

FAMILY FOCUS

JANUARY 2021

REKINDLE-GETTING FIRED UP FOR A NEW YEAR: JOY

BY REV. DR. JONATHAN LOVELADY

⁹ Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. ¹⁰ Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." ¹¹ The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve." ¹² Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them. (Nehemiah 8:9-12 NIV)

As I prayed about the start of this year, especially the first sermon series, God communicated to me one word, "rekindle." God's direction comes in a variety of forms for me. It can be a scripture, a quote, a conversation, an idea or a combination of these things. Anytime I sense a direction from God, I will pursue and challenge it. Sometimes it unfolds like a series of "breadcrumbs" (depending on your age, you will either think of *Hansel and Gretel* or *I, Robot*) and these breadcrumbs lead me to the place I need to be. This year was unusual in that I did not follow breadcrumbs, instead this singular word became the anchor. Everything I did led me back to "rekindle." I think after this past year, there is a need to rekindle some important things in our lives. I worry that the difficulty of 2020 has quenched the flames of goodness and has allowed the destructive flames of frustration, anger, cynicism, and despair to consume too much time and energy. This is one of the consequences of hardship; it drains our emotional resources and strains our spiritual strength to the breaking point.

One of the realities that we need to rekindle in 2021 is joy. It seems to me there has been little joy in 2020. It was overshadowed by all of the discouraging images, news, and events. In our struggle to find joy, we often confuse it with happiness. There is a distinction between happiness

and joy. Happiness is momentary and circumstantial. Joy is enduring and timeless. C. S. Lewis, the great Christian writer of the twentieth century, said "Joy is never in our power but pleasure often is." This is precisely the problem. In good times we become accustomed to a diet of circumstantial happiness, but in difficult times the diet of happiness does not supply substantial strength for weathering the storm. How does anyone rekindle their joy?

I doubt that you have read the book of Nehemiah recently. It is really an amazing book in many ways. Nehemiah was the cupbearer for the King of Persia who was the ruler of the First Persian Empire. I realize being a servant of the King sounds insignificant to us, but it gave Nehemiah access and relationship with the most powerful person in this vast empire. He took a great risk and asked for the King's help to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and The Temple. This may not sound risky, but had this request offended the King, the penalty would have been death. God granted Nehemiah favor in the eyes of the King to rebuild the walls and Temple.

When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, the people of the city followed his lead. They heard the call of God and answered it with energy and effort. This reconstruction was met with opposition from the surrounding provincial leaders. At one

point, these people were working with a sword in one hand and a tool in the other. These people were putting in their best effort, despite clouds of fear and danger. They completed the walls of Jerusalem in 52 days and rebuilt The Temple. As I look at this sequence of events, there are parallels for us. We too have been working under clouds of fear and uncertainty. When we commit ourselves to serve God's purpose, this is always the beginning of joy. Our mission may not be rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, but it can be offering a cup of water in the name of Jesus. (Matthew 10:42) Our mission may not be large, but that does not make it unimportant. This is a critical ember to rekindle the flame of joy. Seek to be God's servant. Do things out of a commitment to follow Christ and you will find blessings and help, even in the middle of fear and uncertainty.

I think we would be well served to memorize the last part of verse 10, and let it become our basic response for 2021: *"Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is our strength."* The scene that lies behind this verse is the rededication of The Temple. As part of the celebration, there is a reading of the Law (possibly just the book of Deuteronomy). As the Law is read, the people realize how far they have fallen. Despite their apparent success in rebuilding, they were overwhelmed because they did not know how they could ever be God's people. It seems they had climbed the mountain only to find another, greater mountain to climb and they were exhausted! I am sure that Nehemiah and the priests reminded them that they had two things that were causes for joy: access and relationship to the Almighty God and King of the Universe.

