

The Secret to a Joyful Life Part 6

“Even though his mother tried her best to teach him about spiritual truths, this man’s life chose instead to follow in the footsteps of his father. Born the son of an English sea captain, he eventually went to sea and spent the next 20 years of his life as a sailor and engaged in a life of drinking, debauchery, and even slave trading.

Here he would regularly buy and select the finest specimens, which he bartered for weapons, ammunition, metal, liquor, trinkets, and even cloth. Then he would load the captives onboard his ship and pack them in for sailing where he proceeded to chain them below decks to prevent suicides.

Then he laid them side by side to save space, row after row, one after another, until the vessel was laden with as many as 600 units of human cargo. Yet when an outbreak of smallpox or dysentery occurred, the stricken were simply cast overboard.

And then the ones that did survive, he traded for sugar and molasses to make more rum. In fact, this man’s whole life was spent indulging himself in the most wicked and based things he could occupy himself with. But all that was to change one stormy night.

One night, there arose such a terrible storm that the ship he was on threatened to sink. Suddenly, this man’s wicked life passed before his eyes and so with deep conviction, he cried out to God to save the ship, but to save his soul. And boy, did God ever deliver!

For the next several years, this man spent his time no longer in wickedness but preparation for the ministry. He learned Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and studied the Scriptures intensively. Soon he was appointed as a Pastor of a Church where he faithfully proclaimed God’s truth and the Good News of Salvation in Jesus Christ for the next 43 years.

And so grateful and thankful was this man to God for saving his soul that he not only became an avid writer, but he became an avid songwriter as well. In fact, maybe you’ve heard of them. His most famous one goes like this, ‘Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!’

The man's name of course was, John Newton.”

Now folks, I don't know about you, but I'd say ol' **John Newton** had a pretty cool life as a Christian, you know what I'm saying? In fact, so much so that I'd say **now that** is A Life Worth Living For, amen? But that's right folks, as we've been seeing, **we've got a problem**. You see, even though God's the same God and we're just as much His children as John Newton is, most Christians read the Bible in one hand and take a look at their life in the other and say, “Man, something's missing here. Something doesn't match, something's not right. What's going on? Why do these people like John Newton get to have an amazing walk with Jesus Christ and here I am keep fumbling around in the dark? I don't have a life worth living for. I've got a life worth giving up!”

Oh, but people, once again, I'm here to tell you this is the great news. It doesn't have to be that way! That kind of life, a life worth living for, like John Newton had, **is available to every to every single Christian!** And that's exactly why we're going to continue in our series entitled, “**A Life Worth Living For.**” And what we're doing is taking a look at **4 different keys** that I believe are absolutely pivotal if we're ever going to have that amazing walk with Christ like John Newton had.

And we've already seen that **first key** to having **A Life Worth Living For** is when you and I finally learn **The Secret to a Worshipful Life** not a cry baby whiny complaining life. And then last **five times** we saw the **second key** was when you and I finally learn **The Secret to a Joyful Life** not a some sour ungrateful grumpy life. And the last **two times** we saw the **first practical way** we maintain the joy of the Lord is **By Our Action**. And there we saw the actions of Prayer, Bible study, Witnessing, and Serving is not just something for we Christians to do, but hello, that's how we maintain the joy of the Lord too!

Oh but that's not all. The **second practical way** we maintain the joy of the Lord is **By Our Appreciation**. You see folks, many times we don't experience the joy of the Lord because we **forget** to do what the song says to do. Count our blessings one by one, then you'll see what the Lord had done. Why? Because one of the best ways to experience the joy of the Lord is to simply **appreciate** what in the world He's done for us!

The **first appreciation** we need to have is this, "**Thank you God for Saving My Soul.**" But don't take my word for it. Let's listen to God's.

1 Peter 1:3-9 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

People of God, the Bible is clear. One surefire way to experience the joy of the Lord is to simply what? To **remind ourselves** that we’ve been saved by the precious Blood of Christ, right? And people, this is precisely our problem. Instead of taking the time to appreciate the fact that God has saved a bunch of wretches like you and me, we say, “Oh yeah, I’m saved, but I wasn’t as bad as he or she.” And somehow this rationalization becomes the excuse for not loving Jesus as much as some other really bad sinner like Pastor Billy of not being full of the joy of the Lord like some wretched person like Jeffrey Dahmer. Wait a second. Could somebody like Jeffrey Dahmer get saved? You better bet the Blood of Christ he can. Let’s take a look at an interview his father had with Larry King.

