

DEALING WITH A PERSISTENT LACK OF JOY IN MARRIAGE (JOY, 3 OF 4)

<https://fiercemarriage.com/dealing-with-a-persistent-lack-of-joy-in-marriage-joy-3-of-4>

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Selena: Lacking joy in your marriage consistently is often a really hard trial to walk through. I think that we can kind of go through gentle lows and highs of joy. But when you're in the season where you feel like your marriage is joyless, it can often leave you hopeless as well. So today, we're going to talk about how we can see that lack of joy as an opportunity and way back to our Savior, and in turn, finding that joy that can produce hope and fruit in our marriage in ways that maybe we might not expect. So, with that, we'll see you on the other side.

[00:00:41] <intro>

Selena: Welcome to the Fierce Marriage podcast where we believe that marriage takes a fierce tenacity that never gives up and refuses to give in.

Ryan: Here we'll share openly and honestly about all things marriage—

Selena: Sex—

Ryan: Communication—

Selena: Finances—

Ryan: Priorities—

Selena: Purpose—

Ryan: And everything in between.

Selena: Laugh, ponder, and join in our candid, gospel-centered conversations. This is Fierce Marriage.

[00:01:15] <Podcast begins>

Ryan: I love what you said there, how the lack of joy is... I don't know how you said it exactly. But it's almost like a neon banner pointing us back to the giver of joy. I truly mean that. I've been feeling discouraged lately. I'm a pretty upbeat guy I feel like. *[Selena chuckles]* I'm pretty hopeful about the future. And I still am. I'm optimistic.

I tend to enjoy, you know, having conversations and I'm usually enjoying our girls. But I go through seasons. In this recent season, where this kind of this been a perfect storm, I'll say, of all kinds of different... I'll say let downs. Things that aren't going as I want them to go. It's been deflating, it's been discouraging, it's been frustrating. And by God's grace, he just reminded me that I can still... and I can confidently say this. Even though I feel discouraged, I still feel great joy.

And the reason for that, and that's the topic of this episode and we're going to apply it to the space of marriage, but the reason for that is that I can look to the final destination, if you will. We talked about this in the priority series, how last things have an orienting effect on the Christian life, when you look at what our lot is as believers in Christ, as a coheirs with Christ, as those adopted into the family of God. And that's where I can say, "Lord this life, all this toil..." I love to go to Ecclesiastics in these times because it's like all this toil and the meaninglessness of it, or the seeming meaninglessness of it can all be contextualized in the finished work of Christ in the second return. And that's the hope that we can look forward to.

And that one day, yes, this life will pass away but God's Word as promised won't pass away. It will be fulfilled and history will come to its culmination in the second coming of Christ, and He will reign forever. And that gives me joy. That's all I'm saying is that reality it makes me joyful. Now, I'm not joyful in my circumstance. Anyway.

This has just been really timely for me to think through the... when you're lacking joy, how that's an opportunity to go deeper in true joy. Obviously, looking at marriage, it's a huge drag when your marriage is lacking joy. Because I mean, when your marriage is joyless, and we've had those seasons... currently in one. I'm kidding. *[both chuckles]*

Selena: I was like, [inaudible].

Ryan: We've had those seasons, and it's been... your whole life is impacted by it. You feel like you can't have dinner.

Selena: Yeah, it just feel overshadowed. You just kind of feel like there's just this underlying... it's almost like a discontentment. I don't know. You can't connect, you don't want to connect, but you do want to connect, but-

Ryan: You don't want to do the work or you just feel like the boundaries are too big.

Selena: So we're excited to talk about this today. This is part three of a four-part series, and then we are going to have a Q&A at the end of that. So if you do have

some questions after listening to the series, get them in, text them in. The number 971-333-1120.

Just a quick recap of this series we talked about and defined what is Joy. Joy is happiness rooted in the things of God. We looked at John 15 and abiding, and joy's fruit of the Spirit. That was the first episode in the series. The second one is how do you truly enjoy your spouse and your marriage as a result? So we kind of dove deeper into understanding joy and what joy our spouse... [00:05:00] how we can enjoy them in light of the gospel.

Ryan: We looked at three ingredients specifically. If I can recall those, what were those three ingredients? Trust was the big first big one. Also positional accuracy. It's kind of a weird way to put it, but knowing like the role. And then what's the final one? Oh, desire or affection. So affection, trust, and positional accuracy all contribute to having a joy-filled relationship with your spouse. So go back and listen to that episode for more details on that.

Selena: So today, we're talking about how we can have joy in the midst of lack of joy in our marriage. And then next week, we're going to talk about five habits for cultivating joy in your marriage. So a bit more tangible, probably a faster one at the end. Anyways, you want to run through housekeeping real quick?

