1. **Brain Diagnosis**

The last year and a half – living through a global pandemic – has been one of the most draining, disorienting, and disruptive times in most of our lives. The pain of loss cannot be understated, and the effects of stress cannot not be ignored.

Studies have shown that this pandemic is having a significant effect on our brains. Mike Yassa, a neuroscientist from UC Irvine says, *“We’re all walking around with some mild cognitive impairment…based on everything we know about the brain, two of the things that are really good for it are physical activity and novelty. A thing that’s very bad for it is chronic and perpetual stress.”*

The stress, isolation, quarantine, sickness, anxiety, pain, and death have wreaked havoc on our minds.

Depression, substance abuse, and social anxiety has skyrocketed in the last 12 months.

So, the bad news: the last year and a half has negatively affected our brains.

The good news: the Great Physician has a remedy – JOY!

“God designed our brains to run on joy like a car runs on fuel. Our brains desire joy more than any other thing.” – Jim Wilder

Brain science has now discovered that joy is essential to brain development and function. In other words, there are literally neurological benefits to joy. We can, in essence, combat the negative effects that our world is having on our brains by discovering and increasing our joy.

1. **Joy – The Serious Business of Heaven**

**(Ps. 16:11)** *You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is the fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures evermore.*

In God’s presence, joy is full, complete, abundant, and satisfying! That’s such great news! There is abounding joy in God’s presence.

But, what exactly is joy? Why is there so much of it in where God is? And if God is omnipresent and even lives in me through the indwelling Spirit, can I have joy all the time?

C.S. Lewis once wrote that joy was the, “serious business of heaven.” He was communicating how important he believed joy is in the life of the believer. And I agree with Lewis. **Joy is an essential part of Christ-like living.**

After all, Jesus Himself was anointed with the oil of joy more than any human – ever!

**(Heb. 1:9)***, Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness* [wild joy; ecstatic delight] *more than Your companions.*

In other words, Jesus was/is the most joy-filled man to ever live. Beloved, to become more Christ-like means to increasingly walk in joy.

This is a time for the church to grow in her understanding of joy. In this hour, Holy Spirit is highlighting the importance of experiencing the overflowing delight of God’s unspeakable joy.

1. **What Is Joy?**

Joy is defined by Webster as, “the emotion evoked by well-being; a state of happiness; a source or cause of delight.”

The Old Testament word for joy [simchah, from the root samach] carries the meaning of gladness, delight, and pleasure.

In the New Testament, the word joy, [chara, from the root xara] carries the meaning, “to lean towards; be favorably disposed; to show favor.”

In fact, there are over 500 verses in the Bible about God’s gladness, joy, and pleasure. That is more than all the verses in Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, and Philemon combined!

Dr. Allan Schore, an American neuroscientist, beautifully defines joy relationally as, “someone who is happy to see me,” and, “being the sparkle in someone’s eye.” [from The Other Half of Church, Jim Wilder and Michel Hendricks]

Combining Schore’s definition [which proves to be a very biblical definition, as we’ll discover] with the biblical definitions of joy we might say that joy is, “the glad feeling of being the glimmer in someone else’s eye.” In other words, **joy is experiencing the pleasure of knowing that someone knows you, loves you, and enjoys interacting with you.**

The Light of God’s Countenance

**(Numbers 6:24-26) 24** *The Lord bless you and keep you;* **25** *The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you;* **26** *The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.*

**(Ps. 4:6)** *There are many who say, “Who will show us any good?” Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us.*

This phrase, “shine the light of God’s countenance” – or face – is used over and over in Scripture. It is a bit unfortunate that the English translations make it sound so fancy, lofty, and conceptual. This Hebrew idiom literally means, “the look of delight in God’s face.”

In other words, “Let us experience Your cheerful face.”

When we ask for the light of God’s face to shine upon us, we are quite literally asking that we would experience the joyful look on His face and know that He is really glad to be with us.

 **(Ps. 17:8)** *Keep me as the apple of your eye…*

Beloved, God made you to be the recipient of His delight, pleasure, and joy. In fact, the Psalm 16:11 verse is more accurately translated, “there is abundance of joy in Your face.”

**These 3 truths – that God knows us, loves us, and enjoys interacting with us – provide the believer with an unshakable joy-foundation**. Living a joy-filled life is God’s design for every believer, and we are called to be joy-bringers to those around us.

1. **The Joy of Being Known**

The first foundation stone of a joy-filled life is: God knows me.

In Luke chapter 10 Jesus sent 70 of His followers two by two into the surrounding cities to preach the Kingdom of God and heal the sick.

When they return, they are brimming with stories about their successful “mission” trip.

**(Lk. 10:17)** *Then the seventy returned with joy saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.”*

After hearing the many rip-roaring stories, Jesus enters into the excitement with them by telling His own story.

 **(Lk. 10:18)** *And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”*

Perhaps in their jubilation the 70 were preoccupied with trying to one-up the other, so Jesus had to play the ultimate trump card to bring some perspective.

Then Jesus brings it all home be making this very important statement about their misplaced joy.

**(Lk. 10:19-20) 19** *Behold I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.* **20** *Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*

Jesus is telling His followers not to root their joy in the outer results of their ministry, but instead, root their joy in the fact that the Father knows their name. Beloved, **the blessed only Sovereign, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, omnipotent, everlasting, all-powerful, Creator of the universe KNOWS YOU!**

He knows you better than you know yourself.

