

**Date:** 9/18/2022

**Title:** Week 2 - Discipleship Pathway 2-4 (Grace, Joy, Righteousness)

**Speaker:** Rev. Tony Thomas

### **Introduction**

- Good morning
- Last week I introduced our Discipleship Pathway with the visual of the Psalm 1 tree
  - And so we said we started Week 1 saying we wanted to be a church rooted in the SOIL of the Gospel
    - \* And this week - we'll hit the next 3 movements in the discipleship pathway - grace, joy, righteousness...next week we'll hit "love"
    - \* To use theological terms...last week was justification - but this week is sanctification
- And what I'll say at this point is this - there are a lot of times two extremes we can go into with our view of sanctification - legalism and License
  - 1. Legalism
    - \* Would essentially basically do the 4 parts of the tree - but especially righteousness and love - and say...Christ says "deny yourself", "pick up your cross", "be holy", "serve the Lord" - so do that
      - And often there's a lot of tired, weary, beat up Christians
  - 2. License
    - \* Would say - we believe the Gospel and the Gospel is not just the ABC, but the A-Z of Christian life
      - And that's it - REST in the Gospel...rest is a big buzz word these days
    - \* And so part of me is really sympathetic to that message - because I really think the Gospel, justification is SO KEY to Christian life
    - \* But some people think the ONLY GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is justification - that we're forgiven and reckoned righteous
      - And the words like "fight", pursue God, hunger for God, pursue holiness, love sacrificially
        - Feel like bad words, they feel and sound legalistic
- And so personally - one of my deep burdens in my personal Christian life and then also in ministry has been
  - How does Christian life work with these tensions of license and legalism?
- And so, again this Flourishing Tree Discipleship Pathway is my attempt to take my wrestlings with God's Word and theology and ultimately with the Lord - and put it into something that my hope is that
  - It is faithful to the Word - and that it is Biblically balanced to say the Gospel is both pardon and power - pardon of sin and power to change
- So with that - lets see what comes from the soil of the Gospel - we'll start with grace

### **1. Grace**

- OK so if the Gospel pointed to the tree of the cross
  - Then Grace in this picture is described by the stream of water

- ***Psalm 1:3 - He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.***
  - And one thing we just have to get observationally about this tree is - ITS ALIVE, its bearing fruit, its prospering...NOT BECAUSE of itself...but because there's a stream of living water sustaining it with life
  - There's something OUTSIDE OF IT...that it DID NOT PRODUCE OR CREATE OR CAUSE...that is giving it life
    - \* Now, I want to touch briefly on the connection of Gospel to Grace
      - We can say that the Gospel - all that Christ accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection - is the source from which grace flows to us
      - A physical illustration in the Old Testament is like Moses striking the Rock - the rock we learn in 1 Corinthians is represented from Christ...and when Christ the Rock was struck - as it was on the cross...from him flowed a stream of water, a stream of grace to strengthen and satisfy God's people
- Now, as we consider grace and its reception into our lives - there are two general categories through which we can understand grace and how it comes to us
  - 1. Sovereign grace
  - 2. Means of grace
- **1. Sovereign grace**
  - There's a debate in Christian thought and theology - does grace come to us ultimately by God's sovereignty or by human responsibility?
  - So doctrinally as a church and the position of the PCA is what we'd call Calvinism or some say we're Reformed in our theology...personally I prefer to say that we are a church that believes in the "Doctrines of Grace"
    - \* And what we mean by that is
      - That we believe AT THE BOTTOM...in the MIDDLE...and AT THE END of Christian life
        - The reason we're Christian and the reason ANYTHING happens in our Christian life is ultimately attributed to the sovereign grace of God
          - And again the picture of the stream by the tree shows us that - we're sustained with life with a power OUTSIDE OF US
  - What would be the practical take away?
    - \* And I believe this conviction about sovereign grace of God being ultimate
      - What it does is it creates a type of people filled with absolute humility - that I can't take ANY CREDIT, all credit belongs to God
      - And it creates a people with an absolute hope - that if GOD is for me, then who can be against me?
        - There's a stream of grace coming to me from God and who can stop it? No one...not even me!
        - Think about what courage and hope that gives a Christian...versus the person that believes...that stream of grace might become a trickle or dry up one day... and I might get thrown out and burnt up as a tree if I don't get things together in my life

