

## A Joy Learned

### A Study of Psalm 126

Characteristic of Completeness: Joy

Big Idea: Joy is in the middle.

Related Scriptures: Hosea 6:3; Romans 8:18, 28; 1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18; 9:6; 12:9; Galatians 6:7-10; Ephesians 1:1-14; Hebrews 13:5; James 5:7-8

Introduction:

- A. (Play video, “Joy” here. It should begin automatically when the PowerPoint is started.)
- B. Where do you find joy? Where do you find joy in the midst of life’s hardships? Where do you find joy when you feel parched and dry inside? Where do you find joy in the midst of a long loneliness? Where do you find joy in crisis? Where do you find joy when the daily grind has ground you down? Where do you find joy with cancer? Where do you find joy staring at the casket of the one you loved? Where do you find joy when you’re signing the papers for legal separation or divorce? Where do you find joy in betrayal or drudgery?

Noted author, ► Eugene Peterson observes where our American culture tries to find joy. He says,

*We try to get it through entertainment. We pay someone to make jokes, tell stories, perform dramatic actions, sing songs. ► We buy the vitality of another’s imagination to divert and enliven our own poor lives. ► The enormous entertainment industry in America is a sign of the deception of joy in our culture. ► Society is a bored, gluttonous king employing a court jester to divert it after an indulgent meal. ► But that kind of joy never penetrates our lives, never changes our basic constitution. ► The effects are extremely temporary—a few minutes, a few hours, a few days at most. When we run out of money, the joy trickles away. ► We cannot make ourselves joyful. Joy cannot be commanded, purchased or arranged.<sup>1</sup>*

Our Characteristic of Completeness for the week ► is joy. Specifically, I want to talk about where we can find true, lasting joy.

- C. We’re going to be studying ► Psalm 126 today. It’s a psalm that tells us something about where we can find joy. You’ll notice a heading or superscription at the beginning, where Psalm 126 is ► called, “a song of ascents.”

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 2d ed., (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 96-97.

The consensus of biblical scholarship is that the superscriptions on the psalms were probably not part of the original compositions, but were added soon after to reflect how the Jewish community used and categorized the psalms.<sup>2</sup>

Psalms 120-134 are fifteen ancient psalms or songs of ascents (Psalms 120-134) that were traditionally sung by Hebrew pilgrims as they ascended the road to Jerusalem to observe one of three annual worship festivals each year.<sup>3</sup>

The ascent to Jerusalem was a special break in the routine of Hebrew life for the purpose of worship and gaining fresh perspective.<sup>4</sup> And the lyrics of Psalm 126 were a reminder of some things that the people needed to remember to maintain their joy in everyday life. What were they to remember? Where do you find joy?

- D. Psalm 126 is only six verses long. In the middle of the Psalm, in the last part of Verse 3, it says,

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 126:3**  
 . . . we are filled with joy.

So, here we have the Jewish people who are joyful at the time this was written. The Hebrew word for ► “joy” here means pretty much the same thing as our English word, “joy.” According to one Hebrew lexicon, this joy, “denotes being glad or joyful with the whole disposition as indicated by its association with the heart (cf. Exodus 4:14; Psalm 19:8 ; 104:15; 105:3), the soul (Psalm 86:4); and with the lighting up of the eyes (Proverbs 15:30).”<sup>5</sup>

But the circumstances in which the psalmist and his people find themselves are not what you might expect. The people are in the midst of a dry spot in their lives. In ► Verse 4, the psalmist says,

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 126:4**  
 Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negev.

The psalmist is asking God for restoration—a restoration likened to streams in the Negev. Somehow their situation is like the Negev. Well, what is the ► Negev?

<sup>2</sup> Leslie McFall, “The Evidence for a Logical Arrangement of the Psalter,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 62 (Fall 2000): 227.

<sup>3</sup> Willem, A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1991), 769, and James L. Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, ed. James L. Mays, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 385-386.

<sup>4</sup> Peterson, 19.

<sup>5</sup> . Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. “יָשַׁח,” (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), hereinafter referred to as TWOT.