KING: How old was he? (Speaking of Jeffrey’s death in prison)

Mr. DAHMER: Thirty-three. And for the second time I sat at my desk, totally numb, paralyzed, to get the news.

KING: How was Jeff dealing with prison?

Mr. DAHMER: At first it was extremely hard, but then he – he sent away for 13 books. It's down in Alcahona, California, Institute for Creation Research. I told him about the place. And he bought 13 books that turned him from an evolutionist into a creationist and from there into a Christian. And he started handing out pamphlets and talking with other prisoners and so forth, trying to...

KING: So he was a born again?

MR. DAHMER: He was – he was – I'm sure, in talking with him, it wasn't just a jailhouse conversion. I really believe that.

KING: Because he wasn't going to get out?

MR. DAHMER: No.

KING: We'll be back with our remaining moments, find out some things we might learn from this, after this. (Cut to a commercial)

KING: We're back with our remaining moments. Do we know why he killed?

MR. DAHMER: Well, we don't know why he killed. I really believe there was a chance of finding that out, had he not been murdered and he had been studied extensively.

KING: Could have been inability to interact with people?

MR. DAHMER: That's part. Even the psychiatrist that examined him for the purpose of the trial didn't really know why he did it. But he did tell me why he felt that he could do what he did. Why he felt free to do what he did. He told me that – and this was after reading the books on creation science, he felt that he was up – up from the slime, as he put it. You know, molecules to amoebas to Larry type of a thing, evolution. That there was nothing, no direction by a god. No one to be accountable to. No one to answer to at all.

KING: That's what he believed?

MR. DAHMER: That's what he felt. That's why he felt he could just do whatever he wanted to. That's quite different from knowing the cause.

Now folks, how many of you knew that Jeffrey Dahmer became a Christian before he was killed in prison by another inmate? That's amazing isn't it? In fact, what's equally amazing is the fact that after what he did, you know like homosexuality, cannibalism, murder, etc. that he even could be saved in the first place, right? And here's the point. How many of you would say that after going down that horrible, dark, sinful road that Jeffrey Dahmer was just a little bit glad that cross of Jesus Christ really did have the power to wash away all his sins? Slightly! Now here comes the punch line. Then why aren't you filled with the same joy like Jeffrey Dahmer? Is it because you don't think your sins we're just as grotesque to God as his were? Is it because you don't appreciate the fact that like John Newton that God saved a wretch like you too? Is it because you don't think you were as bad as he or she? People of God, wake up! Haven't you read your Bible? God doesn't categorize sin like you and I? Are you kidding me? Sin is sin and it carries the same penalty.

Romans 3:9-10,23 "What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

People of God, the Bible is clear. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. And that means the sin of homosexuality is just as bad as the sin of pornography. The sin of cannibalism is just as bad as the sin of cussing. And that also means the sin of murder is just as bad as murdering somebody with your mouth! I didn't say that Jesus did!

Matthew 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment."

People of God, when are we going to learn that God doesn't categorize sin like you and I? Sin is sin and it carries the same penalty. The death penalty! And that's precisely why the Bible says Jesus didn't die for His buddies, are you kidding me? The Bible says He died for His enemies!

Romans 5:6 "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."

Romans 5:8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:10 "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

But that's still not all. Little do you realize that your self-proclaimed statement of not being as bad as a Jeffrey Dahmer or a he or she is called self-righteousness. And people, that is one sin that is utterly grotesque in the eyes of God. I didn't say that, God did!

Isaiah 64:6 “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”

People of God, do you have any idea what a filthy rag is? In the Hebrew it literally means, a menstrual rag, a tampon. Therefore, that means that all of our so-called righteousness, and all our statements of not being as bad as somebody else is just as grotesque to God as if we we're to appear before His throne and say, I don't need the blood of Jesus to save me, and instead chuck a bloody tampon before the face of God! You talk about sin! Hello! Not even Jeffrey Dahmer did that one! And that's precisely the point! When you realize that we were not only guilty of sin and even the horrible sin of self-righteousness, but God still went ahead and made a way that we can be saved us anyway, when He didn't have to? Can you believe that? But it gets even better. Listen to these verses.