Ryan: Yeah. Subscribe, follow, rate, and review this podcast in your app of choice. All of those actions greatly help us. They also help others who are looking for good gospel-centered marriage content. So please do take a moment to subscribe, follow, rate, and review if you haven't done those things.

If you want to partner with us, we would be so grateful. This is how our family makes gets food on the table, I'll say. And so God is gracious. He is our provider. And you know what? Sometimes God, and oftentimes God will provide through His church. And that's why we're using this Patreon model because we feel like it's the most biblical and that the beneficiaries of our work, like you listener, and if God leads you there, that you're the ones that make the work possible. And that's the model for Paul's ministry. He echoed that over and over again in his epistles to the early churches.

And so if you feel called to be a part of this, please do take the next step and take a step of faith. We are doing this in faith and trusting that God is going to spur you along. So just go to patreon.com/fiercemarriage. We try to make it a valuable community for everyone involved. We post in there a couple times a week, at least once a week. We have Zoom calls, we have early release episodes. You can get free books, you can get free rings, and get free access to Gospel Centered Marriage.

There's a lot of value to be had there. But the biggest value our hope, and our prayer is that you would just feel like you're on mission with us, you're complicit in everything that God is doing through Fierce Marriage and the work that Selena and I are about.

With that said, the final thing is Gospel Center Marriage. That's our online learning platform. Go to gospelcenteredmarriage.com. We are constantly adding new content there and it's only going to get better. So get in, be a part of that. We also do Zoom calls there. That's just how to get on the same page once and for all with your spouse. There's a six week marriage core course that we encourage every couple to go through. After the first six weeks, then we ask you invest just one night a month to go through a mini-course to enrich and re-center your marriage on the gospel. Gospelcenteredmarriage.com, go check that out.

As we get into this content, I want to preface it with this. Because you might be hearing, okay, Ryan and Selena are going to talk about how to have joy in a joyless marriage. What do I do when I'm lacking joy in my marriage? I can always see where it's going. They're going to say, "Look to Christ." And yes, we are going to say that. That's what we're here to do, frankly. But the conversations like these have a place in the life and in the rhythms of believers.

Why do we go to church on a Sunday? To be reminded of the gospel? Why? Because we're forgetful. If we think we're any different from the Israelites in the desert or even Israel after they entered into the promised land of Canaan, they continually forgot the promises of God, the character of God, their role as the people of God. They're constantly forgetting those things.

So here we are, we're going to go through an early passage in Hebrews over the next 30 minutes. Just rest in it. Just rest and listen and ask the Holy Spirit, how are you reminding me to find my joy in you? And our prayers that we can faithfully communicate what God's word of saying, and stir your affections for Him in new ways that will stir your affections for each other in new ways. Does that make sense?

Selena: Yeah.

Ryan: I just want to set the baseline there. Please just hear this and let's see where God takes us. Because I feel like we can just get kind of locked into, oh, that's me today." This is just going to be another kind of rote gospel presentation. And I'm here to say... is there such a thing?

Selena: It is in the [inaudible]. You're right. There is such a thing. It's good. Because I was just like, the Holy Spirit works as he desires. And so we present the gospel

and pray and ask God to work it for His glory, for our sanctification. And this is not us outside of [00:10:00] the conflict and the lack that we're talking about. We too, have experienced Joylessness in our marriage, and yet still we can walk in joy, and we can have an anchor joy in the Lord.

But that is something that is set aside, I think, for believers. The funny thing about it is that I think we... I don't know, when you get saved or maybe we just have this kind of inclination as a believer that we're kind of exempt from trials, right? Because we love God, we're created in his image, we know who we are, we're living in obedience that we should be kind of exempt from some of the bigger things in life. Maybe one of those things is not having joy in our marriage. Maybe we think we're believers who should always have joy. We just do. We will. If we don't, we'll fix it.

But what happens when you find yourself in this place of lack, in this place of desiring more than what is there? Jesus said in John 16:33, that we are going to have trials. This is not something that is exempt. In fact, we probably will have more. He says, "I've said these things to you..." And this is the whole context of I've overcome the world. He's talking to the disciples about joy and parables and trying to help them understand.

And he says, "Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

I don't think it's out of context to again, cling to those words of Jesus saying, "In the world you will have tribulation." He understands the world. He is the Creator. He was there when it was created. So we can take heart and we can understand that He has also overcome it.

So just to kind of, I think, regulate us or bring some understanding of where we are, sometimes we can think that we're above trials, or that we're going to have so many trials, we're just, what are we going to do? We're just always going to be in this process of trial trial trial? Well, yes. I mean, God is being glorified through our sanctification. But we can take heart in these trials that we face and these lacks and in particular, for our conversation today, in this lack of joy that we might be enduring in our marriage.

