

FOTS - Wk 3
"Joy > Cynicism"
8/29/21
John 16:16-22, 33

Introduction

Tim. Pastor. **John 16:16-22, 33**. Pray.

Tonight we are on to our third week of our series called - the Fruit of the Spirit in a Time of the Flesh - where we are seeking to become like Jesus more and more by looking at these battles going on within us between what the Bible calls our flesh, our sin nature, ourselves apart from God and the Holy Spirit within us. Last week - love in a time of selfishness. Tonight, we're talking about **joy in a time of cynicism**.

In a Time of Cynicism

Let's start by talking about cynicism.

Cynicism can be defined as **"the belief that something good cannot or will not happen, and even if it does, it won't matter."**

Cynicism at its core is a suspicion of the good. Good in the world, good in others, the goodness of God. **We live in a time of cynicism.** (now if you're a cynic you might not believe me...that's a joke...so let me show you some stats).

- One recent study found that in the past 10 years, trust for **politicians** has gone from 49% to 22% and trust for **corporations** and **companies** has dropped from 54% to 33%.
- In another study, only 16% of millennials think that "most people can be trusted".
- And then you start looking up stats on Gen Z, y'all who were born after 1997, and basically every article calls you "the cynical generation".
- This is part of the reason why we as a culture are obsessed with conspiracy theories. Because we're cynical and suspicious - we think there's always a figurative man behind the curtain.

We live in a time of cynicism. Suspicion of the good - in our lives, in others, in God, in institutions, etc. etc. But here's the deal → **Why wouldn't we be cynical?**

We live in a broken, messed up world. I mean just turn on the news for 5 minutes or take a scroll through what's trending on Twitter:

- Terror and pain and agony in Afghanistan
- One natural disaster after another in Haiti and out west
- A Global Pandemic and variant after variant threatening lives and shut downs
- We've lived through an economic recession, a housing crisis, abuse scandals inside and outside the church

Why wouldn't we be cynical?

"I think that if a person doesn't feel cynical then they're out of phase with the 20th century. Being cynical is the only way to deal with modern civilization — you can't just swallow it whole." - Frank Zappa

Childhood dreams. Now, no one ever starts cynical, right? This is never the goal. If you ask a three year old - what do you want to be when you grow up? Chances are you're not going to hear something like - "Well I really want to be play in

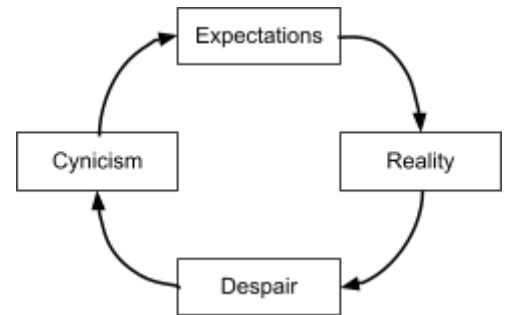
the NFL, but given the size and stature of my parents, and my already distinct lack of athletic ability, I should probably save myself from the years of disappointment, heartache, and embarrassment when I'm the third string running back on my high school football team, so instead I guess, idk, I'll go into business or something." That'd be weird, right? No - they say "NFL! LEH GO!!!"

There's this childish naivete (and I mean that in a positive sense) that we think is both cute and foolish at the same time and that we expect will eventually fade once they face the realities of life.

Because here's what happens. We'll call it the **cynicism cycle:**

WALK THROUGH OF EACH BOX:

- **Expectations** - We begin to develop certain expectations in life. For our culture, that expectation is happiness. That everything will turn out alright, things will go a certain way, we'll accomplish our goals, live out dreams, be good to go. Here's the problem: **LIFE**.
- **Reality** - We come face to face with reality. Live for any amount of time and you quickly start to realize - "You can't always get what you want." Life is broken. Sin is real. Our realities will not go perfectly according to our plans. And so we struggle. Unmet expectations, brokenness, pain, suffering are a part of living as broken people in a broken world.
- **Despair** - And so eventually we have to do something with that struggle. And our coping mechanism, in the flesh separated from the life of God (remember we said the flesh isn't just rebellion against God but also life lived independently from God), is to self-protect from pain by giving up hope. We start to despair.
- **Cynicism** - And our despair then produces cynicism, and then cynicism begins to cloud our expectations - "This is always how it's going to be. That's going to let me down. They're going to hurt me. If it can go wrong it will go wrong."