I want this verse to remind us that we too have access and relationship with our Savior who wants to give us the gift of joy. This does not mean that our circumstances will be easy. The easy circumstances will only give us a diet of happiness which will not weather the storm. Jesus says: *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love...I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."* (John 15:9, 11, NIV)

During a very difficult time in my ministry in Florence, Alabama, I was wondering if ministry was the place I needed to be. The problems were many and there was no sense of joy. A couple of friends invited me to go for a bike ride with them on a Saturday morning. They were training for a

triathlon and I would ride with them occasionally. We left just after dawn, from the city of Florence and rode into the countryside. It was the spring and as we left the city, the sky was clear. As we topped a hill at the most distant point in our ride, we saw a line of thunderstorm clouds. We could see the bright streaks of lightning and hear the distant thunder. The hill was just before a valley which gave us a great view. We realized that we could not outrun this storm, and it looked severe enough that we could not ride through it. As we rode down the hill, we saw a small church just off to our left, less than a mile ahead. We knew this was the only place we could wait out the storm. As I rode towards the church, despite the apparent danger and fear, I was filled with an unexplainable joy. It was so contrary to the circumstances. Just as we made it to the church, the storm arrived and it was fierce. Fortunately, the church was open because the people were preparing for a special event happening the next day. They welcomed us into their sanctuary to wait for the storm to pass. Afterwards, as we left the church, my fear and exhaustion with ministry had vanished. My circumstances had not changed, but now the flame of joy was burning bright in my heart!

As I have talked about this ride over the years, some people would relate the presence of joy to an "exercise high." When we exercise it releases chemicals into our body that can result in a sense of euphoria. While I know this happens, since this moment I have ridden hundreds of miles and trained for marathons, but I have never again experienced this kind of joy. I think this was simply the joy that the people at this celebration experienced; *"Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."* My circumstances would not get easier, instead they became more difficult. This joy saw me through those circumstances, and I am still reminded of it to this very day, because it was the joy of the Lord.

Remember this one verse in 2021 and let it rekindle the warmth of God's joy in your life!
Amen.

In Christ,



HOPE LOOKING FORWARD

by Lisa Reinhard

Many years ago, when I was going through a particularly rough period, I came up with an idea of what the word HOPE stood for. It was Hold On Past Everything. It might not be original, I've never really checked, but it worked for me. Just when I felt like I couldn't take one more step forward, I'd remember to hold on past everything, and it gave me the wherewithal to keep going. Being a lover of poetry, I also recalled Emily Dickinson's immortal words:

*"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -*

Hope never ends. It is as constant as the One who made it. Job says during his hellacious struggles, *"Though He slay me, yet I will hope in Him."* (Job 13:15) When I discovered that statement during another hard time, it spoke loudly to my soul. Psalm 42 uses these words, even repeating them: *"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God."* (verses 5 and 11 and Psalm 43: 5) What these words from Job and the Psalms say to me is that when you truly believe that God is working all things together for your good, you are able to keep hope alive within you even when your circumstances point to despair. Take this COVID pandemic. I am the first to admit that I was petrified to go back to brick and mortar teaching this past fall. Everything in me screamed, "NO! Don't go! Run. Fast," but deep inside me was the

belief that God would take care of me. When I teach, I believe I am doing the Lord's work. I know I am exactly where He wants me to be and that I am in His care. Does that mean I can throw caution to the wind and forge ahead yelling yippee? Not hardly. It means that I take every precaution: I wear my mask, I sanitize everything in my classroom, I wash my hands every chance I get, and refrain from touching my face. It means I stand at least six feet from my nearest student whenever possible. What it **doesn't** mean is that I let it paralyze me, shut me down, interfere with my teaching. I have been pleasantly surprised at how going back to my students has energized me, pumped me full of life, brought me the deep satisfaction I've grown used to. School is rolling along, at breakneck speed and we're all doing okay. I'm amazed, and yet, should I be? *"O Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty. He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants. He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved."* (Psalm 104: 1-4) [On a side note, is it any wonder I love the Psalms so much? My grandmother was so sure I was going to be a boy that my parents had the name David all picked out for me and had to scramble for a girl's name when I surprised everyone!]