Ephesians 1:3-4 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

Ephesians 5:25-27 “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

Now wait a second here. We've all fallen short of the glory of God and our sins are just as grotesque as what Jeffrey Dahmer did and that's why

God says Jesus didn't die for His buddies but for sinning, ungodly, enemies.

Then to add insult to injury we commit the sin of self-righteousness by saying we're not as bad as he or she which like casting a tampon before the very throne room of God **and yet** God not only saves us and forgives us, but even to the point where in His eyes we are now blameless and spotless.

Why, if I didn't know better, I'd say that's a great cause for joy! Hello! And that's precisely what this guy was saying.

"Listen to what the Scripture says. He Who had never sinned, He Who knew no sin, on the cross would what? Not only would be punished for sin, more than that, He would become sin for our sakes.

One of my students asked me, 'Who is the most evil man that ever lived? Genghis Khan, Hitler, Mao Tse-Tung, Stalin?' And I could respond, 'I'll tell you who was the most evil man that ever lived. Strange as it may sound, it was the man who never sinned himself. It's Jesus.'

Because on the cross He became what is rotten and what is dirty and what is ugly about every human being. He didn't just get punished there, He literally absorbed into His own body, the filth and the sin and the ugliness of each of us. If Hitler on his deathbed could have said, 'I give my life to Jesus,' at that moment, He would have become everything that is despicable about Adolph Hitler, He would absorb that in His own body. Is that incredible? Is that incredible?

And here's the good news. So much does He cleanse us, like a magnet, He attracts our sins as though they were iron filings and makes Him them own so that on that day He will be able to present us to the Father, I love this, faultless without blemish. Oh, I could just see it. 'Father,' says Jesus, 'I'd like you to meet my friend. The perfect one!' I hope my wife is there.

But that's the truth! He will present me faultless, without blemish, without spot. You say, 'Well what about the sin?' I already told you they're not mine

anymore. He absorbed them and literally made them His own. Oh, that's love! Oh, that's love! That's love."

And yet Christians still have the audacity to say, "Nope! No siree! I ain't got not reason at all to be filled with joy of the Lord. Nope. Nope. Life is horrible. Life is rotten. I ain't got no reason to smile." Are you kidding me? People of God, wake up! I'll say it again. We've all fallen short of the glory of God and our sins are just as grotesque as what Jeffrey Dahmer did and that's why the God says Jesus didn't die for His buddies but for sinning, ungodly, enemies. Then to add insult to injury we commit the sin of self-righteousness by saying we're not as bad as he or she which like casting a tampon before the very throne of God, **and yet** God not only saves us and forgives us, but even to the point where in His eyes we are now blameless and spotless. If that doesn't put a smile on your face, you've got a major problem. In fact, maybe the reason why you don't have what Peter calls the joy of salvation, is because you don't have a genuine salvation! Why? Because the Bible says for the Christian, "Even though you do not see Him now, you are filled with **not just joy** but an inexpressible and glorious joy, **why**, because you are receiving the goal of your faith, that salvation of your souls."

Oh people, don't you see what's going on here? This isn't just about joy. It's about being a witness! You see, the devil does not want you to be

joyful in God. Are you kidding me? He wants you to be mad at God! He wants you to join him by shaking a fist at God by accusing Him saying, “God You’re no good. You don’t know what You’re doing. And I’m going to scream and shout until I get it my way and the things that make me happy!” But I ask you the obvious question, “What kind of a witness is that?” Are you kidding me? Do you really think the world’s that stupid? On the one hand we tell people to accept Jesus because He’s the greatest thing since sliced bread but yet we can even put a smile on our face after all He’s done to save us? People, that’s called a false advertisement and it’s not only sickening to the lost but it’s sickening to God, like this man shares.

“When I travel to give my concerts, I get a view of the modern-day American Christian Church that most people never see. I’ve played in every denominational Church I can think of, and as a result, I’ve discovered what the world hates the most about Christianity: Christians.

It would be okay if they hated us for the right reasons – for our love and our joy and our good deeds. But the problem is, they hate us for our hypocrisy.

We don’t like to admit that the world is tired of hearing us say ‘praise the Lord.’ They’re tired of seeing the bumper stickers without seeing something Christ-like going on inside of the car. They’re tired of our T-shirt philosophy and our rings and our necklaces and our phoniness.

They’re hungry and thirsty for truth. They want to see Christians being Christians, or else to them, we’re just another trip. Are you excited about Jesus? Can other people see the joy of the Lord in your face?