So we're going to look at Hebrews 12:2-3. We're going to spend a lot of time here. And then James 1, which is the very popular "counted all joy, my brothers when you face trials of many kinds." So we'll get to that in just a minute. But starting with Hebrews 12, I'm going to read the two verses, and

then we're going to go through them kind of line by line because it reveals so much about who Jesus is, how He modeled enduring trials, and whatnot.

All right. Hebrews 12:2-3. But I think we're going to start in one. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." So stop there for a minute.

Ryan: We're going to walk through this line by line. But it's helpful to know the full context. So Hebrews is a really unique book in Scripture and there's a lot of themes. But one of the main themes of Hebrews is perseverance of the saints. It makes a very strong connection right from the outset, Hebrew 1. Maybe you should read it. I don't have it in front of me. I'm open to the wrong page.

So it makes a really strong connection between the Old Testament and the New. It says, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature..." And it goes on.

Selena: So good. So good.

Ryan: It's wonderful. It's one of my favorite passages is the first part of Hebrew.

Selena: The title is The Supremacy of God's Son.

Ryan: That's another theme is the soteriological effect of Christ. The soteriological effect of the reality of Christ. And what that means is Christ saves and that He's the root of our hope, and therefore persevere. In the midst of all your trials, in the midst of persecution, in the midst of just life, persevere. Those are big themes that we need to really remember as we read this passage, because the author of Hebrews is not just saying [00:15:00] these things in a vacuum. There's a train of thought happening here. And here we are inserting ourselves into this "fix our eyes on Jesus." And what that means for the perseverance of you the saints.

Selena: Right. Right. We're going to go line by line. So just like you said, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. So we're looking at our marriage, we are joyless. Our marriages making us unhappy. What should I do? Ryan and Selena, what can I do? What should I do? Here's the one thing that we would always say is "let us fix our

eyes on Jesus." Which seems like such a simple phrase. But just like you said, fixing our eyes on Christ, understanding the supremacy of who He is, and therefore how sufficient He is because of who He is. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, not on our lack of joy.

Our lack is an indicator, it is not the issue. Our lack is pointing us back to our Savior, to who He is. That is what we can do—we can fix our eyes back on Christ. So let us fix our eyes on Jesus. So that's an action. Fixing our eyes on who our Savior, the author and perfecter of our faith is. Again, this is an identifier identifying who Jesus is, and in contrast to who we are not.

Ryan: I love this because this is exactly what I was talking about how in other translations will say look to Jesus. And I know that sounds really kind of obvious, but fixing our eyes and looking to Jesus, if we keep focused in on our issues...

Selena: Our lack, yeah.

Ryan: ...our lack of joy, it's just navel-gazing. It's a perpetuating cycle. It'll self perpetuate. I was going to say it'll self perpetuate itself. *[both chuckles]*

Selena: I think there is some truth in understanding it and not keeping it at a distance, not being afraid of it, not ignoring it. But I think it's just a clear identification of we are really lacking joy in our marriage. God, why is this happening? How can we begin to get back on track and experience the joy that you have given us? And how can we experience it even getting ourselves on the journey back? Like the journey back to back. Does that make sense? Not only getting back on the right track but that journey back to the track that we want to be on.

Ryan: I would even take it a step further because that starts to bridge the gap. So I'm seeing the reason for joylessness in our own marriage, we're fighting, or we just meh about everything...

Selena: It's a constant, yeah.

Ryan: ...or we're going through a really hard trial and there's lots of tears, maybe there's grief, maybe you're suffering a loss, maybe there's a sickness or a job loss, or some sort of betrayal happening, whatever the thing is, we are joyless.

So the first step is saying, "God help me in this. Help me with this exact scenario." That's the life of a believer is going to the designer of marriage and the designer of the human heart and saying, "Heal us." But I would say, and this is what the author of Hebrews is probably pointing us, is saying, "Look to the hope that is set before you." And you did mention...

Selena: We'll get to that.

Ryan: Okay. When it says, "Look to Christ, fixing our eyes on Christ" is not go to Him to get the help you need. Yes, that's part of it. But I feel like the grand call here is to remember that your hope will never be satisfied. Your joy will never be full here.

Selena: Well, the interesting thing about looking or fixing your gaze, when you look at something, your whole body eventually turns to that thing. I mean-

Ryan: Oh, I found that out the hard way as a child riding my bike. *[both laughs]*

Selena: Our kids are still learning that.

