, but I'm saying it on the basis of three decades of knowing Jesus as a friend.

But how do you maintain your sense of hope in the midst of a time when you simply can't get solved- your problems solved? In verses 19 through 39, Jeremiah turns his life completely around. And if you wanted to- I want to give you an assignment. Get a commentary sometime, if you're hurting this morning, you get a commentary on the Book of Lamentations and get alone

by yourself and you study verses 19 through 39 of chapter 3. And you're gonna find riches in this passage that are unbelievably helpful. I can only skim the surface this morning.

Now, what I'd like to do is to share with you four principles from this passage for how to strengthen your heart and fill your life with hope when you're in the middle of your problems and you can't solve your problems. Verses 19 through 21, we get the first principle. Jeremiah says, Oh Lord, YOU must remember my affliction. YOU have to remember my wandering. YOU must remember the bitterness in my heart. Surely when my soul remembers my wanderings and bitterness, it becomes bowed down within me. This I recall to mind, therefore, I have what? Hope. What is it that he recalls to mind? He recalls to mind the fact that he doesn't have to spend all day worrying about his own problems, because he can let God worry about them for him.

Folks, think about this with me. Why do you worry about your problems all the time when you've got a problem? Why do you do that? Here's why. Because you think that if you don't worry about it, you're not going to solve it. And what you try to do with worry is control your problems. You don't want your problems to overwhelm you. Suppose you've got a guy-girl issue going on. You think if you can just worry about it and keep thinking about it, you'll manage it and it won't eat you up. So you get up and you try to control it by just focusing on it and mulling it over and worrying about it. And the assumption is, if I spend enough time worrying about this problem, I'll be able to control it and solve it, and it won't eat my life up.

Now, I'm not suggesting to you that you should not try to solve your problems. You should. It's common sense that if you've got a difficulty, you ought to sit down and think about it and try to

find a way out of it. That's common sense. But I will tell you this. You pass over a line when you're no longer just trying to find a way to get out of the problem that's appropriate, and instead, you are obsessing on it to the point that it's not doing you any good anymore. And at that point, you have simply got to tell yourself "I'm going to let God worry about this for me because I can't handle it any longer." The New Testament 1 Peter 5 says, "Cast your anxiety on God. Let Him carry your anxiety for you because He cares for you."

I've got an illustration. When I went to seminary in my late 20s, my wife now, Hope, and I began to date. And she declared to me that she was interested in marriage before I was interested. She just was more interested at that point. She- she came to that point ahead of me. For the next 18 months, we dated and I had what was called an approach-avoidance problem. I would get closer to her and I would get closer to getting engaged and I would get nervous and anxious and I'd back off of it. Once I'd back off, I would be able to see her in a new light and I would want to pursue her again. And it was a terrible situation for her. A lot of you are really getting mad at me, I can tell that. Please, hear me out here. It was terrible for her and it was horrible for me. And I was spending all of my time trying to figure out what's wrong. I'd get up in the morning literally, and I'd analyze the relationship to death. I'd say, well, what are the things you like about her? And so I'd run through my mind. Well, what are the things you don't like? Well, can't you overcome those? Are those that bad? No.

So I was just killing the life out of this relationship. As a matter of fact, I got to the point, this is the God's truth, I got to the point where I would get up in the morning and take a shower before I would go to seminary. I wasn't thinking about the issue at all. And I would start breaking out in

an anxiety sweat in the shower because I was so habituated to thinking about this problem. I was carrying anxiety about that far from the surface of my life. So I didn't even have to think about the issue and the anxiety would just shoot through the ceiling. I got to the point where someone said to me, "J, you are no-, you've passed way over the line to where it's appropriate to think about a problem in order to solve it. And now you are worrying about it all the time because you're trying to manage it. And what you need to do is you need to remember that God will think about this for you and you need to let Him ponder it for a little while."