I’ve noticed too few Christians radiate the presence of the Lord in their life. They look like they were baptized in vinegar! They seem to have this image

of Christianity that requires them to have a grim, gray look on their face. It's like they're saying, 'Well, praise God, it's such a *burden* to be a Christian.'

What kind of a testimony is that! If you're happy (and you if you're a redeemed child of God you certainly *ought* to be happy), then you better show it on your face. That's what the world is looking for to see the in the life of the Christian. The world is tired of seeing hypocrites.

If it weren't for *religion* I would have become a Christians two years earlier than I did. As a result, I didn't become a Christian through going to a Church service. I *couldn't* have become a Christian, because I wouldn't be caught dead in a Church. All the Churches I'd seen had been full of hypocrites.

I wanted to know if these supposed 'ambassadors for Jesus' really could *show* me Jesus Christ by the way they lived. I never found one. Rest assured there are a lot of searchers out there, just like I was. They may not tell you they're looking for God, but they are. And when they look at your life, do they see him?

If you're a pew-warmer, I'm not telling you you're doomed. I'm telling you you're dooming others. I'm not telling you you're hell-bound. I'm telling you you're sleeping while others are sinking down into a fiery eternity.

Guys, we're in a sorry mess. The world is sick of it and God is sick of it. It's enough to make Him vomit."

People of God, when are we going to learn that that when we walk around looking like we've been sucking prune juice out the end of a tailpipe that it doesn't just affect us. It affects our witness. It affects people's eternal destinies all around us! **Why?** Because you can't seem to appreciate what in the world God's done for you! He has saved you. He's cleansed you. He has made you spotless and blameless in His sight! Therefore, what more in the

world does He have to do for you to put a smile on your face! Isn't salvation in Him enough? Isn't that enough to fill you with joy?

Oh, but that's still not all. The **second appreciation** we need to have towards God if we're going to be filled with His joy is this, "**Thank You God for Sparing My Soul.**"

Luke 16:19-26 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side.

The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.

But Abraham replied, Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us."

Now folks, from the lips of Jesus, I think it's pretty clear. When a person dies they are going to one of two places. It's either paradise in heaven or eternal torment in hell, and once you're there, you aren't getting out! And so here's the bottom line. I don't care how bad of a day you might have, I don't care how bad of a life you might have, even as a Christian, but there's one surefire way to **instantly be filled with the joy of the Lord**. And no, it's not eating cow, although that's a close second, but it's this. To know that

purely by His grace and mercy that God has not only saved my soul, but that He has spared my soul from eternal destruction in hell. Why if I didn't know better, I'd say that's great cause for joy!

And people, this is precisely our problem. You see, most people today, **even in the Church**, don't even believe there's a devil let alone a hell. It's the silent "H" word in the American Church today. And yet the irony is we tell people all the time to get saved, but if there is no hell, what are they supposed to get saved from? A mediocre life? Jesus came to save people from hell! And hell is one place you never want to be!

- Place of Thirst: (Luke 16)
- Place of Worms: (Mark 9)
- Place of No Return: (Luke 16)
- Place of Remembrance: (Luke 16)
- Place of the Wicked Dead: (Luke 10)
- Place of the Wicked Demons: (2 Peter 2)
- Place of a Bottomless Pit: (Luke 8)
- Place of a Burning Waste Dump: (Matt. 23)
- Place of Outer Darkness: (Matt. 8)
- Place of Fire: (Rev. 20)
- Place of the Lake of Fire: (Rev. 20)
- Place of Eternal Fire: (Matt. 18)
- Place of Unquenchable Fire: (Mark 9)
- Place of Everlasting Punishment: (Matt. 25)
- Place of Eternal Condemnation: (Mark 3)
- Place of Eternal Judgment: (Heb. 6)
- Place of Everlasting Destruction: (2 Thess. 1)
- Place of Weeping & Gnashing of Teeth: (Matt. 13)
- Place of Torment: (Luke 16)
- Place of Eternal Torment: (Rev. 20)

Now folks, maybe it's just me, but I certainly don't want to go to that place, how about you? Slightly! And to think that my sins not only deserve it but by the grace and mercy of God I can be spared from it? Why if I didn't no better, I'd say that's great cause for joy! And yet many people claiming to be Christians still say, "Life is horrible. Life is rotten. I ain't got no reason to smile." Are you kidding me? Do you have any idea how horrible it would be just to spend one day in hell let alone for all eternity?