Our default response in our flesh to the brokenness of the world is to self protect through cynicism. Because if we stop expecting good, we won't have to deal with the disappointment when what we want doesn't come true.

And so we land at cynicism, and then to make matters worse - it's almost like we begin to take pride in how cynical we can be.

We begin to think it's a marker of maturity. We can disguise our cynicism by calling it "wisdom".

- Well you think that way because you just don't know enough.
- Well you're optimistic about them because you just haven't been burned like I have.
- We do this really clearly with a newly engaged couple or with someone who becomes pregnant for the first time → OH MAN. Like congrats and all BUT OOH IT'S GONNA BE TERRIBLE. Just wait and see...**REALITY** is going to hit you."

I love the way Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard put it when he said, **"There is a shrewdness which, almost with pride, presumes to have special elemental knowledge of the shabby side of existence, that everything finally ends in wretchedness."**

But cynicism is not a fruit of a life in the Spirit. Cynicism is a marker of the flesh.

Why? Because cynicism is a marker of **disbelief**. Cynicism demands a culture of suspicion, doubt, and uncertainty - towards God, towards the Church, towards authority (particularly for us spiritual authority), towards others.

Cynicism is a work of the flesh, it is not of the Spirit. But the alternative offered to us in the world, and sadly oftentimes in the church - isn't better either. Because here's the alternative.

The optimism cycle:

Reality doesn't match our **expectations**. We are hurt, we are suffering, we are broken. And then we sit down with a friend, or we get on social media, or even sadly we show up to church.

And it's just like → here comes the hype train! "I know you're suffering, and you're hurting but God's got a plan and a purpose, woo!!"

And what we're pushed back to is a new **naivete** (ignore the problem, reframe it - it's just a set up for something better) that leads us to cheap and blind **optimism**:

- God's got big time plans for you, this is just preparing for you that crazy stuff to come!
- I know my job is really tough right now, but everything works out in the end.
- Or we tell it to our friends - "Hey, I know you're suffering, but it's definitely gonna get better soon, just hold on."

But this naivete doesn't deal with the realities of life. Naivete and optimism don't stare down the brokenness and the suffering and provide what can actually help us in our times of need.

So cynicism is of the flesh, but the response is not optimism. So what is it?

Defiant Joy

Galatians 5 - the fruit of the Spirit is joy. The Spirit calls us to **defiant joy**. We as the people of God are called to **joy in a time of cynicism**.

Here's how theologian Dallas Willard defines joy - **"Joy is not a passing sensation of pleasure, but a pervasive sense of well-being that is infused with hope because of the goodness of God."**

Joy is not bubbly feelings of happiness that rise and fall with our circumstances. Joy is not blind optimism that ignores the suffering and brokenness of our lives and the world. Joy is not the ability to go "WOOHOO" even when things aren't going well.

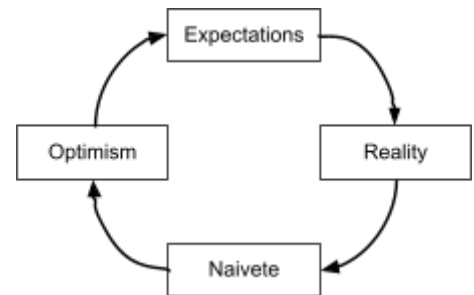
Joy is **a pervasive sense of well-being that is infused with hope because of the goodness of God."**

Or as John Piper defined it - **Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the Word and in the world.**

John 16

So let's look at **John 16** together. I want to show you a new cycle. Better than the cynicism cycle or the optimism cycle → **joy cycle**.

To set the scene for us - Jesus and His disciples are at the last supper. Judas has left. Later tonight Jesus will be betrayed, handed over to the religious leaders to be crucified. So this is His sort of parting speech to His disciples before that happens - trying to encourage them and love them and prepare them.



He's already told them in John 15 that they should abide in Him and if they do so **His joy will be in them and their joy will be full**. Then we get to John 16:

John 16:16-22:

16 "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me."

Jesus tells them - I'm going to go away. He's talking about this imminent death and burial. "I'm going to leave you."