Here's what I want to suggest to you. The first thing you've got to do if you're in the middle of a hard time right now is after you've given an appropriate thought and done what you can to solve the issue, then you have got to give it to God habitually and refuse to worry about it all day long. I want to give you a specific application. You might say, how do you do that? I recommend- I did this since Singspiration, I recommend you schedule time to worry about the problem each day. That's what I did. I literally did that. A friend said, if you want to learn to cast this on God, you can't do it overnight. So here's what you do. If you start worrying about it in the morning, you say, Lord Jesus, I'm gonna worry about this issue from 5 to 6 o'clock this evening after dinner. I'm not going to think about it till then. So when the thing came to my mind during the day, I would say to myself, Lord Jesus, You gotta think about this. I can't handle it. I'm going to worry about it from 5 to 6. And I would literally postpone until that hour I gave myself to worry each day, the time to worry about the problem. Now, obviously, I wanted to wean myself even of that didn't I? But I wanted to at least start with a way to move in that direction.

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And so my recommendation to you is that if you've got something you're carrying this morning, you try to rest with the fact that God will think about it for you. And if you can't do that, you schedule time each day to worry about the problem and the rest of the day you give it to God. And if you're tempted to pick it up again, give it back to Him and tell yourself I'm going to worry about it later on. So I'll just postpone it until then.

Now you turn from your circumstances and you stop mulling them over all the time. What do you turn to? Three things. The first one is found in verses 22 through 24. Jeremiah says "the Lord's loving kindnesses never cease. His compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is Thy faithfulness." And what Jeremiah is suggesting is that you concentrate on living one day at a time.

You remember in the New Testament, Jesus says, "don't be anxious about tomorrow. Each day's got enough troubles of its own"? Now, again, let's be commonsensical. Jesus isn't saying if you've got a midterm in a week, you wait until the day of the exam to think about it. I know many of you wish that's what- it's what Jesus meant. It isn't. Certainly, there is a common sense planning for the future. That's not what Jesus was talking about. And that's not what Jeremiah is talking about. They're talking about worrying about the future when there's nothing you can do about the future. And instead, concentrate on a day at a time.

Remember the story of Manna in the Old Testament? Remember that event? What was the point of that? That silly story, which actually is a true story, looked silly at first. What is this manna

stuff all about? You know what it was about? It was about teaching people to trust God one day at a time instead of building up things over a long haul.

The other day, I talked to a girl in her late 20s who's single and she's lonely. We got to chatting. And I said to her, I said, "May I ask you an honest question?" "Yeah, please, please ask." I said, "are you happy right now? I mean, do you like your work?" "Yeah." I said, "do you think you're growing in Christ?" She said, "Actually, I really am. I've been doing some great reading and I feel like right now my spiritual life is good. And I'm- I have some friends and I'm really pretty happy right now." And I said, "well, what's- what's the problem then?" "Well," she said, "I'm worried that if I'm not married, let's say, in three or four years, that I'm just going to be lonely the rest of my life." I said, "well, do you hear what you're doing? You are using one day's worth of mercies to worry about three years of life. And it doesn't work that way. God gives you enough mercy each day to last that day, and you can't spend one day's worth of mercy worrying about what's going to happen to you if this doesn't change for three years. And may I just say to you that God will be with you each day. He'll be with you today. He's going to be there tomorrow. So if part of your anxiety is worrying what's going to happen to me if this never changes? That's highly unproductive. Because what you're really doing is worrying about a long period of time when God only gives us the grace to live a day at a time."

So the first thing you want to do if you're in a situation where you're constantly struggling and worrying about it is to say, "hey, I've thought about it enough. Now I'm obsessing on it. I'm going to give it to You. You think about it for me. I get hope when I think about You can meditate on this for me, dear God. And I'm going to worry about it later." Then you concentrate

on living one day at a time. And you do not allow yourself the thought "What's going to happen to me if this never changes?" That is an unproductive thought and it will do nothing but rob you of your joy today. And cut it out. It'll hurt you. It's not good for you. You worry about concentrating on living with the grace God gave you today. And when two years comes, you'll have grace then to live another day.