Ryan: I've been over the handlebars more than once, because I was distracted by ice cream track. *[both laughs]* I ran into the glass window.

Selena: So fixing our eyes on Christ. It's not fixing our minds. It's not fixing our hearts or our bellies or whatever. It's fixing our eyes. There's purpose in that writing. On who? Jesus. Who is He? The author and perfecter of our faith. Again, identifying who Jesus is, and in contrast, who we are not. We are not the authors of our faith. We are not the protectors of our faith. We're not even the creators of ourselves. I mean, God allows us to create life by His grace and for His glory, but we are not the creators of this process.

There's an awe and a holy fear and reverence I think that should be placed in our hearts when we're going to God humbly fixing our eyes, knowing that there is a fault, there's a sin, there's something that we are... I hate to say sin all the time because, again, if it's an external trial that is happening to your marriage or you, then it may not necessarily be a sin. But there's just hardship around you and it's taking away the joy, there's a lack. Again, we're fixing our eyes on Christ knowing who He is.

And then when we know who He is, we can know who we are and our role and understand and look at His model of who for the joy... the next phrase. Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame. So there's a few things happening.

He paid the ultimate price, sacrificed His perfect, sinless life, He endured the cross. He endured the cross. Why? Because He knew the joy set before Him. He knew it. It wasn't some ambiguous thing. It wasn't some random, I don't know, Joy. It makes you feel happy. It had to be something deeper. It had to be an understanding, yes, he's God, He is eternal. But how do we know that

joy? Do we know that those end things of, like you were saying in our priorities talk, of thinking about and prioritizing things based on the end. Right?

Ryan: Yeah.

Selena: So what is our joy that is set before us. There's a parallel I think.

Ryan: Absolutely.

Selena: Like we endure our own cross in this life, the weight of sin. We can scorn its shame. But we can endure this cross. Christ endured the cross. How did He endure it? By the joy set before Him. That joy wasn't like literally set before Him on the way up to Calvary? It was an eternal joy. It was a bigger greater outside of our even capable minds to comprehend joy, because we are human and He is not. I mean, He's fully God, fully man. Sorry. Back that up. Back that up.

Ryan: It's okay. It's a complicated... Christology is not cut and dry all the time. The thing that really jumped out at me as you were sharing... and thank you so much for this. It's so thoughtful in how you've outlined it. Very good. So, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross. We talked about this when I was nitpicking about joy is not the same thing as hope and peace.

And when you're sad or when you're downtrodden and downcast, I used to say, "well, we have deep joy that's there. Even though we don't feel it it's there." And then I kind of flipped over to this. I'm like, "No, Joy has very close attachments to your feelings. This passage to me is credence to that idea saying, "Who for the joy set before Him..." It wasn't the joy He felt, is the joy set before him, He did what? He endured the cross.

People who laugh while hanging on a cross are crazy people. People who are shouting for joy while hanging on a cross, that's craziness. It's painful. He's scorned. It's shame. The pain was not something that He would... He was doing it for a joy that He had yet to experience.

Selena: Oh, man, there it is.

Ryan: And so that's what I'm saying is that when you're in a joyless marriage, you're in a joyless season of your life, we can take this. Like you said, it's a parallel. There's the author of Hebrews is giving us instruction here and saying, like Jesus, you too, who for the joy set before you can endure your cross. Which Paul tells us to pick up our cross. And we can scorn its shame in the process doing all those things with the context that there is joy to come.

Selena: And what is that joy? So we read "Who and who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame. And what? Did what? What is this reward? "And sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." The reward. The eternal reward.

Again, this call to remember these last things first. Jesus knew the eternal joy set before Him. We too have that knowledge and understanding. We have that as believers. Oftentimes, we don't allow God the time to do the work that He wants to do in us because we're fixated on having our marriages fixed today the way we want it, and how we want to experience it. Then now and just quick and fast, just take it away. Rather than trusting the work of God in our souls, especially in the midst of the lack of our joy, right?

Ryan: I was reading ahead, in 12:7 it says, "It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. So we are called children of God. And that is not a flippant phrase is we have been adopted into the family. We are co-heirs with Christ.

Selena: By the blood of Christ.

Ryan: Now, we should take great joy and great comfort in the discipline [00:25:00] of our Father. Why? Because we're sadists? Because we love to feel discipline? No, because we know our Father is loving. That's why we can take great joy in knowing that we are being disciplined. Now, here's the question is, is your trial a form of discipline? Maybe.

Selena: That's my question.

Ryan: It might be. What comes to mind is our daughters were playing are on the staircase in our house. And Clementine, our second daughter was sitting up on the railing over the stairs. I looked at her and I was thinking in my head, "I don't want to be like a hovering parent." But I was like, "You need to get down from there..."