17 So some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?" 18 So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about."

This is a terrifying thing for His disciples. This is their rabbi, their teacher. The one they committed their lives to following and learning from and emulating. But they also know He's more than that. They have believed that He is the Messiah. He's the one that's supposed to rescue God's people and usher in God's Kingdom. And now He's going to leave them?

19 Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'? 20 Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice."

Jesus doesn't sugarcoat it - this is going to be painful. He says - "You will weep and lament, even as the world rejoices around you." Everyone else will be celebrating - you will be in agony. Thanks Jesus. Right? But then notice what he says:

You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.

Jesus doesn't turn a blind eye to the suffering His disciples are about to experience. The cross? No biggie. Seeing the leader you put your entire hope in and revolved your eternity around die a murderer's death through public execution? Don't worry about it! It's all gonna be great! WOOOOOO. HYPE.

No he says → You will be sorrowful. This is going to hurt. **But your sorrow will turn into joy.**

I love the illustration Jesus uses in v21 - **21 When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.**

Childbirth - there's 9 months of not feeling great, nausea, swollen ankles, discomfort, and then a short burst of one of the most painful things a human being can experience. And yet...so many people do it multiple times. That's crazy! Why? Because of the reward. Even a tremendous amount of pain pales in comparison to the joy on the other side. There is life on the other side of the pain.

And Jesus tells His disciples - I'm about to go to my death. And you will experience great suffering and pain → But there's joy on the other side of the cross. But there's joy because there's life on the other side of this suffering.

22 So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

I'm going to be killed. The world will rejoice. You will weep, lament, and suffer. But then you're gonna see me again. I'm going to rise from the dead. I'm going to ascend to reign forever at the right hand of God - and you're going to rejoice that no one can or will take that joy from you. And I'm going to return to fully and finally defeat satan, sin, and death.

Finally in verses 23-32 His disciples start to get it. They start understanding what all of this means. Jesus invites His disciples to pray bold prayers to God the Father in His name.

Then Jesus says this, vs 33:

33 “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

It's about to get really hard, after that it's still gonna be hard. Life on this earth for you guys as you try to follow me is not going to be easy (and if you know the story of the disciples, you know that's true...). But take heart - **I have overcome the world.**

The Disciple's Cynicism Cycle

If you're the disciples, how easy is it for you in this moment and in the days to come to walk out the cynicism cycle?

You had expectations. You put your entire life and eternity in this guy's hands. You gave up your career to follow him. You believed what He was saying - that He was the promised Messiah, that He was going to rescue God's people. And now He says He's leaving?

Now the reality isn't lining up. He's leaving. He's about to be tried, tortured, and killed? They're about to first hand experience the death of Jesus. This is about as bad as your reality can get.

Why wouldn't that lead to despair? Why wouldn't that lead to cynicism? *You're just like the rest of those false messiahs. You were just full of smoke. This was all pointless. What about redemption? What about ushering in the Kingdom of God? What about no more mourning or crying? What about freedom?*

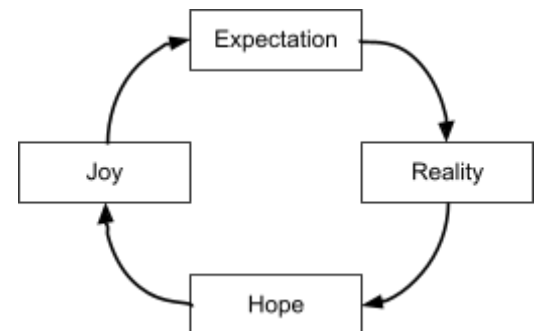
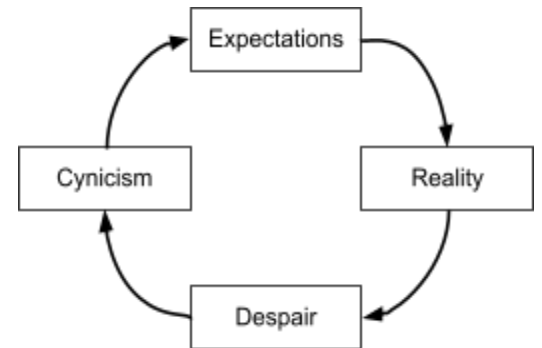
But then look at what Jesus offers them. **Defiant joy.**

The joy cycle:

I know you had a certain expectation. This is the reality though: I'm going to die, you will have sorrow. You will scatter. You will feel abandoned. You will have trouble in this world.