Now, in the meantime, not only do you focus on living a day at a time, but Jeremiah goes on and suggests that you practice something. And you practice learning to be patient and learning to cultivate the art of endurance. Verse 25-30, The Lord is good to those who do what? Who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him. It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the Lord. Verse 27 is in the Bible, and I need to read it to you. "It is good for a man that he should bear the yoke in his youth." You know what that means? It means it's good for young people to have to suffer. And I'm sorry. I wished that- I wished the Hebrews said something else, but it just doesn't. What Jeremiah is actually saying is it is good for a young person to be trained how to bear up and endure hardship so that when they become old, they do not become bitter, little shallow people.

I'm going to give you a tip, folks. People who go through their teen and college years when everything goes well for them are in great danger. And here's why they're in danger: When they get older, they will not have learned how to function in the midst of heartache. And they're going to have to learn it when they're older. And you know the problem with that? They've usually got more responsibility. It's not a good thing for a 35 year old man who's got a wife and two kids to

have to be negotiating how to handle his life with joy when things don't go well. Wouldn't it be a better idea to learn that when you were a teenager, in your early 20s, that makes sense to you?

Well, if that makes sense, it follows, doesn't it, that one of the most important things that can happen in your life right now is not to find a solution to all your problems, but instead to learn to have hope and strength and patience in the midst of them. Because when you get older, the stakes are higher. And if you have not matured when you're older, you do more damage to people than you do when you blow it at your age by- by and large. And so what the Scriptures are teaching us is a very sane principle that it's good for a young person to bear the yoke in his youth. And that means to learn, to endure and be patient when things are- are not going the way a person wants it.

Psychologists tell us that worry is a learned behavior. You actually can learn to get good at worrying. I happen to have a mother that I love dearly, but one of her weaknesses was that she was a worrier. And I observed, from the time I was just a little boy, I observed my mother cope with her anxiety by worrying all the time. And by the time I reached my 20s, I had learned to be a good worrier. Some of you have learned the art of successful worrying. It's not a good art. And what this passage is telling us is that just as you can learn to get good at worrying, you can also learn to get good at not worrying, if you'll focus on it. And so Jeremiah's suggesting that in the midst of a hard time, you reach a point where it's no longer profitable to think about it any longer. And you say, Lord Jesus, You think about this for me and worry about it for me. I can't handle it right now. I'm going to concentrate, you say, on living a day at a time. I'm going to be joyful today. I'm not going to worry about what's going to happen if this problem doesn't change in the

next two or three years. I'm going to focus on the day. And in the midst of focusing on the day, instead of spending all my energy trying to solve my problem, I'm going to spend as much energy learning to be patient if it doesn't get solved. Learning to be patient, if I don't solve it.

The final principle and the last part of this is to try to learn what God can teach you from the difficulty. Verse 31- uh verse 33 on. Excuse me, verse 34, "to crush under his feet all the prisoners of the land, to deprive a man of justice in the presence of the most high, to defraud a man in his lawsuit, of these things, the Lord does not approve." Now what Jeremiah is saying is this, in his case, and in the people of Israel's case, the reason they were suffering was because they were being cruel to people in law courts. They were being unjust to widows and orphans. And they were crushing people, and there was no justice in the land. Now, that was the lesson that they had to learn for why they were suffering. I am not suggesting that every time you go through a hard situation, it's because there's sin in your life. I'm not suggesting that. That happens to be what was true of these people. OK?

The broader point is that Jeremiah learned something from his suffering. He redeemed it. It wasn't just that he focused on being patient, but he asked for help from God to gain some lesson or insight about his life from his heartache. If-, for example, if some of you are working through a relational issue, it could well be that God has allowed this thing into your life because you are controlling or manipulative, or you are highly insecure and you use relationships to make yourself feel good about yourself. I don't know. Why, I do know this. You need to learn lessons from your own sufferings like I need to learn lessons from my own sufferings. Okay?