The background on the screen is actually ► photo of the Negev today.<sup>6</sup> The Negev is a vast desert south of Israel, veined with waterless ravines in the long dry season. When rain comes, primarily in winter, the ravines channel rushing streams of water.<sup>7</sup> Apparently, the people were in a hard, dry season, desperately in need of some refreshment. The name, ► Negev, means “dry” and “parched.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, scholars generally categorize this psalm as a psalm of communal complaint or national lament.<sup>9</sup> They’re in trouble.

The psalmist is calling out to God for restoration—like the restoration of streams in the Negev after a long dry season.

Well, what’s the problem? Why are the people so parched and dry? What are their circumstances?

Evidence strongly suggests that these people are recently returned to Jerusalem and to other cities in the land of Judah from 70 years of Babylonian captivity. You see, the Bible tells us that, from 605-586 B.C., Babylon repeatedly invaded the land of Judah, with Jerusalem its capital city. By the end of this period, all of the most influential Israelites had been either killed or captured and exiled to Babylon, including Daniel and Ezekiel. In the process, Jerusalem had been largely destroyed; only the poor were left behind in the rubble.<sup>10</sup>

This was not one of those seemingly random bad things that happen for no discernible reason, like cancer or Hurricane Katrina. You see, for hundreds of years, the people of Judah had forsaken God. God had sent prophet after prophet to warn these people of their sin and to urge them to repent—prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah. The people refused. So God followed through on what He said He would do. According to the covenant between God and the Israelites given through Moses many hundreds of years before, in the face of stubborn rebellion, God brought destruction and exile.<sup>11</sup>

After some 70 years in Babylonian exile, the Israelites returned to Jerusalem—to a city that had been destroyed. I imagine that the return of the Israelites to Jerusalem must have been something like the return of modern Hurricane Katrina evacuees to their homes New Orleans. Only worse. The place had been destroyed, and what made it

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<sup>6</sup> Available from [http://www.barth.com/israel/Negev/pages/ASC\\_1893.htm](http://www.barth.com/israel/Negev/pages/ASC_1893.htm); Internet; accessed 14 March 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150, Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 21, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 171.

<sup>8</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, ed. D.J. Wiseman, (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 439.

<sup>9</sup> Allen, 172, and Donald Williams, *Psalms 73-150, Mastering the Old Testament*, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, (Dallas, London, Vancouver, Melbourne: Word Publishing, 1987), 422.

<sup>10</sup> 2 Kings 24-25; 2 Chronicles 36:1f; Jeremiah 39:1f; Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel’s History*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970, 1986), 315-328; Kem Oberholtzer, “1-2 Kings Analytical” class notes for BI 517-1 and II Kings, 27.

<sup>11</sup> See Deuteronomy 28:1f; Leviticus 26:14-39.

worse is that the Israelites knew that they—or at least their predecessors—had brought this on themselves.

What would it have been like for those who returned? We can only imagine. After 70 years, some of those originally captured and deported were among those who returned. They remembered Jerusalem in her glory days—the splendor of the temple, the vibrancy of that city on a hill. Perhaps during the exile, the first generation reminisced about the glory of Jerusalem to their children and grandchildren born in Babylon who had never set foot in the Promised Land.

Upon their release from captivity, they traveled about 800 miles through the desert from Babylon back to Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> And now, having returned, they stare at the rubble that is weathered, baked, and overgrown with weeds from 70 years of neglect. I can almost see a first-generation exile taking his extended family to the spot in Jerusalem where his home used to be, finding it barely recognizable and experiencing a fresh wave of shame. And then going to where the magnificent temple once stood and finding it in ruins. “We walked and rode donkeys for 800 miles for this? Look at the mess we’ve made of our lives.”

Archaeology confirms the devastation of Jerusalem. One archaeologist says,

*A rapid review of the archaeological evidence from Judah of the sixth century B.C.E. thus gives a picture wholly in keeping with the [biblical] literary evidence: thorough destruction . . . a great decrease in population due to slaughter, deportation, pestilence, flight and the resultant complete collapse of the economy . . .*<sup>13</sup>

The people had returned to a ghost town. This is the time when Psalm 126 was probably written. No wonder the psalmist, who is recounting the return, cries out . . .