- That sort of theology creates such anxious, doubtful, insecure Christians
- Transition - so we talked about sovereign grace, lets talk now about means of grace
- **2. Means of grace**
  - OK, so...a ditch we can fall into is to say - well, God is sovereign...He gives grace - I have no responsibilities, right?
    - \* And that would be an unbiblical extreme
  - Consider the illustration of the tree again...to consider the difference between sovereign grace and means of grace
    - \* Now from a sovereign grace perspective - EVEN IF the tree allows weeds and stops putting its roots into the stream...God will pour rain to feed the tree - God remains faithful even when are unfaithful
    - \* BUT from a means of grace perspective - there is REAL growth and grace and health we happens BY putting our roots DEEPER into that stream of through the means of grace of God's Word, prayer, and the Church
  - And so the terminology we use in Reformed circles to describe the human responsibility side of grace is to talk about the "means of grace" - there are God-ordained means by which we can deepen in God's grace - and we'll talk mainly about 3 major means of grace - 1. God's Word, 2. Prayer, and 3. The Church
    - \* 1. Word
      - The reading, listening, meditating of God's Word - is means through which God's grace, truth, strength, love, power flow to us
    - \* 2. Prayer
      - As we pray personally, corporately we are drawing near to God, asking God, receiving strength, peace, power
    - \* 3. Church
      - The Body of Christ where we worship on Sundays, we sing songs, we hear God's Word preached, we take communion, we have discipleship, accountability, and ministry to one another and the world around us
- **3. Q: What are implications of "grace" in our discipleship pathway for Joy of All Nations?**
  - **1. Our ethos is to "Take 10 Looks at Christ, 1 Look at Self"**
    - \* That phrase comes from Robert McCheyne
    - \* And what I mean is this - so far we've talked about Gospel and Grace in our discipleship pathway
      - And so far...we are not really yet talking about what we do as much...we are talking about what Christ has and will do forever for us...and means of grace is really putting ourselves in places to just SEE IT MORE
    - \* THEREFORE, a major ethos for us is to say...the WAY a Christian changes...is not by looking at the mirror and trying to change what you see by human effort
      - NO, we change MAINLY by looking OUTWARD...looking AT CHRIST, AT the Gospel, TO God's sovereign grace, and yes we DO and WILL talk about the means of grace of Word and prayer and church...but the reason we do is NOT because of

some legalistic reason - but because IN THEM we are saying...we want you to SEE GOD

- \* This Scripture to me is one of the most important in my mind of the main way sanctification, transformation happens in the Christian life
  - ***2 Corinthians 3:18 - And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.***
  - Beholding Christ leads to Becoming like Christ
    - And so practically in the preaching, in the Table, in the singing, in our Life Groups - we want to keep putting Christ up and forward and say LOOK to Him...be strengthened BY HIM
- **Transition** - So we talked about grace, next we'll talk about joy

## **2. Joy**

- ***Psalm 1:2 - 2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night***
  - \* I love that the psalmist DOESN'T just tell us - the tree drinks from the stream...and then he becomes strong and then he produces FRUIT for others to eat!
    - But no...it tells us an all-important and I'd say necessary...that He DELIGHTS in the law of the Lord
      - And physically in the tree its unseen from the outside...but there's a holy sap of joy and delight that runs through the tree...which enables it to bear fruit
- Two implications, first **1. Joy in God is essential, not optional to Christian life**
  - And so, one major value that we'll talk about at our church is how joy in Christ is not optional, but essential
    - \* A lot of times we think of Christian life as choose obedience and we choose to love - and we think of Christian life as a pull-up your bootstraps, willpower type of religion
      - Instead of the miracle of Christian life is that God actually changes our desires and our affections
    - \* John Piper says it like this: "Joy is not icing on the cake of decision for Christ, but joy IS the cake"
      - Meaning Joy in Jesus is not optional icing that's nice to have, but no issue if you have no joy in Jesus...NO - joy in Jesus is essential to being a genuinely born again Christian...and essential to growth in holiness and love for others
- **2. Joy in God is essential to Christian life...because it is the essence of how we glorify God**
  - So some people mistakenly think - the reason we pursue joy is because its practically helpful to Christian living - now, yes that is true
  - BUT DEEPER THAN THAT - THE REASON for the pursuit of joy in God is CENTRAL, is because it is connected to the HIGHEST GOAL of the Bible...which is the glory of God
  - So a question becomes...well, if the highest goal or the chief end of man is to glorify God...well, how does man do that? How do we glorify God?
  - Consider this quote from "Desiring God" - John Piper's seminal book on this topic