How do you do that? How do you learn from your heartache? I got one tip. You try to step back from it for a minute, and look at a longer and a bigger perspective on your life. You step back and you try to think about your life in terms of a longer picture, longer period of time, because sometimes a broader perspective will help you gain a lesson from a problem instead of just keeping the problem right in front of your face and thinking about it all day long. Let me give you an illustration of this. When I was an elementary school boy in Grandview, Missouri, 1st 2nd grade, we used to have vaccination day. And I don't know if you had these, but vaccination day was when all the nur-, they'd take the cafeteria, turn it into a shot factory, and, you know, your mom would show up and you'd go down to the cafeteria and you'd get your vaccination.

Well, one day, it was- my mom shows up. I'm in first or second grade. I don't remember the grade. I'll never forget the incident. I hate shots to this day because of it. And my mom shows up. Hey, well, mom, what are you doing here? You know, and I could-, she says, well, it's uh you know, it's-, we're going to go down to the cafeteria. And I was- I knew something was putrid in Peru. So we get out in the hallway and we start walking down. And I'm seeing some of my schoolmates from the other classes walking back with a little piece of, you know, on their shoulder. And I'm thinking there's something bad happening at the end of that hall. And we got down to the course to the cafeteria. You can smell that vaccination stuff. You know what I mean? And so I'm getting in there and I'm thinking, I'm not getting- there's no way I'm getting the shot, PERIOD.

So, most kids got it in the arm. I had to turn the other cheek (audience laughing). They put me on a-, I started kicking. I was trying to get me off of here. I'm not making this up. They had to have

two nurses hold me down. And guess what happened? You're not going to believe it. My mom held me down. I'm sitting there thinking, hey, it's Moreland, I'm a member of the family. What's the deal? Why are you on their side on this thing? Come on. See, the problem was I really didn't understand what was going on because I didn't have a bigger perspective. And I thought what was happening to me was horrible, whereas if I had just had a little bigger picture, I would have understood that this really was a pain that had good as the result.

You're never going to be good at life. And may I say it's- you should want to be good at life more than you should want to be good at your career. You're never gonna learn to be good at life if you don't learn the art of learning how to be happy and hopeful in the midst of heartache. If you make your happiness depended on solving your problems, you're never going to be happy and you're never going to have hope. A much better approach to life is to learn to solve your problems when you can, but to also learn how to maintain a sense of strength when you can't solve them. And to do that, Jeremiah is- is recommending to us this morning that we get to a point where we stop mulling it over all day long. And we say, Lord Jesus, You're gonna have to think about this for me. I can't handle thinking about it.

To help you with that, you schedule a time each day if you need to. If you don't, praise the Lord. But if you do, you schedule a time to worry about it each day, and eventually wean yourself. What do you concentrate on? Taking it a day at a time. Don't let yourself entertain the thought "what will happen to me if this never gets solved in the next two or three years?" Forget that. You live a day at a time and you'll be OK. And in the meantime, you focus your attention not on nervously trying to solve your problems, but on learning to be patient and calm and endure in the

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MIDDLE of your problems. And while you're doing that, you ask the Lord, is there any broader perspective that I can think about my life in that will help me learn a good, important lesson from this difficulty so that I can actually benefit from it?

Does Christianity work? No. If by work you mean following Jesus means I'll never have problems. No, it doesn't. Yes. If you mean sometimes God will clearly bail me out of my difficulties. But more importantly, He will teach me something unbelievers can't get. And it's how to maintain a sense of strength right in the middle of my difficulties. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, I am so glad to be able to share this message this morning, because from my own experience, I have seen it true in my life. We all fail. I still fail. My faculty friends fail. But still we have made progress. And I pray for my younger brothers and sisters that You would help them learn to handle their difficulties with dignity. In Jesus' name. Amen. You are dismissed.