

June 17, 2012 – Father's Day
The Summer of Joy: "Love the Struggle"
1 Timothy 6:12; Psalms 118: 15

1 Timothy 6:12 NKJV
Fight the good fight of faith.

Psalms 118:15 NLT
Songs of joy and victory are sung in the camp of the godly. The strong right arm of the LORD has done glorious things!

How are you doing in our experiment with joy? Here's what I'm finding out, it's a battle to be joyful always. Why is it so hard?

Here's a much used term in Christian circles: *Spiritual Warfare*. What exactly does that mean? Paul says in Ephesians 6:11 (NLT), "Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil." There's a war going on and we're in it...whether we like it or not. So, we must be dressed and ready for battle at all times. Our enemy never rests, so the moment we do the battle is lost.

Not that we should be preoccupied with evil. Jesus had sent out His disciples and "they joyfully reported to Him, 'Lord, even the demons obey us when we use your name!'"

When they said this Jesus encouraged them; but then He calmed them down by reminding them of the true basis for joy when He said to them in Luke 10:20, "**But don't rejoice because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered in heaven.**" Joy rests in the simple fact that our "names are written in heaven." The joy that comes from this is what gives us the strength to keep up the fight to attack and defeat the enemy.

Jesus taught in Mark 3:27, "**Who is powerful enough to enter the house of a strong man like Satan and plunder his goods? Only someone even stronger—someone who could tie him up and then plunder his house.**" We have to plunder the enemy's house *before* he plunders ours. (This reminds me of the little boy who was asked if he knew the Golden Rule and he said, "Yes, do unto others before they do unto you!" But we're talking about dealing with the devil not with other human beings.). The first thing the devil robs is our joy, for when he succeeds in doing that everything else goes with it. However, the reverse is also true; if Satan can't steal our joy, neither can he steal anything else of value.

If you want joy, you will have to fight for it; and you will have to fight deliberately and aggressively and fiercely. Waging war in Christ's name is a privilege and it is linked to our joy. One of the keys to overcoming in spiritual warfare is to love the struggle. Hey,

if spiritual warfare is not an option but a necessity anyway, we might as well love the struggle; For the joy is not only in winning but it is the fight itself. To be fully alive is to plow right into life acknowledging all of it, horrors included.

Love the Struggle: The secret of winning at spiritual warfare is to love it. We must love the struggle in the same way athletes love their sport, even though the preparation and competition can be fierce and brutal they have great love and enthusiasm for their sport. The part they love the most is the competition, the battle itself, the adrenaline rush, the smell of victory. They don't dread game day, they can't wait for game day. In the same way, when it comes to spiritual warfare, you must not fear, but you must love the battle itself. Hey, the devils love what their doing, don't they? Yes, they love attacking us. But don't fear, don't you know we have the edge, in Christ we are motivated to fight with a pure and perfect love, and as 1 John 4:18 NIV tells us, "Perfect love drives out fear."

The problem is we don't like struggles, and the devil knows it. The reason we don't win the battles of life is because far from loving war, we want to avoid it at all costs. The thing is you can be certain that there will be trouble, we may not confront the powers of darkness directly, but God will do this through us, and we must be ready. More than ready we should be eager to face our enemies. Does an athlete want to avoid difficult competition? No they are eager for a good battle. We should be also, you know why? Because we know that through it the Kingdom of God will be advanced. Not that we love trouble like the devil does, but we know the opportunity in it. We love the struggle for three reasons:

1. Because we fight knowing that Christ is our Commander and we are fighting in His Name and for His sake.
2. We love the struggle because it's necessary; there is evil in the world and it must be combated.
3. Because of the ultimate end or goal, which is peace.

Jesus wants us to fight alongside Him, to rise up out of our misery, take up arms against our foe, and experience the joy of victory. Christ knows that rising up against the enemy of our soul is the only way we can be free. He'll supply the weapons, the courage, the power, and everything else, but there is one thing only we can supply and that is the will to fight. Do you love God's will? Then you must will to fight. Jesus did. He gave His life in battle. One if not the most important key to joy is this: Love the struggle. To do that we must overcome fear for joy depends on overcoming our fears. Then when against all odds we get a taste of victory we will surely rejoice.

During WWII my dad often served his army unit as a scout - sent ahead to gather information about the enemy's position and movement. On one occasion he went up ahead and climbed a tree to get a better look. To his shock Nazi soldiers were right near by, so close that he could not get down from the tree in time to avoid being seen by the enemy. However, he was able to let his unit know where the enemy was. Soon the enemy forces were right below him. He feared that they might see or hear him, and he

wondered if his strength could hold out as he clung to that tree. He stay in that tree into the night watching the enemy below him being attacked by his unit. On the one hand he would never forget the horror of seeing these men being slaughtered, yet silently cheering his unit on. He could taste victory, and eventually, as the men from his unit came into the area having defeated the Nazi unit, he knew it was safe to come down from the tree.

How do you think he felt when he saw his fellow soldiers? How do you think they felt when they saw him? What were the odds that he'd still be alive? They celebrated. The taste of victory is essential to joy. But to be victorious there must be an opponent; and the greater the odds the greater the potential for joy.