But here's the invitation - not naivete. Not despair. **HOPE.** “I have overcome the world.” “You will see me again.”

Hope. This deep rooted trust in the goodness of God. For the disciples, it's trusting **that God will do what He said He's going to do.** That it is true that Christ has overcome the world.



Push into our lives

And the invitation is the same for us → Hope. **That God has done what He said He would do.** That Jesus did die. That He did suffer. That He was crucified. But also that He didn't stay dead. That three days later He got up out of the grave. And now, Jesus risen and reigning will be true forever. That's a done deal. Guaranteed.

And that doesn't negate our circumstances or nullify our sufferings or our pain or our frustrations with our lived reality.

Hope doesn't necessitate that we turn a blind eye to our pain, our suffering, or the pain and suffering of those around us. Hope isn't naive or blind to our own brokenness or the brokenness of the world.

It is an invitation to look above our immediate circumstances into an even greater and bigger and forever reality → Jesus on the throne.

And then here's what happens → **Just like despair gives way to cynicism, Hope leads to the fruit of joy.**

This **"pervasive sense of well-being that is infused with hope because of the goodness of God."**

You don't just stop at hope. You don't just stop with - "ok, yeah sure God's on the throne, I'm hoping in Him. It's all gonna get better..." **Eventually this leads to a celebration.** Joy is not just a feeling, but it does involve our feelings. Eventually our emotions are supposed to catch up to the disciplined choice of hope. **And that catching up is joy.**

Godly, Defiant joy.

The call to joy for a follower of God is all over the place in the Scriptures. 155x in the OT, 63+ in the New. And almost all of these have two factors:

1. A reminding ourselves of the faithfulness and goodness of God in the past.
2. A hope in the future salvation that will come.

We, as Christians, should be the most joyful hope-filled people in the world!

We should be marked by a deep confidence in the past faithfulness of God and the future faithfulness of God. We should be marked by a defiance:

- The rest of the world says you can't trust others but God calls us family so our relationships are filled with hope which leads to a deep relational joy.
- The rest of the world says you can't trust anyone in authority, but God gives good authority as a blessing, so I'm hopeful about those God has placed over me and me over so there's joy in leading and being led.
- The rest of the world says this is how it's always going to be, but we believe in a God of redemption, so there's hope towards what's going on in our world which leads to joyful servitude, sacrifice, and compassion.

We're not naive. We're not blind. We know the world is broken. We know things aren't as God designed them to be.

But we're not mopers! Too many Christians are mopers. Head held low, woe is me, doomed forever people. That's cynicism! That's the flesh!

Cynicism says this is how it is and how it always will be. This is how I am, this is how the world is, this is my lot.

The Bible emphatically says that's not true!! We know of something so much better to come! We know this isn't the end - but **we don't just wait for joy then, we have joy now because we know the "then" is coming!**

Peter in 1 Peter 1:8-9 tell us this - **Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.**

There is a future outcome of our faith - namely life forever with God - that we are obtaining. There is the promise of the future. But even though now we don't see Him and now it might be cloudy, we still believe and what? **REJOICE WITH JOY that is inexpressible.** Why? Because we're obtaining what is promised to us → Eternity with Jesus.

Christian - when's the last time you rejoiced with joy (**over your salvation, over Christ on the throne**) that is inexpressible?

We take pride in our cynicism and mask it as maturity. We can scoff at the fervor of new believers. We roll our eyes at the person just going for it in worship. We call deep trust in God naive. We think forgiveness is foolish. We are "realists". **And yet the fruit of the spirit is inexpressible defiant joy.**

Henri Nouwen - **People who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it. They claim that the light that shines in the darkness can be trusted more than the darkness itself and that a little bit of light can dispel a lot of darkness. They point each other to flashes of light here and there, and remind each other that they reveal the hidden but real presence of God.**

We should be, as the people of God, the ones willing to stare down suffering, see the hand of God, lift up our eyes, see King Jesus on the throne and choose hope which leads to joy.