People of God, wake up! I'll say it again. I don't care how bad of a day you might have, I don't care how bad of a life you might have, but if all there was to salvation was to know that by the grace and mercy of God that we have been spared from eternal destruction in hell, isn't that enough to keep a smile on your face for life!

But it gets even better! You see, **by the grace of God** I'm not only spared from eternal destruction in hell, but I'm set apart to spend eternity in heaven, **and I don't deserve it**. How could you not be joyful about that?

Luke 10:17;20 "The seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."

People of God, it's really not that hard to figure out. If you're here today and you're not experiencing **A Joyful life in Christ** then all you need to do is start **appreciating** what in the world God has done for you. If you

would only daily remind yourself that God has **saved you** from your sins, He has **spared you** from hell, and He's even **set you apart** for heaven, then the Bible says you will be filled with His joy. The choice is yours.

Oh people, don't you see what's going on here? This isn't just about joy. It's about being a witness! You see, the devil does not want you to be joyful in God. Are you kidding me? He wants you to be mad at God! He wants you to join him by shaking a fist at God by accusing Him saying, "God You're no good. You don't know what You're doing. And I'm going to scream and shout until I get it my way and the things that make me happy!" And so I ask you, "What kind of a witness is that?" Do you really think the world is that stupid? On the one hand we tell people to accept Jesus because He's the greatest thing since sliced bread but we can even put a smile on our face after He saved us, cleansed us, and spared us from hell? People that's not only called a false advertisement for Christ, it's a false witness for Christ. But don't take my word for it. Let's listen to the lost!

- The German atheist Friedrich Nietzsche said scornfully about Christians of his day, "I would believe in their salvation if they looked a little more like people who have been saved."
- Phillips Brooks said, "The religion that makes a man look sick certainly won't cure the world."
- Billy Sunday. He said this. "To see some Christians you'd think an essential to being one is to have a face so long you could eat oatmeal out of the end of a gas pipe."

- Oliver Wendell Holmes. He said this. “Hey, I might have entered the ministry if so many Christians didn’t look and act they were undertakers.”
- Mahatma Gandhi was once asked by the missionary E. Stanley Jones “Mr. Ghandi, though you quote the words of Christ often, why is that you appear to so adamantly reject becoming his follower?” To which Ghandi replied, “Oh, I don’t reject your Christ. I love your Christ. It’s just that so many of you Christians are so unlike your Christ.”
- A high school girl said, “I attended your Church service yesterday. During the singing of the hymns I was surprised to note that some of the Church people weren’t singing. Between their sighs and yawns, they just stared into space. The Pastor’s sermon was very interesting, although some members didn’t seem to think so. They looked bored and restless. I said good morning to one couple, but their response was less than cordial. My parents don’t go to Church services. I came alone yesterday hoping to find a place to truly worship. But I’m sorry, but I didn’t find it in your Church and I won’t be back.”

People of God, when are we going to learn that that when we walk around looking like we’ve been oatmeal out the end of a gaspipe that it doesn’t just affect us. It affects people’s eternal destinies all around us!

Why? Because you can’t seem to appreciate what in the world God’s done for you! He has saved you. He’s cleansed you. He has made you spotless and blameless in His sight and you’re not going to hell you’re going to heaven! Therefore, what more in the world does He have to do for you to put a smile on your face! Isn’t sparing you from eternal destruction enough? Is that enough to forever fill you with joy? Oh people, don’t you get it? Don’t

you see what the devil is up to? He's not just trying to rob you of joy, but the lives of those around you He's trying to destroy!

Therefore, if you're here today and you're sick and tired of reading the Bible in one hand and looking at your life and saying, "Man, something's missing here. Something does not compute. What is going on? Then maybe you too need to discover **The Secret to a Joyful Life**. Maybe you too need to stop living life as some ungrateful sad excuse for a Christian life and start living a life that rejoices in God **with your appreciation!** And people, I'm here to tell you, once you do, you're going to discover just like that, you're not only full of the joy of the Lord again, but you just got empowered to finally have that **Life Worth Living For!** Amen?

To find the way to God, to understand the *truth* of God's Word, and to received the gift of eternal *life*, begin by repentance and faith through a prayer like this:

"Dear God, I understand that I have broken Your Law and sinned against You. Please forgive my sins. Thank You that Jesus suffered on the cross in my place. I now place my trust in Him as My Savior and Lord. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."