Selena: It's not hovering.

Ryan: "...because you're going to fall and you're going to break your neck. And I love you." That's the bottom line is I love you and I don't want you to get hurt. Therefore, I'm going to tell you not to do something. Now, if she would have continued doing that, then there would have been actual discipline or maybe the next level of discipline. The point is, she can take joy knowing that I asked

her to get off because I love her. And I'm a loving father to her. So we can do the same thing when we're going through a hard time.

Again, yeah, God doesn't just remove our pain. Instead, He gives us His healing. He doesn't just remove the trial. Instead, He gives us strength by the Holy Spirit to get through the trial.

Selena: To endure.

Ryan: To endure it. Why? Because of this joy that set before us. And that's why we have to know like if we're being disciplined, we need not shake our fist at God and grit our teeth at Him and grumble at Him and complain to Him. That never goes well. There's no place in scripture where shaking your fist at God ends well. Instead, we are to humble ourselves and say, "God, you are holy, I am not; you are perfectly good, and I am not; and you are perfectly trustworthy. Therefore I place my trust in you, and therefore, my eternity secure and therefore, I can now have joy."

Selena: Well, if it is a form of discipline... we're listening to the message yesterday at church that oftentimes it can be... we misinterpret it, right? And God's saying, "No, I love you too much to give you back your idols and things that you want. You want this to be over quick. You just want to be able to deal with it and be happy again." And Gods like, "There's some things that I want to root out in you. If you continue to have these idols, you will not understand or experience the joy that is truly set before you." He loves us too much to let us kind of hold on to those idols. So again, it's begging us to trust Him, which is not an easy thing, but it is doable. God is good in that way.

So the last part of this verse, I think, it's verse three... sorry, there's two parts. "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men." Again, a call to look back at Jesus. Consider Jesus. Consider the trials He faced, the huge lack of joy He felt going to the cross, knowing the cross was coming. I mean, look at the garden of Gethsemane. Another example and model of how we can endure in the midst of trials, praying to God. Yes, asking Lord, if there's another way. But nonetheless, your will be done. Trusting that God's will is for our good, for His glory.

We can only have that perspective as believers because of Jesus and because of the eternal perspective we've been given in the time that we live in right now. Those are big things to be grateful for. Those are huge blessings and understanding to grapple with, I guess.

Ryan: I find this so... it's probably not ironic, because I'm just catching it now. But this book is called Hebrews, it's written to the Jews. And who were the sinful

men that were opposing Christ? The Jews. The religious people. It wasn't like Pilate who was like, "I hate that guy."

Selena: Pilate was like, "How can we not do this? Because I realized He is a God fearing man. And I just got myself in a pickle with a..."

Ryan: It was the scribes or the Pharisees were the ones that were saying that Christ is an illegitimate Messiah, he's blaspheming. They refused to see the miracles that He was performing. They refused to hear the prophetic word being fulfilled. They refused to see that. Their hearts were seared.

The warning to me is that I think familiarity with Christ can cause us to forget the truth of who He is and the truth of the word that He came to fulfill and the promise that He gave.

Selena: Which God is so good sometimes to bring lack and to allow lack maybe to happen in our life. A lack of joy, a lack of peace, a lack of hope so that we come running back. If we start getting off the path that He has for us, I think He can use lack for our good. He's God.

Ryan: It also gives us in another sense in this full passage. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men [00:30:00] so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Christ's own people were the ones that betrayed Him. One of His closest friends, Judas was the one who betrayed Him into the hands of His own people, the Jews. So we can sometimes feel like, "Oh, my spouse... I've grown weary because she's not serving me in a way that I feel like I deserve."

Selena: Or he won't just get it. He just doesn't get it. He doesn't love me in the way I want to be loved. He doesn't hear me. He doesn't consider me. He doesn't take initiative with my family.

Ryan: What if God say those things to us? Like, "They don't hear me, therefore, I am going to give up on them." So instead, we can say we're not losing heart or growing weary even though the closest person in our lives fails to see us or we feel like they fail to see us.