Personal Story

Steve. When I was 22 years old and a senior in college, I experienced one of the greatest relational heartaches of my life up until this point. For the better part of four years I was best friends with two guys - we'll call them Mike and Steve. For most of our college experience we were a trio. We hung out all the time, did everything together, walked through a ton of highs and lows together. One of those friendships where if you would've seen me by myself the first question you would've asked is - where's Mike and Steve, and vice versa.

But during our senior year, Steve started making some choices that Mike and I didn't agree with. And it wasn't like small things. It was life-shaping, clearly against Scripture, active rebellion against God, putting himself into danger type decisions. And so Mike and I agreed as his closest friends we would confront him on it out of genuine love and concern.

We sat down with Steve and had the conversation. What I didn't know until much later is that afterwards Steve and Mike had another conversation where Mike essentially said "this was all Tim's idea, he doesn't want to be your friend anymore and he's telling all of us to do the same." And almost overnight I had lost my two best friends in the world, and basically an entire community of guys we were connected to that I had been walking with for four years. To put it into perspective Mike was Steve's best man, and I wasn't invited to the wedding and haven't talked to him in 8+ years.

Now, I am not the hero or the victim of this story. I was 22. I didn't do a lot of things correctly in how I handled it. But I can see the way this playing itself out in my life has pushed me towards cynicism. I can see the way that my **expectation** of how Steve was going to respond didn't correlate with **reality**. And when that happened it messed with me and how I view relationships.

If I'm not careful, if I'm giving in to the flesh, I can still carry a lot of cynicism towards my relationships and people around me.

- If I have to say something hard to someone, there's this fear in the back of my mind that they'll push me away and run my name through the mud.
- If someone asks me how I'm doing and invites me to open up, there's this wall that wants to go up so quickly.
- Just last week: conflict - they're gonna bail.

That's off. That's the flesh. And that cynicism robs me of so much **relational joy**.

And yet the Lord continues to meet me in the middle of that. To not let me give into my cynicism and my flesh. To put my eyes on Him, to show me over and over again in His Word how much I need the church. And to place my hope ultimately in Him - His care for me, His being a good shepherd to me.

And when I'm doing that by the power of the Spirit it leads to joy. Joy in my relationship to God, joy in my relationships with others. I can let my guard down and experience the joy of giving and receiving love, of knowing and being known by God's people.

Cynicism is an enemy of joy. And we as the people of God are called to stare down our suffering - past, present, and future - lift our eyes up to the one who knows all things, holds all things, is gracious and kind - to place our hope in Him which leads to **JOY**.

We are called to **joy in a time of cynicism**.

Become Like Jesus

And this is a way we become like Jesus. Because this is what Christ does. That's what He's pointing to in **John 16**. This leaving He's about to do is the cross. The suffering He will face.

- Betrayed and handed over to the religious leaders by one of his 12 closest friends.
- Abandoned by the other 11.
- Mocked, insulted, publicly ridiculed and slandered.
- A week earlier the city was celebrating Him as he arrived on a donkey, now they would rather a murderer be released instead of Him.
- Whipped one lash short of death, his back having the flesh completely torn off.
- Nails driven through his hands and his feet. Left to die a humiliating, public death by suffocation on the cross.
- Perfect and righteous in every way, took our sin upon Himself. Experienced the wrath of God, His Father, poured out upon Him. Went to the grave.

All of that. Why??

Hebrews 12:2

2 for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Even the death of Christ, the greatest suffering there ever was, was full of joy.

Christ's joy that he embodied and that He offers to us through the power of His Spirit is not a joy absent from or despite or outside of or ignorant to the pain of life, the pull of cynicism and despair, but one well acquainted with and in the midst of great suffering. That's why he can see us in our suffering and pain and beaten up-ness of life and still call us to joy.

Because He himself also suffered and yet He saw - God is accomplishing something - namely the salvation of the world - **so it's joy.**

We become like Jesus - **joy in a time of cynicism.**

Cultivating Joy

So this week our practices center around staring down the realities of life and cultivating joy.

Grace + Grit.

Romans 15:13 Paul says - **13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.**

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. We can't snap our fingers and get joy. We can't just will ourselves to joy. We must cultivate.

TWO PRACTICES.
Pray. Communion.