

Understanding and taking joy in our redemption comes through a knowledge of the interplay between the necessity of God and the rebellion against God. What this means, put simply, is that we can't live with God, and we can't live without Him. One of the many roles that God fulfills in our lives is that He provides the standard that judges us. This standard must be personal, because we are persons, allowing Him to judge every aspect of our being. Why do we need a standard to judge us? Because without one, we could not hope to have any joy. Joy comes to us as we approach a goal, and the goal is provided by the standard. For example, you practice a piece of music over and over again because there exists a standard of good music. Your hope for achieving that standard provides the motivation for your actions, and the attainment of that standard brings joy. You also experience joy in being a good parent, a good friend, and a good worker. Without the standard, and being judged positively by the standard, there can be no joy. However, because of our sinfulness, we are, if we are being honest, rarely judged positively by the standard. The joy in redemption comes in the freedom from negative judgment that it brings, as well as the welcoming into positive judgment that it conveys. This week, we will work on finding joy in our redemption.

Day 1

Mastery, Purpose, & Autonomy

It is said that research has concluded that we desire three things above all else. These three things are mastery, autonomy, and purpose. We desire mastery because we are human beings, and eternity is in our hearts. We desire to manifest and incorporate the divine into our hearts, to be judged positively by perfection itself. You can see this desire in children, who practice sports or instruments from a young age simply because something drives them to pursue excellence, and the approach of the goal provides energy to the pursuit. The next thing we desire is purpose, because we want that mastery to mean something, to have some kind of importance in the world. This desire is so strong that we often create it when it is not there naturally. You can see this most clearly in interests or pursuits that most of the world does not care about. When I was a kid, I had a slot-car track that used electricity to power little cars around a set course. I had no idea that grown men spent a great deal of time and money racing these toy cars. Well, a few do, anyway. At the places where these men gather, a seriousness about the task that outsiders find baffling will prevail. Those who are accomplished will walk with an heir of importance, and be treated with reverence and jealousy by those who pursue slot-car glory, but find it elusive. This need to imbue a deserved sense of importance to our actions hints at our need for purpose, to have our mastery mean something in the grand scheme of the eternal. Finally, we have a need for autonomy, that is, a kind of authority. We find this need for autonomy alluring as a way to deal with our failures in the first two areas. Because we very rarely achieve mastery, and because we often see through our attempts to bring purpose and meaning to our pursuits, we need autonomy to soften the blow of finding our lives disappointing to ourselves. This need for autonomy allows us to redefine our failures into success, and our meaningless accomplishments into true glory. If you doubt this, talk to someone who achieved success in small town high school athletics. You know what I mean. The first step in enjoying our redemption is the most difficult. Leave the need for autonomy, and face the truth of your existence as a sinner. Only those who have really felt the need for a redeemer will take joy in redemption.

Verses: Colossians 3:1, Matthew 28:18, Luke 10:19

Prayer Topics: Focus, Progress, Excellence

Day 2

The Discomfort of Learning

Most kids dislike school because learning is painful. Of those few kids who liked school, many liked the social aspect, not the learning. Of the very few who actually liked the learning, congratulations, you are a rare breed. Why is learning so painful? Because we are sinful people mired in failure. Seem harsh? Try something out of your wheelhouse this week. If you are not musical, try an instrument. If you are not handy, try a home improvement project, something a little involved where skill matters. The first thing you will find is that things that seem easy, are not. The guy that runs the smarter every day YouTube channel made a bike that steered backward, and was shocked at how long it took to learn to ride it, and how stupid it made him feel to learn. Learning makes us discard the fig leaf of assumed competence. We usually look at some skill and think that we could do it if we really wanted to, and when we try, we find out that not only are we worse at it than we thought, but we also find that we are lazier and more prone to frustration than we thought. The whole process of learning is painfully revealing. We find in learning, shame, embarrassment, and feelings of inadequacy. We can also find joy in redemption, if we are willing to look. The process of learning lays many unpleasant things bare in our lives, but it hints at many more ugly things. If we take the one part of excellence that we are trying to learn and multiply it by all that exists, we get a rather depressing look at our state. However, if we take seriously the fact that we have been redeemed by Christ, we understand that Jesus lived a perfect life, and that life is credited to our account. We can experience the painful revelation of our state that learning brings to our attention, and rather than recoil we can rejoice. All of this failure has been taken from me, transferred to Jesus on the cross, so that I can face who I am with a grateful heart. Because of this experience, I can embrace learning, and can pray as David did for God to examine my heart, to show me all that is less than perfect in who I am, so that the Holy Spirit can begin the process of turning my life into a reflection of the perfect life of Christ.