- \* Piper recalls the Westminster Shorter Catechism - which is actually part of the doctrinal standards of the PCA, our denomination
  - *The old tradition says: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever” ...**(and then Piper deals with some of the ambiguities of that statement)** ...Sometimes you glorify God and sometimes you enjoy Him? Somethings He gets glory, sometimes you get joy? “And” is a very ambiguous word! Just how do these two things relate to each other?*
  - *Evidently, the old theologians didn't think they were talking about two things. They said “chief end”, not “chief ends.” Glorifying God and enjoying Him were one end in their minds, not two.*
- \* Then he goes on to say:
  - *The overriding concern of this book is that in all of life God be glorified the way He Himself appointed. To that end this book aims to persuade you that: “The chief end of man is to glorify God **by** enjoying Him forever.” (18)*
- So the thesis which the Bible presents to us is that man is created to glorify God and the most essential way we glorify God is by enjoying God
  - \* A self-evident truth is that “we glorify what we enjoy”
    - Think about it practically - you and I give glory to the things we enjoy don't we?
      - Personally...I love the Chicago Bears - I'll be watching my Bears tonight in fact!
      - And when I watch...my emotions are stirred, my body jumps, my voice shouts...by what happens with the Bears
        - And I am NOT doing that as a legalist...well, I guess I should be really disciplined and watch the Bears tonight even though I hate doing it
        - NO - my joy in the Bears...glorifies the Bears!
          - And probably I need to repent a little here...I'm not the type that thinks we can't enjoy God's good gifts of life...but if we enjoy them TOO MUCH...some repentance may be in order
- **3. Q: What are implications of “joy” in our discipleship pathway for Joy of All Nations?**
  - **1. We want the “Gospel” and “Grace” to first and foremost produce changed affections for God leading to changed behaviors**
    - \* So, 3 points so far - Gospel, Grace, and Joy - are very much STILL truths to know and believe and taste and experience
      - And we're not “DOING” much yet, right?
        - And I really hope you don't believe its because we don't care much whether in our church we root out sinfulness and immorality
        - And we don't care about sharing the Gospel with our neighbor and reaching people for Christ
    - \* NO - we deeply believe and want to pursue all those things - its just that we believe at our church that...those actions flow from DEEP SPRINGS of Gospel, Grace, and Joy
      - And here's the thing - if we become a church where we side step these truths and do an end-run around it to holiness and love for people