Selena: We have to calibrate again because the water that we're swimming in is so fast. Everything is instant. Everything is quick. Everything is a beautiful, flawless picture. Everything is just top-notch, super fast all the time, best images ever. God doesn't work that way. I mean, He can. He's God. He created time, He can do whatever He wants. I mean, bring that back in. It's just why do we consider Jesus? Not losing heart, not growing weary is not a one week thing. It's not within a month that you just not grow weary? He's calling us to-

- Ryan:** Endurance has a meaning...
- Selena:** Endurance. We just need to calibrate our expectations and our understanding of time and how God is leading us and our expectation of His word. And I think that's where He's so good to allow us to sit in some of the lack, allow us to navel-gaze for a bit even if we have to... it's like the prodigal son out in the mud with the pigs. And he just lets him sit there. The father is not there, but oftentimes, we find ourselves in the mud with the pigs sitting there, trying to figure out how to get out of it. And God is saying, "Come back to me."
[chuckles]
- Ryan:** What you just said about the nature of endurance I think is very telling for us, depending on where we fall on this side of it. If we have a weak, shallow, one-dimensional view of God and how He works, that's going to be discouraging to us. If we choose to see God as a God who works in nuance and works in complexity and works over time, then we can take joy. Now, here's an example. Think about any plant that sprouts up quickly in our yard right now.
- Selena:** Weeds.
- Ryan:** Yes, absolutely. All our grass is dead, the weeds somehow they're thriving.
- Selena:** They got deep roots, man.
- Ryan:** What is the deal with weeds by the way?
- Selena:** I think it's God's...
- Ryan:** It's the curse.
- Selena:** ...way of giving us an illustration for sin.
- Ryan:** Okay. Now think of the trees that are beautiful and they're thriving despite the hot weather we've been having or the ones that are woody trees. Any plant that grows up quickly can easily be uprooted.
- Selena:** It's a seeds parable. Yeah.
- Ryan:** And growth that matters, growth that is strong—and Tim Keller talks about this at length—but you can't look at a tree and watch it grow. There's actually there's some species of bamboo that you can actually hear them growing, you can watch them grow. They're growing so quickly.
- Selena:** Wow.

Ryan: I don't know if you can see them but you can hear them grow. The point is roots are what matter in the Christian life and depth is what matters and strong growth, I'll say woody growth. The kind of growth that takes years and decades and hundreds of years, that's the kind of growth that we're talking about here. And that's why marriage... marriage is for life.

Selena: That's the race that we're running.

Ryan: Yeah. In marriage, we have to have that long-term view. You can't say, "Listen, the last three months have been miserable. Now I need to start thinking about divorce because I've fallen out of love with this man or this woman."

Selena: Or "you got until 12 months from now to get your life together, get your plan, get your health in order."

Ryan: Even if you say the last five years have been a struggle and therefore you have another year, I'm saying that's a very immature, very short, shallow view. Now, there are nuances to that. So please don't hear this across the board. The point is we need to have a view of marriage like God has. It's for life, people. That's how He designed it. And I'm saying that to us too.

That if my mission as a husband, okay, not my sole mission, but God made me a husband to have a husband mission in my marriage. And that is to see my wife flourish in the things of God, is for her sanctification, to love her exactly as Christ loved the church. That's a constant source of conviction for me. And if I have a short-term view of marriage, I'm going to get very discouraged if I don't see the things happening that I want to see happen. Now, if I look at Christ and see what He's called me to do and have a long term view, then now I can actually hunker down, buckle down, do the work, not from a place of trying to earn her love or earn God's love but-

Selena: Humble obedience.

Ryan: ...being loved by God and wanting to love her the way I'm loved by God. [00:35:00] But it takes having that long-term view.

Selena: I agree. I agree.

Ryan: And that goes back to this passage of growing weary and endurance. That's the very terms to say that we are in this for the long haul. And that's a very beautiful hope-filled thing, joy-filled thing if we look to Christ.

Selena: It's interesting he says "not grow weary." I mean, there's probably another translation. So do you grow weary and/or grow in strength? I don't know. I'd have to look at that word study.

Ryan: It happens all the time.

Selena: Connecting the dots. Again, looking at Christ and his model, not growing weary, communing with God through His Word and prayer, communing with the body of Christ regularly in a vulnerable way. The Holy Spirit can produce His fruit in our lives through our communion with Him. Joy can supernaturally be produced in a season that feels dry and dead. Why? Because we look to Jesus, because we see His model, because we trust the Word of God and the eternal things of God.

We're going to look at one more passage here, James 1. It's the typical "count it all joy." It's a good...

Ryan: You don't have to discount it.

Selena: I know.

Ryan: Just read it for what it is.

Selena: God forgive me, I should never discount His word. I just think there's a lot of connotation to sort through. And sometimes the truth gets buried under there. But God's word is alive. So I'm just going to read it and then we can go through it a little bit. James 1:2-8.

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Verse 12, a quick jump down, says, "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him." Again, we see this idea of eternal joy. We see steadfastness, we see endurance for the joy set before us.