Verses: 1 John 1:9, Proverbs 24:16, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Prayer Topics: Failure, Perseverance, Perfection

Day 3

Faith in the Calling

Have you ever felt like giving up at something? Whether it was playing the piano, or figuring out how to have good relationships, life can be very frustrating. Most of the time, we enter our teenage years with great enthusiasm as we think of all that we will become in our life. By the time we reach middle age, however, much of that enthusiasm is gone. We start to understand that we may never achieve what we started out pursuing, and sometimes we start to believe we are not able to transform our lives into the glory we once thought possible. When Adam and Eve were created in the garden, we are told that God made them in His image. This does not imply a certain set of capabilities, but a certain relationship. Man was made to reflect God, and because God is perfect this is a high calling. Everybody has a threshold for frustration, and some have a higher threshold than others. Even though these thresholds for frustration vary, everyone has a point where they give up. I was watching a survival show some time ago where the goal was to live unsupported in the wilderness for as long as possible, and even though most movies make living off the land seem romantic, it is a never-ending battle with frustration. The contestants would spend hours fishing, with no success or reward, day after day. Eventually, all the contestants save one would make the call, giving up on the endeavor. In life, we cannot live with joy if we have given up on the calling of reflecting God's glory, and yet none of us is strong enough to deal with our failures forever, we all reach the point of making the call and giving up. This looks different for different people, with some doing it dramatically and others doing it quietly, living out the rest of their lives with a certain stoic sadness. When you really have faith in the redemption that Christ offers, you find your faith in the calling restored. Knowing that Christ's perfect life has been traded for your life of

sin gives us hope and joy in the pursuit of the calling. One day, my life will look just like Christ's. One day, my life will manifest the glory of my calling. One day, I will be welcomed into perfection. Until then, I pursue it with hope and joy.

Verses: 2 Timothy 1:9, 1 Peter 2:9, Romans 11:29

Prayer Topics: Expectation, Reality, Promise

Day 4

Faith in the Process

Why do I live in a world where life is so difficult? I know that some don't believe life is difficult, but I am talking to people who have their eyes open. Why does progress come through so much difficulty, so much trial and error? Why must I practice something over and over again before I can get it right, and even then, I still make mistakes and get it wrong? I often wonder about this when I watch gymnasts on TV. I think about the hours in the gym, the difficulty in learning the moves, and how even after all of that there is still much failure. I think of it now, after years of typing I still make so many mistakes. How is that possible, and why did God make a world like this? I believe it is because our corruption runs deeper than we know, and our faith is smaller than we imagine. What would happen if we could be perfect at everything the first time we tried? We would never really value the glory of perfection, and it must be valued above all things, *because it is above all things*. I might be tempted to think that I do value it, but then why am I complaining about how difficult it is to achieve? In fact, why wouldn't the thing that is the highest good, the thing that has the highest value, have the highest cost? Could it be any other way? The problem, then, is not the cost of glory but my lack of willingness to pay it. I lack the love of glory necessary to love God fully, and I need to work through that, and that is what God has me do. Why would God make a world like this? What other kind of world could there be? What kind of world could exist where the greatest value did not come with the highest cost? It would be a nonsense world. Jesus' redemption shows us that God is willing to pay the highest cost for the highest good. In order to uphold his own character, Jesus dies so that all of the promises, all of the attributes, all of the glory of God is upheld, and we find salvation and life. Have faith in the process—Jesus did.

Verses: 2 Timothy 2:5, 2 John 1:8, Revelation 3:11

Prayer Topics: Trust, Patience, Submission

Day 5

Faith in Redemption

Did Jesus really die for you? Many people mentally ascent to that proposition without really living out the implications of its truth. Did Jesus, God in the flesh, creator of the universe, really die to redeem you? What would your life look like if that were something you really had confidence in? What is holding you back from that life? What could you start today in order to remove the obstacles to your life of radical faith in redemption?

Verses: 1 John 4:10, Isaiah 53:5, Hebrews 9:28

Prayer Topics: Restitution, Forgiveness, Gratitude