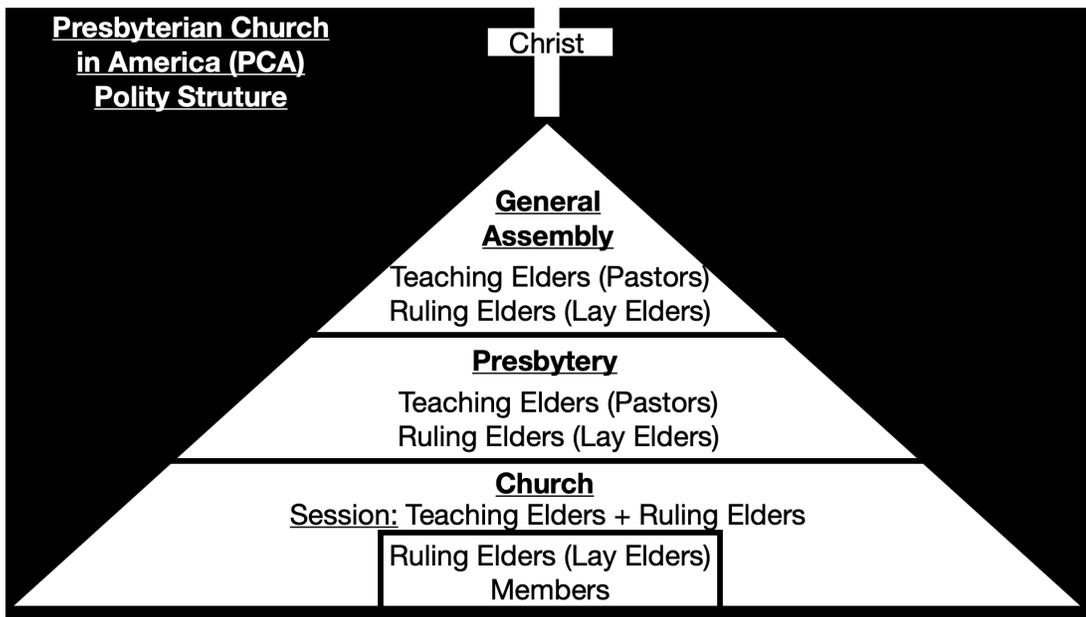
- We'll just end up creating a hardworking, legalistic, but eventually shallow and tired and burnt out people
- \* So in the preaching, in our Life Groups, in our conversations - we want to ask the questions of...not just on the practical level, but at the heart level
  - Are you treasuring and enjoying Jesus these days?
- **Transition** - Lastly, from Gospel to Grace to Joy...we are led to Righteousness

### **3. Righteousness**

- ***Psalm 1:3 - He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.***
  - So we see that the sap of holy delight is flowing through the tree...but is there only an internal joy inside this Christian?
    - \* NO - we see that the Christian is described as a TREE whose leaf DOES NOT wither
      - I believe its describing what Isaiah 61:3 says - that we are to be ***“oaks of righteousness”***
- Now, the previous 3 points - maybe some churches are not as strong in...they may be moralistic and legalistic
  - But, on the flip side - some churches are very strong on being Gospel-centered and grace-based
    - \* YET, there are also some dangerous streams in that movement that were under-emphasizing holiness
  - Yet, the Bible never teaches that grace is an excuse for sin, but grace is BOTH a pardon from sin and also a POWER to produce holiness and righteousness in us
- So, WHILE we are a church rooted in Gospel and Grace and Joy - I also want us to be a church that is PASSIONATE about the pursuit of holiness - that we are actually fighting against sin and we're fighting to pursue a life of holiness
- And so what specifically are we talking about? - We are asking if we are bearing the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives (people of patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control)...we want to have integrity in being people of honesty and integrity...we want to be good stewards our of time by making sure we're productive with the time the Lord's given us, stewards of our finances in being wise and also generous, and stewards of our bodies in caring for the temple of the Holy Spirit...in proper diet, exercise, sleep, rest...and of course protecting and honoring the marriage bed with absolute purity
  - All those things are involved in what it means to be people of righteousness
- **Q: What are implications of “righteousness” in our discipleship pathway for Joy of All Nations?**
  - **1. We will pursue righteousness in community through Discipleship (Life Groups)**
    - \* I plan to spend 2 weeks actually expanding on and talking about Life Groups, so I don't want to get into details here
    - \* But, essentially we want in the discipleship weeks of our Life Groups to be the places where we share vulnerably and are able to challenge and encourage one another towards holiness

● **2. As a PCA Church we believe in church membership and church discipline as a means of grace**

- \* So the PCA and our church polity is something I do want to spend a little more time explaining - one for your understanding, but also because a large part of it relates to it being a means of grace for pursuing holiness in our lives
- \* Now, not every church practices membership and various denominations have various views on church governance - and we can certainly respect other perspectives
- \* But let me take a moment to explain why we value the polity of the PCA - take a look at this diagram



- \* So the PCA is what we call a “Connectional” church
  - The churches are connected to one another and we also have various hierarchies which guide us in governing the church
- \* Let me start at the foundational level - the local church level
  - And we believe the church is made up of members...those who have professed faith in Christ and been baptized and been confirmed in that faith by the Elders of that church...and then the children of believing parents that have been baptized
  - Now amongst those members, we believe Scripture calls the church to be led and governed and taught by Elders - both Ruling and Teaching Elders
    - Ruling Elders are lay elders - it is an office reserved for men according to Scripture and these men are discerned and elected amongst the congregation as godly men of character and able to teach and able to govern the church
    - Teaching Elders are what we typically call “Pastors” - they are called to pastor the church in leading and specifically the ministry of preaching the Word and administering sacraments of baptism and communion is reserved for Teaching Elders