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 126:4**

Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negev.

And yet, the psalmist still ► says,

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 126:3**

. . . we are filled with joy.

What’s up with that? How can these people be joyful? Where did they find joy?

<sup>12</sup> *Logos Bible Atlas 1.0b*, (Logos Research Systems, 1994, 1999); the distance from Addon (cited as one of the Babylonian cities of exile in Nehemiah 7:61) to Jerusalem is 793 miles as the crow flies.

<sup>13</sup> S. Weinberg, *Post-Exilic Palestine: An Archaeological Report* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1969), 6-7, quoted by Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Archaeological Backgrounds of the Exilic and Postexilic Era, Part 3: The Archaeological Background of Ezra,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 137 (July 1980): 197.

- E. Here's the ► big idea: Joy is in the middle. Did you get that? Joy is in the middle. Let me explain.

Joy is preceded by the history of God's provision in the past. And joy is followed by the hope of God's promises in the future. So joy is in the middle.

The position of joy in the Psalm corroborates this. The declaration of joy is in the middle, at the end of Verse 3. In the verses before this middle point, the *past* tense is used to describe what God has already done. In the verses after this middle point, the *future* tense is used to describe the hope of what God *will* do. So the joy of God's people—their joy and ours—is standing in the middle. You stand in the middle and look back to remember what God has already done for you in the past. You stand in the middle and look ahead to the hope of what God will do for you in the future.

This is in sharp contrast to the world's idea of joy. You see, most people think joy is in the moment, not in the middle. The moment is defined by current circumstances. According to the world's way of thinking, if things are going well for me at the moment, then I'm joyful. If things aren't going too well, then I'm not so joyful. The world's kind of joy is dictated by whatever my circumstances happen to be at the moment.

But true joy—the joy of God's people—is undaunted by current circumstances. We can have joy in the Negev because true joy is not in the moment; it's in the middle. One moment might be the pits. It might be the pits through no fault of our own. Or it might be the pits because we've stumbled badly and made a colossal mess of things. But when we realize that moment is just in the middle—in the middle of great things God has done for us in the past and great things He's going to do for us in the future—we can be joyful.

Let's ► see how the psalmist recognizes that he's in the middle in Psalm 126.

- I. First, joy is in the middle, looking back on the great things God has done in the *past*. Listen to the ► first three verses, where the psalmist is in the middle, looking back. He says,

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 126:**

<sup>1</sup> . . . When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed.

<sup>2</sup> Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

<sup>3</sup> The LORD has done great things for us . . .

- A. Verse 1 speaks of the return of the people of Israel from Babylonian ► captivity.<sup>14</sup> ► Zion is the name of the mountain on which Jerusalem is situated.<sup>15</sup>

Their liberation from captivity was so good, it was like a ► dream come true; they could hardly believe it. Verse 2 describes a divine grace so good that it prompts ► laughter and singing. It even prompted the unbelieving nations to marvel; they ► said, “the Lord has done great things for them.” In Verse 3, the Israelites remember a key ingredient for ► joy: “The Lord has done great things for us.” In the midst of a personal Negev, they looked back to see what God had done for them.

- B. What exactly had God done for them? We could certainly catalog a long list of things God had done for His people, but fresh in their minds was their miraculous liberation from captivity.

In 539 B.C., after 70 years of captivity in Babylon, Persia attacked and conquered Babylon.<sup>16</sup> Within a year, the then Persian ruler named Cyrus, clearly moved by God, gave permission for the Israelites to return to their homeland.<sup>17</sup> And remarkably, Cyrus didn’t just give them permission; he also gave them provisions. He returned all the valuables that had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem 70 years before, and he agreed to fund the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem from his own royal treasury! Clearly, God had done a great thing for His people.

But how did they know it was God and not some random good fortune? Well, the prophet Jeremiah—the same one who had warned the people before the exile—he prophesied that Babylon would come against the land of Judah to destroy it. He also said that after 70 years, God would punish the king of Babylon.<sup>18</sup> So, in retrospect, the Israelites could clearly see that God is a God who keeps His promises to His people. God is true to His word. *God* had done great things.