So we may be enduring some hard lacks of joy in our marriage, but this life is not the end. This life is not our final destination, as you said. Our eternal joy will overshadow and outweigh anything that we're facing today. I'm not saying that to ignore or minimize or dismiss the lack that we feel, because the lack is there for a reason. The lack is there. And God is good in allowing us to experience the lack because at some level we are not going back to Him. And so what does that mean? How can we go back? And why should we go back? Why?

God's given us this eternal joy? And yet we're in the already but not yet phase. So we are being sanctified through this whole process. And that means to be set apart as or declared holy.

Ryan: I want to interject real fast. You said something that the trial is there for a reason? That's a bold statement.

Selena: I know.

Ryan: It's okay.

Selena: No, I'm not apologizing. But I do know it's not without...

Ryan: It's a little bit loaded. So I was just thinking on that because, you know, that's one of the trite answers that we can sometimes hear when we're going through hard times. And we'll say, "Hey, everything happens for a reason. Everything happens for a reason. Take heart." And you're like, "Great, that helps me in no way whatsoever. Thank you, though. Thank you for that." Trite Truism that you found on a bumper sticker.

Selena: However, I do feel like we've-

Ryan: It's true.

Selena: ...spend 40 minutes into episode and we talked about the reasons.

Ryan: Well, it is true that God is sovereign. And here's the thing.

Selena: Opportunity. Opportunity.

Ryan: No, no, I'm not trying to-

Selena: I know.

Ryan: When we say the trials are there for a reason and we can take heart knowing that our good, faithful God is at work in that, okay, I can think of two kind of avenues by which we come through trials. Either our own foolishness. We do something stupid and we play stupid games, win stupid prizes. *[both laughs]* You make a stupid choice, you make a mistake. And you can be genuinely wrong, but you're still wrong. So you can try really hard but still be wrong. So there's a lesson there. It happen for a reason. I'm the reason.

Now, what's the lesson? I need wisdom. I need to look to God. I need to get better counsel. I need to grow in my intellect, in my mind and how I process things, in my emotional maturity. I need to grow in relationships. I need to grow out of this mistake. I need to stop falling on my face. That's the reason.

Second reason. Maybe there's something bad that happened to me. It wasn't a decision I made. I got sick or somebody harmed me, sinned against me. Maybe your spouse sinned against you. It happened for a reason. What is that reason? Well, sin broke that thing. And here's where we go. I now can look to God now for reconciliation. I can look to Him for the love that I need or the help that I need in that moment. So when you say everything happens for a reason, I think if we believe that, I think it's true. It's just we tend to think, oh, it just happens because God has some grand plan.

Selena: No, the reason is the Romans 8 of He works together all things. Sin is not outside of Him. So He can even use sin and brokenness. He uses it. I mean, Paul boasts in his weakness as the main way that God is glorified, that the gospel is augmented. That people see who God is through our lack, through our trials, that is, through how we treat each other in the body of Christ, how we love one another through those trials. Those are testimonies. Those are witnesses. Those are eyewitness to the unbeliever who can look at you and say, "Wow, you guys are having a tough marriage but you've got joy. I can see that you're working through it, you're sticking to it. You've got endurance and steadfastness. All my other friends walked away after six months."

Ryan: Wow.

Selena: That's a testimony. And I want to just speak to something. This is kind of the last thought here. You were talking about how we need to look to God, we need to look to Christ. I mentioned this book before in this series. It's called "Christ Centered Conflict Resolution" by Tony Merida. It's about peacemaking, and how we have to be captivated by the supremacy of Christ.

There's a quote here, it says, "One thing that makes Christ so captivating is that He is supreme. Throughout the letter of Colossians, the inspired apostle makes the argument that Christ is enough, Christ is sufficient for salvation and

sanctification. And that's wonderful. But how can we bank on the fact that He's sufficient? What makes Him able to deliver on that promise that He's enough? Colossians 1:15-23 tells us it's the supremacy of Christ which assures us of the sufficiency of Christ."

Again, looking to Christ, knowing who He is. He is supreme. Because He is supreme, He is also sufficient. We need to explore what that means as believers. We can't sit here and explain every single detail to you. I would love to. But as a believer, this is your job to go into the word and explore and to pray and to commune and to experience God for yourself. I would not want anyone else doing that for me. I love being taught, but I don't want someone else go into the throne room for me. I want to experience the presence of God, I want to experience His goodness for [inaudible] in my life.

Ryan: There's a reason why the language is "taste and see." It's not just look and see, but taste and see. Not perceive with your eyes, but perceive with your whole body. Taste. We can talk about an amazing steak here on the podcast, but you got to cook one up and you got to eat one yourself to know how good it is. And that's what you're saying with God's word. And I love that. That's reminder too.

Selena: So our couples conversation challenge this week is I would say read through Hebrews 1. Sorry, read Hebrews.