Hope holds promise. We hope things

will get better. We hope our children will be happy. Paul says this about hope in the letter to the Romans: *"But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."* (Romans 8: 24-25). Hope requires faith. Because we have faith, then we can hope. In Hebrews 11:1, we are told, *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."* That, we find, is extremely hard for many people. Easier to rely on things that we can touch and see, rather than what is invisible to the eye, but we are warned in I Timothy 6:17, *"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."*

As we enter this hopeful year of 2021 (many people say, "At LAST! I thought 2020 would **never** end!") let our hearts be filled with the hope of God's promises. *"For the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath."* (Deuteronomy 4:31) In the book of Hebrews in chapter 6, starting with verse 13, the unidentified author reminds us of this oath by God and that Jesus came

"For the Lord your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath."

Deuteronomy 4:31

and died to fulfill that promise. It states, *"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."* (Hebrews 6:19). Use this hope, firm and secure, to anchor your life, your fears, and your worries in the fresh new year of 2021.

SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES @ 10 AM

MEN'S CLASS

Location: Session Room This class is studying the Genesis. Contact Bill Mentz @ wmentz@gmail.com or John Otterson @ otterpjk@att.net for more information.

WOMEN'S CLASS

Location: Purple Door Room 23 This class is studying Get Out of Your Head, by Jennie Allen. Contact Mashell Lingle @ mlingle3@gmail.com for more information.

NOLAN/PAJIC CLASS

Location: Adult Bible study room in Kindergarten This class is studying Genesis. Contact Jim Nolan @ james.nolan@gray-robinson.com or Curry Pajic @ curry@pajic.com for more information.

KIRK HOUSE CLASS

Location: Kirk House and on Zoom This class is studying Bible Prophecy and Jesus: What the Prophets Said, What the Israelites/Rabbis Understood/Taught, How/When Jesus Fulfilled Prophecy Specifically/Perfectly. Contact Kevin & Wendi Hunger @ wbirdh@comcast.net for more information.

FRIENDSHIP FELLOWSHIP BIBLE CLASS

Location: Chapel This class is studying *The Epistle of Paul, written to all the Christians at Philippi and to all believers everywhere. A message to Be Joyful in Christ.* Contact Diane McFadden @ bmdm56@gmail.com for more information.

LITTLE FLOCK CLASS

Location: New Nursery Pre-K through 1st and 2nd through 5th Contact Mollie Lackey @ mollie@sjpcjax.org for more information.

YOUTH CLASS

Location: Loft Contact Bekah Wilson @ bekah@sjpcjax.org for more information.

SMALL GROUPS

WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY *Location: Fellowship Hall on the first Monday of the month @10 AM* This class is studying *1 and 2 Thessalonians, Living Faithfully in View of Christ's Coming* developed by John MacArthur. Contact Diane McFadden @ bmdm56@gmail.com for more information.

TUESDAY MEN'S PRAYER BREAKFAST *Location: Fellowship Hall on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month @6 AM* Contact John Otterson @ otterpjk@att.net for more information.

WEDNESDAY MEN'S GROUP *Location: Maple Street Biscuit Company on Wednesdays @6 AM* This group is studying Major Lessons from the Minor Prophets. Contact Trip Stanly @ wastanly@hotmail.com for more information.

STEPHEN MINISTRIES *Location: Kirk House on Thursdays @6 PM* Contact Lynne Turpin @ la-turp@bellsouth.net for more information.

MOM'S GROUP *Location: Fellowship Hall Thursdays @9 AM* Contact Pamela Smith @ barbregirl3@aol.com or Lauren McLaughlin @ lmclaughlin7@yahoo.com for more information.

YOUTH GROUP *Location: Loft on Sundays @5 PM* The group is middle and high school combined. Contact Bekah Wilson @ bekah@sjpcjax.org for more information.

YOUTHNEWS

With Bekah Wilson



This past month with the youth was a busy one! From our special Guys vs. Girls Night, D-Life Wednesdays, and annual Christmas lock-in, along with weekly Sunday School, Youth Group, and High-School Bible Study we definitely ended 2020 with a bang!