- C. What has God done for you? Maybe you are in a personal Negev. Maybe you are feeling dry and parched. A very big part of recognizing that joy is in the middle is looking back at what God has done for you.

This is my challenge to you. Take ► a piece of paper and draw a vertical line down the middle. Label the line, ► “joy.” To the left of the line, write ► this heading: “Great things God has done for me in the past.” Below that, list all the great things you can think of. Every day this week, spend some time reflecting and adding to the list, giving thanks for what God has done for you. Things on the list will fall into at least two general categories.

<sup>14</sup> Allen, 173-174; Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, rev. by David O'Brien, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 321-349.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, 423.

<sup>16</sup> Wood, 331.

<sup>17</sup> Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5; Wood, 334.

<sup>18</sup> Jeremiah 25:1-12.

1. First, there are some great things God has done for every believer in Jesus Christ. Ephesians, Chapter 1 is one of the best places in the Bible to review what God has done for us. I encourage you to go to the Moon Valley website and look back at the transcripts for the first four sermons from Ephesians.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps you could review one a day this week and pull from the transcripts items for your joy list. Here's a very brief summary of what you'll find.

By virtue of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our sins, God Himself has packed our personal bag with every gift, ► every blessing, every benefit we need. We ► are chosen. We ► are holy. We ► are blameless. We ► are loved. We ► are adopted. We ► are pleasing to God. We ► are redeemed. We ► are forgiven. We ► are enlightened. We ► are heirs. We ► are sealed. We ► are secure. And we ► are important. These things are true regardless of our circumstances. We know because God is a God who keeps His promises to His people. God is true to His word. God had done great things.

2. Also on the list will be things that are unique to you. I've been working on my own list this week, and it includes my loving wife, my believing children, my fulfilling job, and the list goes on.

The first part of recognizing that joy is in the middle involves looking back on what God has done in the past. Now, I want to talk about the second part.

- II. The second part of recognizing that joy is in the middle involves looking ahead to God's promises for the *future*. That's what the psalmist does in ► Verses 5-6. He says,

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 126:**

<sup>5</sup> Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.

<sup>6</sup> He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

These verses represent the response of God to the lament of the people.<sup>20</sup> In Verse 4, the psalmist has represented the people in crying out to God in their personal Negev. Now in Verses 5 and 6, the psalmist represents God to the people, reassuring them about their future, with the figurative language of the farm.

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<sup>19</sup> These are available at [http://www.moonvalleybible.org/sermons/2005-07-10\\_Ephesians\\_01\\_01-03\\_Christian\\_Life\\_Transcript.doc](http://www.moonvalleybible.org/sermons/2005-07-10_Ephesians_01_01-03_Christian_Life_Transcript.doc); [http://www.moonvalleybible.org/sermons/2005-07-17\\_Ephesians\\_01\\_04-06\\_Trinity\\_Transcript.doc](http://www.moonvalleybible.org/sermons/2005-07-17_Ephesians_01_04-06_Trinity_Transcript.doc); [http://www.moonvalleybible.org/sermons/2005-07-24\\_Ephesians\\_01\\_07-12\\_Trinity\\_Transcript.doc](http://www.moonvalleybible.org/sermons/2005-07-24_Ephesians_01_07-12_Trinity_Transcript.doc); [http://www.moonvalleybible.org/sermons/2005-07-31\\_Ephesians\\_01\\_13-14\\_Trinity\\_Transcript.doc](http://www.moonvalleybible.org/sermons/2005-07-31_Ephesians_01_13-14_Trinity_Transcript.doc).

<sup>20</sup> Elmer A. Leslie, *The Psalms*, (New York, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1959), 127.

- A. These verses speak of the reality of pain and sorrow in life. The dry seasons of sowing can involve ► “tears” and “weeping.” The verb translated, ► “goes out” is in a form that emphasizes the certainty of it.<sup>21</sup> There *will* be dry times in this life.
- B. In the midst of dry times, God expects us to keep ► sowing—to keep trusting, to keep working at what you know is right, to keep dying to your selfish desires.<sup>22</sup> The work of cultivation and planting and weeding and waiting represents faith in a future outcome orchestrated by a God who wants to bless us, even when we’ve made a mess of things.