**(Lk. 12:6-7)****6** *Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God.* **7** *But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

**(Jer. 1:5)** *Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.*

You were formed and fashioned by the perfect mind of a creative genius. He knows every detail of our life – your hidden struggles, your private pains, your insecurities, your broken pieces.

**(Ps. 56:8)** [Lord] *You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book?*

**(Ps. 139:2-4)****2** *You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off.* **3** *You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways.* **4** *For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.*

Jesus says it this way in the book of John

 **(Jn. 10:14)** *14 I am the good shepherd; and I know my sheep, and am known by My own.*

**(Jn. 10:27)** *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*

Take joy, beloved! God knows you. He sees you. You are not outside of His gaze! You are not beyond His care! You are fully known and are still fully accepted in Christ.

1. **The Joy of Being Loved**

**(Jn. 15:9-11)****9** *As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.* **10** *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love…***11** *These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.*

Jesus loves us with the same love the Father loves Him – perfect love. He then says that He tells us these things so that our joy may be full! **A joy-filled life emanates from an abiding heart. When our lives are firmly planted in the Father’s divine affection, our joy germinates, grows, and blooms.**

Not only does joy come from knowing that God knows me, but that He knows me and still loves me.

**(Ps. 139:1-18)****1** *O Lord, You have searched me and known me…***13** *For you formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb…***15** *My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret…***17***How precious also are Your thought towards [about] me, O God! How great is the sum of them!* **18** *If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You.*

Let that sink in for just a moment – God knows you. He knows the good, the bad, and the ugly. He not only knows your warts and weaknesses, but also your unimaginable worth. This should cause you to tremble with unspeakable joy knowing that when God has thoughts about you, they are thoughts of how precious, prized, and uniquely valuable you are. This is truth. This is the Word of God.

Let me declare this truth over you right now: **GOD LOVES YOU, EVEN LIKES YOU, EVEN IN YOUR BROKENESS.**

The God who knows us through and through is the same God that says,

**(Jer. 31:3)** *…Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.*

**(I Jn. 4:19)** *We love Him because He first loved us.*

It’s time for us to agree with the voice of Love!

<Sally Fields clip>

**(Song 4:9)** *You have ravished my heart…you have ravished my heart with one glance of your eyes…*

1. **The Joy of Being Enjoyed**

Not only is our joy rooted in the fact that God knows us and loves us, but that He actually enjoys interacting with us.

**(Jn. 3:29,30)***,* **29** *He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.*  **30** *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

John the Baptist says that his joy if fulfilled [filled to fulness] because he’s heard the voice of the Bridegroom! **Interacting with the loving voice of the Bridegroom God was the foundation of his joy.**

**John was unmoved my decrease because he had been SO moved by the voice of Love**. John says, “He talks to me about how He feels about me, therefore I am filled with joy.

In John 3, John was in a season of decrease. In modern terms, his ministry was dwindling in numbers; his offerings were down; his influence in the community was waning. There was another “pastor” in town named Jesus. Many people were leaving John’s congregation to go to Jesus’ church.

It was in this context that John says, “this joy of mine is fulfilled.” Joy that’s rooted in the glad-hearted, pleasure-filled God who enjoys interacting with us, strengthens us to stand in the midst of seasons of decrease. In other words, **experiencing God’s joyful interaction produced joy in John, which strengthened him in a time of shaking.**

God’s joy strengthens us.

 **(Neh. 8:10)** *…for the joy of the Lord is our strength.*

Notice this verse didn’t say that joy itself strengthens us. Nor does it say that *our* joy strengthens us. It says that the Lord’s joy strengthens us – the joy OF the Lord.

We are strengthened to stand in seasons of increase or decrease, feast or famine, the good times and the bad, when we rest in the assurance that we are fully known, fully loved, and fully enjoyed by God.

1. **Divine Brain Surgery**

As I mentioned earlier, this season that we’re in has resulted in a sort of brain damage. But God, in His infinite wisdom has a remedy – JOY!

Neurologists have discovered that joy literally feeds and strengthens our brains.

Neurologically speaking, joy:

 -helps us regulate our emotions

 -helps us endure struggles and pain

 -empowers us to love more deeply

 -helps solidify our identity

 -strengthens bonds in relationships

 -help inform our decisions/behavior

So, if our brains are running on empty, it’s time to fuel up on joy. Let us feed our minds with the eternal truths that God knows us, loves us, and enjoys us.

Then let us walk in such a way that fuels others’ joy as well. Let us be intentional about expressing to others with our faces, our words, and our actions that we know them, we love them, and we are really happy to see them.

As Jim Wilder writes in his book, The Other Half of Church, *“When our bodies can feel the glory of Jesus’ face shining on us, our joy capacity grows. As our goy grows, our faces shin on each other, which makes other people feel joy. When we throw in some intentional practices to magnify joy, we are on the way to creating a high-joy community.”*

When our hearts are filled with joy, our face show it. When others see it in our face, their joy increases and their faces begins to show it.

**(Prov. 15:13)** *A joyful heart makes a cheerful face…*

Who knew the old song, “If you’re happy and you know it”, was so biblically and scientifically sound?