- Now the Session of a church is the body of Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders
  - that together lead the individual church
    - Set the direction
    - But the other key responsibility is they are called by God to enact church discipline for the members of that church
  - So, when we covenant ourselves as members of a church - we are saying - I am a follower of Christ and I am a member of the church...and I am submitting myself to the church and Elders specifically for spiritual care and shepherding
    - And sometimes if I as a member fall into areas of sin that are serious I am submitting to allow the Elders to shepherd and even administer discipline which can be in the form of a formal warning, or could be suspension from the Lord's Table for a period of time, or if a person remains unrepentant of sin...that person could be excommunicated from the church
- \* Now, there is another level above the local church which we call - the presbytery
  - All Teaching Elders are members of the presbytery - in a sense as pastors...the presbytery is the church we belong to
    - So a little strange tidbit of information - I am not a member of Joy of All Nations church technically...I serve as the pastor here...but I am member of Metro Atlanta Presbytery
  - And then Ruling Elders are members of their local church, but certain amount are allowed to be present at presbytery to serve and vote so there is representation from the laity of the church
  - And so one of the functions of presbytery is to provide a place of shepherding for pastors
    - It is needed to have a place where the pastor is not a pastor, but just a fellow brother
    - And not just that, but I am a man under authority - and if I ever fall into a place of sin - it is in the presbytery where I would undergo church discipline - and I can be warned, suspended, removed from ministry, or even excommunicated as well if I am unrepentant of sin
- \* The final level above the presbytery - The General Assembly
  - Once a year we meet and here we have church-wide business and we deal with theological issues and controversies and then also church discipline cases at times that rise and are appealed to the highest court
- **Transition** - Well, I know that was a lot to digest, but I think its really important for you to know and understand and we'll definitely field questions you have
  - ◉ But here's the main walkaway I'd hope from this point - we at JOAN will take holiness really seriously
    - \* And maybe that's scary - but it shouldn't be...we of course would always do that with sensitivity and grace and appropriate confidentiality
    - \* But the main thing to realize is - we're a Body that will be there for one another... sanctification is a community project, not an individual project - and we'll be committed to that as a church...and our polity helps us tremendously with that as well

## Conclusion

- As we wrap up I'll end with this - hopefully many of us have seen the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy
- Its the story of an all-powerful and evil ring that must be destroyed to destroy the work of the evil Sauron
- And of all people, the little hobbit Frodo is tasked with carrying the burden the ring and all its dangers and temptations and have it destroyed
- Over time, Frodo realizes the ring has such tempting power that few can even be near him and so he tries to go the journey alone
- But, he has a faithful friend, Samwise Gamgee, another hobbit...and from the beginning of the journey he was instructed by Gandalf the Wizard that his only job was to stay with and protect Frodo
- But as Frodo tries to leave and go it alone - he gets on a boat trying to leave...but Sam tries to swim the boat even though he doesn't know how to swim and almost drowns trying to stay with Frodo
  - But Frodo saves him and pulls him back onto the boat with him
- And then Sam in an emotional moment says this to Frodo: *"I made a promise, Mr. Frodo. A promise. Don't you leave him, Samwise Gamgee. (Don't you leave him.) And I don't mean to. I don't mean to."*
  - And from then on - its always Frodo and Sam - carrying the burden together
- I think that image is a wonderful picture of what we're called to be as the church of Jesus Christ
  - We carry the burden of our sins and struggles and trials and sufferings of life...and also we carry the weight of making the Gospel known in a world that often doesn't want to hear it
    - \* But the Lord Jesus never intended us to carry these burdens alone...and of course He is with us...but He desires to be with us through one another
- So brothers and sisters, let's make covenant with one another, let's hear the Word of our Savior that says, "Don't you leave him, don't you leave her"...and let's say in loving response..."I don't mean to...I don't mean to."
- Lets pray