Earlier I mentioned a covenant between God and the Israelites delivered through Moses—the covenant which stipulates destruction and exile in the face of Israelite rebellion. In Leviticus 26:44, as part of this same covenant, God says,

<sup>NIV</sup> **Leviticus 26:44** Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them . . .

- C. What does the future hold for believers? God says His people will one day ► “reap” such a great harvest that they will be “carrying sheaves” and singing “songs of joy.” Sheaves are bundles of harvested crops such as wheat or rye. God’s grace will produce a great future harvest for us.
1. The transition from the plural, ► “those who sow” in Verse 5, to the singular, “he who goes” in Verse 6 suggests that the assurance of reaping is applied to each member of God’s forever family.<sup>23</sup>
  2. The form of the verb translated, ► “will return” once again emphasizes certainty.<sup>24</sup>
  3. This joy does not sugarcoat the difficulties of the present. Joy trusts in God’s promise of a bright future; but it is not blind, superficial optimism. Superficial optimism fixates on how you want the details of your life to go now and tries to wish them into being. Joy trusts God for the ultimate outcome, and accepts what He gives now, whatever it is.

Admiral Jim Stockdale “was the highest ranking United States military officer in the ‘Hanoi Hilton’ prisoner-of-war camp during the height of the Vietnam War.”<sup>25</sup> He as tortured over twenty times during the 8 years he was

<sup>21</sup> The certainty is stressed by the doubling of the verb as noted by Kidner, 440, and explained by Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*, 2d. ed., (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1976, reprinted 1978, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1992), 37: “To indicate emphasis, the absolute infinitive precedes the finite form of the same root.”

<sup>22</sup> VanGemeren, 792.

<sup>23</sup> Herbert Lockyer, Sr., *Psalms: A Devotional Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 648.

<sup>24</sup> Kidner, 440, and Ronald J. Williams, 37.

<sup>25</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 83.

imprisoned. When asked how he got through it, Stockdale said, “I never lost faith in the end of the story.”<sup>26</sup>

When asked, “Who didn’t make it out,” Stockdale said,

*Oh, that’s easy. The optimists. . . . they were the ones who said, ‘We’re going to be out by Christmas.’ And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they’d say, ‘We’re going to be out by Easter.’ And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart.*

*This is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.*<sup>27</sup>

What are the brutal facts about your current reality? In his book, *Shattered Dreams*, Larry Crabb speaks of the joy that is to be found in God, but he doesn’t dodge the brutal facts of current reality. He says,

*Live long enough, and dreams important to you will shatter. Some will remain shattered. . . .*

*The divorce [may] go through, the cancer [may] claim a loved one’s life, the Alzheimer’s [may] not be arrested (let alone reversed) by the latest drug. The broken friendship [may] not be restored despite your best efforts to reconcile. Your marriage [may] not be satisfying no matter how many counselors you consult or seminars you attend. You singleness [may] be an intolerable burden. The budding ministry [may] never materialize. The lost income [may] not be replaced by money pouring out of heaven’s windows.*<sup>28</sup>

True joy is not blind optimism about some improvement in our current circumstances that God never promised; it is grounded in the promises of God for the future.

4. Well, what are the promises of God for our future? What can we count on as believers?

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>28</sup> Larry Crabb, *Shattered Dreams*, (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 22-23.

Here's the second half of my challenge to you. Take the ► piece of paper I mentioned earlier—the one that has line labeled “joy” down the middle. Now write this heading at the top of ► the right column: Great things God will do for me in the future.” Below that, list all the great things you can think of. Every day this week, spend some time reflecting and adding to the list, giving thanks for what God will do for you in the future. Let me help you get started on the list.

- a. First we have the assurance that, having believed in Jesus for eternal life, we'll never be disowned by God; He will ► never forsake us, no matter how dry our Negev gets. In Hebrews 13:5, God says,

<sup>NIV</sup> **Hebrews 13:5** . . . “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

- b. Second, we have the promise that ► God's grace will be sufficient for us to face any circumstance in this life. In the midst of the Apostle Paul's hardships, God says in 2 Corinthians 12:9,

<sup>NIV</sup> **2 Corinthians 12:9** . . . “My grace is sufficient for you . . .”

