

## Joy // Sharing the Joy

Good morning, Grace Chapel family. I hope you've had a wonderful Christmas with family, friends, and loved ones.

We are coming down the home stretch of 2023 and prepare to enter a brand-new year. It's the perfect time to reflect on what God has done in the previous year and what God wants to do in the upcoming year.

As we reflect, maybe there's something He's taught us, a perspective we've gained, a word He's spoken over us, some characteristic he's growing in us.

In our staff meeting on Monday, I shared with our team that among the many things God has done this last year, the most profound among them is that He's taken me into deeper levels of healing and freedom. It's been hard and difficult work this year, but after chipping away at some things through prayer and counseling, I'm coming into this year with a new sense of freedom, joy, and incredibly hopeful and excited about what's ahead. Not only in my own life and my family's, but for our church family. And I am so unbelievably grateful.

And as we look ahead into 2024, it's also an opportunity to consider new beginnings, new habits, new hopes, and new resolutions, things we want to stop doing that are distracting or unhelpful, or things we want to start doing that we know God is inviting us to do.

Allan Schore's definition of joy is, "...being with someone who is happy to be with me." And in the context of our series on joy, there is one practice we haven't talked about yet, but it will multiply not only your joy but other's joy as well.

### ENCOURAGEMENT

When the Bible talks about this practice, it's not talking about complimenting someone's homemade salsa, or their new haircut—although, we certainly can and should do those things.

But biblical encouragement is about seeing and calling out the good in them. It's about building into them God's perspective of them and how He has uniquely wired and gifted them. Or how you see God changing them, growing them, or using them to impact other people's lives.

**Hebrews 3:13, "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today,' so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."**

Notice this is not a suggestion, it's a command. And notice the frequency... daily. The phrase "as long as it's called today" means, while you still have the chance, don't miss an opportunity to encourage somebody.

Why? Encouragement is a guard against sin, discouragement, the hardening of our hearts.

*“Encourage literally came from ‘in courage.’ The courage is put ‘into’ you from outside. Our character and abilities grow through internalizing from others what we do not possess in ourselves.”*

— Dr. Henry Cloud

A few weeks ago, I preached a message on the face of God, and I’ve been studying a number of different books on the intersection of neuroscience, Christianity, and attachment theory. I’m doing my best to connect the dots between what science has discovered in the power of our facial expressions and the Bible’s instruction to seek the face of God, but I’m quoting neuroscientists, and Christian psychologists, people on a whole different intellectual plane than I am.

And after our 11:00am service, the sweetest woman came up to me, and she looked me in the eyes and said, “You’re not expecting this, but I’m a neuroscientist, and ya did good.” I’m thinking, “I’m not a neuroscientist, and that just made my day!” Her encouragement built into me a joy and a courage that I didn’t have before that moment.

**1 Thessalonians 5:11**, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up...” (ESV)

**Ephesians 4:29**, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” (ESV)

**Hebrews 10:24-25**, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (ESV)

We all need encouragement. The Bible commands it, we’re all better for it, but many of us, we’re timid or afraid to do it. When we think about encouraging someone else, it can feel like we’re exposing something about ourselves that makes it easier to be hurt or wounded. So, we let our fears or insecurities get the best of us, we wall ourselves in, and we never say anything at all. Because we’re afraid to be vulnerable, and we view vulnerability as weakness.

This may look like saying, “Oh they probably already know what an impact they’ve made, I don’t need to say anything.” They don’t, and you do. “Well, they probably have other people who encourage them all the time. What difference would it make?” Again, they don’t, and even if they did, it would mean something different to them coming from you.

Or we go to the worst-case scenario. “They’re going to laugh in my face, and tell me they already knew that, and say something like, ‘why would I care what you think?’” I know you think

this sometimes because I do too. But what kind of person is actually going to do that? And if you think that's a real possibility, write them an encouraging note instead.

There's a saying that is a part of the culture at the Narrow Gate Foundation, one of our partner ministries, and a community that God used to change my life. The phrase is this:

**"You are best ministered to when you are ministered through."**

**Proverbs 16:24**, "Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body." (ESV)

**Proverbs 12:25**, "Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad." (ESV)

**Romans 1:11-12**, "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith." (NIV)

Encouragement is like oxygen... you need it to keep going and you really feel it when it's you don't have enough. And the irony is you give encouragement away to others... you're encouraged along with them.

**Proverbs 11:25**, "A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed." (NIV)

As I head into the new year, I'm resolving to be more intentional in encouraging others. To be looking for opportunities to point out the good things that God is doing in and through the people He's placed in my life. My wife, my children, and those I'm walking in biblical community with.

So, here God's invitation to you today:

Set aside a few minutes today to get alone with God, grab a pen and paper, and as you're listening to the Lord, answer these 3 questions.

### **1. Who needs to be encouraged today?**

Truett Cathy was known for asking "How do you know if someone needs encouragement?" He would answer, "If they are breathing!"

Everyone could use it but there might be someone specific that God brings to mind for you that needs an extra dose of encouragement today. Could be a friend, your child or your parent, a sibling, a neighbor, a coworker.

## 2. What circumstances or challenges are they facing right now?

Are they changing jobs or struggling to make ends meet? Are they worn out from additional stress at work? Are they the only Christian in their family and trying to remain gracious and patient in some really challenging relationships? Do they have a child that has walked away from the faith? Have that lost a loved one recently?

Or maybe you don't know challenges, but you know they have a gaggle of children in their home, and it's a little chaotic at times, and they're doing their best to love and serve their family well. But think through who they are and what circumstances they find themselves in.

## 3. What can I affirm and what does God want them to know?

Now, this isn't you saying, "God told me you're supposed to move to Canada!"

Just be encouragement to the person. Think about who they are, who they're becoming, and what impact God is making through their life. It doesn't matter how small the impact it seems to be.

Whether it's written or verbal, the key here is **BE SPECIFIC**.

*"I know you've been walking through a tough season lately, and the other day, I couldn't help but notice how you went out of your way to bless this other person, and you didn't have to do that. It just speaks to the kind of person you are. In fact, God sees the way you love others, and He wants you to know that He is so pleased with you. It's so easy to see the heart of Jesus in you and it matters. Don't give up. You're not alone, and every hard season will cease one day."*

It's not, "I think you're great for no reason in particular." Vague encouragement is only slightly better than no encouragement at all. And if it's just flattery, then it is actually worse.

Here's what I know: As you encourage others, you will be encouraged. As you bring joy to others, you'll be filled with joy. And as we head into 2024, my prayer is that Grace Chapel will continue to grow to have a rich culture of encouragement, and what Paul describes in Ephesians 4 may be true of us.

**Ephesians 4:12-13**, "...that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (NIV)

God bless you, Grace Chapel family, and Happy New Year.