December started off with an exciting and action-filled youth "war" for our Guys vs. Girls Night. Our students ran all throughout the church campus, sporting nerf guns, pool noodles, dodgeballs, and other various "weapons." They hid behind makeshift shields and random obstacles in an attempt to safely and swiftly "steal" bases from their opposing team. This reminded them that while life's "battles" can get messy, **God has a master plan for our lives and we can trust Him to help guide us and strengthen us through it all.** For our Sunday night Youth Group and Tuesday night High School Bible Study, we completed both of our series for the year. For our Youth Group, we finished the series "God Is", leaving us with solid reminders of different attributes of God and how He affects us in our daily lives. Our

High School Bible Study, Pastor Jon's teachings on the Reformation and Church history left our students with a greater knowledge of why, we as a church, are the way we are today.

D-Life's December event was an entertaining one as always. With go-pros and the special prop of some pool noodles in hand, our students spread out around the church in groups with the goal to make the most creative commercial involving our prop. From freshly manicured nails, kayak paddles, to ninja swords, the youths' commercials definitely did not disappoint.

As if all of that wasn't enough fun, we ended 2020 with our annual Christmas lock-in. Because of the pandemic, we revised how we typically run this night's events. For our progressive dinner, we usually drive our students to different church members' homes for appetizers, dinner, and dessert. However, in 2020's version we skipped around to various on-campus sites to get our meals. That night we held our



annual white elephant gift exchange, night-time game of secret church, and breakfast made by Pastor Jon and SJPC's lovely John Otterson. For new traditions, we added a few extra games including "reindeer hunting," a gingerbread house making competition, and a super fun Christmas photo booth.

Our youth have had a crazy year. From a pandemic that kept us distant from each other, to a surprising leadership change, we couldn't have predicted what was to come of this year. Through all our changes, we are so thankful that we have stayed strong, and are taking advantage of the opportunities we have to safely come together and grow in our relationships with God and each other. We are looking forward to a great year in 2021, whatever craziness, fun, and growth that may bring.



GET YOUR POPCORN AND TALENTS READY FOR THE

D-LIFE TALENT SHOW

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13TH 6PM-8PM

Email Bekah @
bekah@sjpcjax.org
with your talent.
today!



JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Lauren	Danson	January 02
Henry	Kerr	January 02
Jodi	Johnson	January 04
Margo	Austin	January 06
Harper	Wright	January 07
Linda	Edwards	January 08
Angie	Garland	January 10
Debra	Grant	January 10
Elizabeth	Keating	January 10
Anne	Nasrallah	January 10
Joe	Schmidt	January 10
Tyler	Burnette	January 11
Susan	Crainshaw	January 12
Josephine	Jones	January 12
Bruce	Jackson	January 13
Bill	McFadden	January 13
Brandon	Terhune	January 13
Daniel	Turpin	January 14
Ellie Jean	Lackey	January 19
Nancy	Doering	January 20
Bill	Knoop	January 20
Margaret	Alexander	January 21
Jesse	Bozeman	January 23
Matt	McLaughlin	January 23
Sarah	Hubbard	January 24
Cullen	Johnson	January 25
Cameron	Whyrick	January 26
Mathew	Tanner	January 27
Theresa	Turner	January 27
Jimmy	Hawkins	January 29
Andrew	Gaines	January 30
Jada	McGhee	January 30
Robert	George	January 31
Joyce	Hershey	January 31
Lesley	Hull	January 31
Lude	Stokes	January 31
Sarah S.	Walker	January 31

PRAYER REQUESTS

**-SUE CULPEPPER
-DORIS CASS
-AIREN WALKER
-VIRGINIA STAATS
-MARYLEA RUSSELL
-RUTH LAVENDER
-LIZ MCKEAN
-MARY SAMFORD
-POLLY ANN ANDERSON
-FRAN MILES
-JUDY DAILEY
-KATIE MARPLE
-WAYNE HOLLOWAY
-MAL MAY
-GAYLE TOLBERT
-GINNY WHITNER
-SHIRLEY DOUGLAS
-LIZ KEATING**

To add birthdays and prayer requests
please email the church office @
sjpc@sjpcjax.org.



CONNECT WITH CHRIST, CHURCH & COMMUNITY

IN-PERSON WORSHIP SUNDAYS

9 AM & 11 AM

LIVE STREAMING @ WWW.SJPCJAX.ORG

4275 Herschel Street

Jacksonville, Florida 32210

(904)384-4501

Office Hours: 9-4 Mon-Thursday