- c. Third, we have the promise that our ► every effort to follow the Lord will be worthwhile. It will make a difference. It is not wasted, even if nobody sees but God. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:58,

<sup>NIV</sup> **1 Corinthians 15:58** . . . Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

- d. Fourth, we have the assurance that, in God's economy, ► no suffering or pain is ever wasted. Romans 8:28 says,

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 8:28** And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Crabb explains,

*Our shattered dreams are never random. They are always a piece in a larger puzzle, a chapter in a larger story. Pain is a tragedy. But it's never only a*

*tragedy. For the Christian, it's always a necessary mile on the long journey to joy.<sup>29</sup>*

- e. Fifth, we have the promise of eternal life, which will culminate ► in heaven. Let me give you a quick, 29-item list I borrowed which provides a biblical description of heaven:

1. *The place where God dwells*
2. *A place of righteousness*
3. *We can worship God there*
4. *No hunger*
5. *No thirst*
6. *No tears*
7. *No death*
8. *No sadness*
9. *No pain*
10. *No hard labor*
11. *Always be with the Lord*
12. *Paradise*
13. *Beautiful*
14. *Magnificent*
15. *Nothing unclean*
16. *God will be our light*
17. *Lots of places to dwell (it took God six days to make this world; Christ has been working on heaven for almost two thousand years. It should be nice)*
18. *No sex (. . . everything in heaven is better than that . . .)*
19. *New and perfect bodies*
20. *Every spiritual blessing is [fully realized]*
21. *Physical descriptions of heaven speak of all the things that are the ultimate in beauty to us (gold, silver, crystal, precious jewels)*
22. *[We] retain our present personality with the sin nature removed*
23. *No age (Somehow every person will be distinctive, just as they are now, except they will not appear young or old)*
24. *We'll be served by angels*
25. *We'll be served by Christ (the most staggering conclusion of all)*
26. *Not limited by time*
27. *In charge of many things*

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<sup>29</sup> Crabb, 4.

28 . . . *we're going to worship, reign, and serve proportionate to what we have done here on this earth with the time, talent, and treasure we've been given*

29. *In heaven we'll do all the good things we do here, only we'll do them perfectly.*<sup>30</sup>

f. Finally, we have the promise that our diligent efforts to follow hard after God, even in dryness, will one day be ► rewarded when we stand before Christ. One scholar notes that our rewards will come in at least four areas.<sup>31</sup> I don't have time to develop each of these areas this morning. I will simply list the areas of reward and provide references in the transcript for you to do further study on your own.

- 1) First, we will be rewarded with ► greater responsibility in the kingdom of heaven, according to our faithfulness on earth (Luke 16:10-12; 19:17-19).
- 2) Second, we will be rewarded with a greater capacity for reflecting and displaying ► the glory of God after this life, according to our faithfulness on earth (Daniel 12:2-3; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:40-41; 2 Corinthians 3:13-18).
- 3) Third, we will be rewarded with deeper and richer ► relationships with people in heaven, according to our faithfulness on earth (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; 4:13-18; Luke 16:9).
- 4) Fourth, we will be rewarded with a greater capacity to know and ► enjoy God in heaven, according to our faithfulness on earth (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Philippians 3:20-21; 2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Now, look back at the list we started. That is a bright future!

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 126:5**

Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.

<sup>6</sup> He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

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<sup>30</sup> Jay Carty, *Playing with Fire*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Yes! Ministries, 1994), 93-95. On Item 20, Carty originally wrote, "Every spiritual blessing is ours." According to Ephesians 1:3, this is true the moment we believe in Jesus for eternal life. So I took the liberty of editing his statement to emphasize our full realization of this fact in heaven.

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 139-141.

Conclusion:

Where do we find joy? Joy is in the middle, looking back on the great things God has done for us in the past, and looking ahead to the great things God will do for us in the future.

I challenge to work on your joy list this week, so that in the midst of our Negev, we can join the psalmist in singing,

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 126:3**

. . . we are filled with joy.

(As soon as I am finished speaking, ► play video, “Joy 2.”)