What attitude do you bring to your present battles? Can you taste the glory to be won through them? Let's talk about ...

Attitude:

2 Corinthians 4:17

For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!

It makes all the difference how you see your troubles. Do you see that they are small and won't last very long, or do you view them as heavy, and unsolvable? Problems are only heavy if you're not sure you can beat them. Joy knows it's on the winning side. That's why we can rejoice even in the midst of trouble. If any struggle was permanent or unconquerable joy would be impossible, but we have not lost a fight yet, have we? In Franklin Roosevelt's famous words, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." You must not have a defeatist attitude, rather you must have a winning attitude. The right attitude makes all the difference in the world.

This week Robin Roberts of Good Morning America told her listening audience that she has MDS a serious blood disorder brought on by her treatment for breast cancer. It will require a bone marrow transplant. What was her attitude? She said her faith tells her she can beat this. What make the difference between someone who believes they can beat cancer and someone who complains about a runny nose? Attitude!

Be willing to fight:

Eugene Peterson (in his book, *The Pastor*) tells a story about a school bully when he was growing up, the bully's name was Garrison Johns. Peterson writes, "(Garrison Johns) wore a red flannel shirt, summer and winter, and walked with something of a swagger that I admired and tried to imitate..."

About the third day after entering the first grade, Garrison discovered me and took me on as his project for the year... Most afternoons after school he would catch me and beat me up. He also found out that I was a Christian and taunted me with 'Jesus sissy.'

I tried finding alternate ways home ...but he stalked me and always found me. I arrived home most afternoons bruised and humiliated... And then something unexpected happened. I was with my neighborhood friends on this day, seven or eight of them, when Garrison caught up with us and started in on me, jabbing and taunting, working himself up to the main event. He had an audience...He always did better with an audience.

That's when it happened. Totally uncalculated. Totally out of character. Something snapped within me...I grabbed Garrison. To my surprise, and his, I realized that I was stronger than he was. I wrestled him to the ground, sat on his chest, and pinned his arms to the ground with my knees. I couldn't believe it – he was helpless under me. At my mercy. It was too good to be true. I hit him in the face with my fists. It felt good, and I hit him again – blood spurted from his nose, a lovely crimson on the snow. By this time all the other children were cheering, egging me on. 'Black his eyes!' 'Bust His teeth!' ...

I said to Garrison, "Say 'Uncle.'" He wouldn't say it. I hit him again. More blood. More cheering...And then my Christian training reasserted itself. I said, "Say, 'I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.'" He wouldn't say it. I hit him again. More blood. I tried again, "Say, 'I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.'" ...

And he said it. Garrison Johns was my first Christian convert.

Now do you think Eugene Peterson had any trouble with that bully after that? No, you know why? Two reasons: First he knew Peterson was willing to fight and second he knew Peterson had strength greater than his.

You can overcome your spiritual battles when the enemy knows you're willing to fight and when you realize your strength because:

1 John 4:4

You belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory ... because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.

Now, let me read you another true story, this one is found in Joshua 10:20-25 So Joshua and the Israelite army continued the slaughter and completely crushed the enemy... Then the Israelites returned safely to ... the camp ... After that, no one dared to speak even a word against Israel.

Then Joshua said, "... bring the five kings to me." ... When they brought them out, Joshua told the commanders of his army, "Come and put your feet on the kings' necks." And they did as they were told.

"Don't ever be afraid or discouraged," Joshua told his men. "Be strong and courageous, for the LORD is going to do this to all of your enemies."

The story of Garrison Johns and the aggressiveness of Eugene Peterson was easier to understand than this story. As I read this story in Joshua it was hard to understand the bloodthirsty aggressiveness of the Israelites. But I want you to see the metaphor in the Old Testament story.

In the Old Testament the battles were with a flesh-and-blood enemy, but since the time of Christ the battle has moved within. Christians talk about being attacked by the enemy in ways that sound like they consider it a badge of honor.

In the Old Testament the Israelites were attacked only when they had gone astray; their sin made them vulnerable. But when they followed the Lord they became the aggressors, and no enemy could withstand them.

When it comes to our spiritual enemy perhaps we've have stuck a compromise. Here's what I'm saying, since we are followers of the Lord Jesus we must stop playing the victim and learn to be the aggressor in our spiritual warfare. I never thought that way before – the idea of attacking my spiritual enemies, being the aggressor, even loving the battle. You see I've learned this surprising truth: what matters isn't the force or skill of my attack, but the simple resolution to fight. The moment I am willing to fight the bully the enemy is on the run or as James put it: **James 4:7 Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**

What do you think Israel's leaders were feeling as they towered over their enemy with their foot on the necks of their enemies? You imagine that feeling now. Imagine your position to crush your worst enemies, not human beings, but things like fear, anxiety, shame, lust, addiction, abuse...imagine the tables have turned and you have totally triumphed over them. Once they controlled you, now you control them. How does that feel? Remember that feeling. It is what you'll need in order to live a life of joy.

When it comes to spiritual warfare:

Love the struggle

Have a winning attitude

Be willing to fight

Rejoice in your victories, but more importantly

Rejoice because you know your name is written in heaven.