Ryan: Read Hebrews, people.

Selena: I was just saying, "Read the whole book of Hebrews," but Hebrews 12 was where we were. Hebrews 1 is awesome. Read the whole book. Anyways, read Hebrews. James 1. Read those aloud together. I think there's a lot of content to be discussed there. So read them aloud and discuss in terms of trials and joy. In the midst of your lack as a couple, how can you find your way back? Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in those conversations.

Ryan: Wow. Speaking of which, next week, we're talking about...

Selena: Next week we're going to give you five habits for cultivating joy in your marriage. We can't share those without first teaching and I think understanding the foundational piece that joy is modeled in and through Christ. And without Him we can't find joy in our joyless marriage.

Ryan: We're going to get real practical next week. Make sure you listen to that. But I just want to echo what you said in that it does start with Christ. That's not just a rote Christian. To close the loop on what I said at the beginning of our conversation is that we need these reminders. We are forgetful people. The

people of God are a forgetful people. We're a lot of things. We are people who sin, we're people who give praise to God...

Selena: And blame the enemy.

Ryan: ...we're people who read His word, but we also forget a lot. So we need these reminders that in the middle of your trial, that that should be like a check engine light that says, "Oh, I need to go to the creator of this life of mine and I need to get joy. I need to take joy in Him. I need to look to the joy that has been set before me just like my Savior did on the cross. And I can scorn the shame that I'm experiencing now. And I can scorn this and say, "This is hard. This is terrible, yes, but my joy is set before me. And I'm going to endure it because of that."

Selena: And God is using it.

Ryan: That's then wells up within us joy that we can now use, we can now ride that joy wave [00:45:00] into doing these actions we're going to talk about next week and building these habits with each other in marriage. So, Selena, would you pray for us?

Selena: Okay.

Ryan: Thank you.

Selena: God, thank you for joy in what it is and what it can mean to us as believers. Thank you that you use sin and brokenness and lack to bring us back to you, Father. That even those dark things can augment your light and your joy. In the most desperate of situations, Father, you are not absent.

I pray for an enlivening of joy, I pray for a flooding of joy in the marriages listening, God. That they would find their way back together to you, to the cross, to knowing who you are Jesus, to the depths of what you have done. May we not gloss over that because we seem to know it or be so familiar with the story, God. May our hearts remain soft and calloused. In Jesus' name, amen.

Ryan: Amen. Amen. If you haven't yet, please consider joining our online learning platform. And not just because that's our thing and we want you to do that thing. But really our hope is to give you opportunities to have these types of conversations. Like Selena just said, and I love it so much, we can't possibly live your Christian life for you. But what we can do is lay out before you some ideas and some thoughts, and give you an excuse to go into scripture together

to ask different questions of one another, to explore the various facets of your married life with Scripture at the center.

Instead of just going home, eating food, getting on a computer, turning on the TV, whatever the thing is, you can go home and you can actually gather around the warm fire that is God's word. And we're hoping that Gospel Centered Marriage can be one way that you do that. And so if you've been curious about it, just go check out gospelcenteredmarriage.com.

Here's what you can trust you'll get from it. We're always going to keep Christ at the center and we're always going to go back to Scripture, and we're going to try to tackle relevant marriage-related topics. So things like communication, things like sex, like in-laws, like coming from a broken home, how that affects the home that you're building with your spouse. I've just mentioned... these are all actual, many courses that are available within Gospel Centered Marriage. And we wanted to bless you. So gospelcenteredmarriage.com. I want to make sure don't mumble those words. Go check that out.

So anyway, thank you for joining us. We hope this has blessed you. Again, join us next week for five habits for cultivating joy in your marriage. It should be awesome. So this episode of the Fierce Marriage Podcast is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: See again about seven days. Until then—

Selena: Stay fierce.

[00:47:45] <outro>

Ryan: Thank you for listening to the Fierce Marriage podcast. For more resources for your marriage, please visit FierceMarriage.com, or you can find us with our handle @Fiercemarriage on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Thank you so much for listening. We hope this has blessed you. Take care.

PODCAST NOTES

- **[00:11:00]**
 - Scripture references:
 - John 16:32-33, ESV

- **[00:13:06]**
 - Scripture references:
 - Hebrews 12:1-3, ESV
 - Hebrews 1:1-3, ESV

- **[00:36:00]**
 - Scripture references:
 - James 1:2-8, 12, ESV

- **[00:41:22]**
 - Book references:
 - [Christ Centered Conflict Resolution](#) by Tony Merida

- **[00:46:00]**
 - Recommended Resource:
 - [Gospel Centered Marriage](#)

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