

## Marks of a Healthy Christian Pt. 2

Romans 12:9-16 (11/24/13)

Ernie Godshall  
Faith Bible Church  
Evansville, Indiana

When God saves us, He begins to change us. The marks of a healthy Christian in Romans 12:9-16 are some of the ways He changes us throughout our Christian lives. These marks don't save us, but if we truly know Christ, these marks will be in our lives and growing. We looked at the first three marks last week: healthy love, healthy relationships, and healthy service (verses 9-11)

This morning we're looking at the next two marks of a healthy Christian – healthy endurance and healthy giving. I want you to see that all of these marks come under the leading mark of love. This is clearly seen in 1 Corinthians 13, Colossians 3, and other Bible passages. Love always leads the way. True, biblical, godly, self-denying, Christ-like, Spirit-motivated love fuels and shapes all the other marks of godliness. God has called us in Christ to be great lovers, even though we fall far short. In 1 Timothy 1:5 Paul said, "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." The fourth mark of a healthy Christian is healthy endurance.

### **HEALTHY ENDURANCE – v. 12**

"Rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer." These three directives are like three strong, well-armed soldiers standing side by side in your heart as you move through your life dealing with all kinds of issues and struggles.

**Healthy endurance rejoices now because whatever you are facing won't last long and the best is yet to come!** Notice these two words – hope and rejoicing. They go together all the time in the Bible. Look at Romans 15:13, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

God is the God of hope. He is out there in front of you, giving you all kinds of assurances and promises about the future. He fills your heart with all joy as you believe His promises, so that you can abound in hope. God's kind of hope is absolute assurance about what He has for you in the future. We know for sure that God has written the last chapter and we know what it says. Jesus wins! No question. We don't have to be dejected about the end plan. We don't have to grieve in the face of death like lost people who really have no hope for eternity. We know Christ has paid it all on the cross and God will never again use our sins against us. He's thrown them into the deepest sea, separated us from them as far as the east is from the west, and He promised nothing will separate us from His love, forever. We know that even though we may go through severe suffering and pain and horror in this Genesis 3 world, the good stuff is up ahead.

And it is because of this hope in God and His assurances that we rejoice. Turn to 1 Peter 1:3-9.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.*

This is a hope-filled passage. It starts with the fact that we've been born again to the living hope. A hope that is alive, because Jesus is no longer in the grave. And it ends in vv. 8-9 with this huge celebration of joy and our future salvation. But let's notice what lies between.

First, you've been born again to a living hope, and that hope is at the right hand of God right now. Can you imagine living without hope? Everyone sails through this life in the ship of HOPE. All hope of change, of good, of better days coming. One of our students invited me to hear Eva Moses Kor, a holocaust survivor. She spoke at USI several weeks ago. In her book *Surviving the Angel of Death*, she describes what it was like at the end when some liberating soldiers were coming their way with real smiles. She writes, "Joy and hope welled up inside of us. We were safe. We were free!"

Life can be brutal without hope. Three more ladies were just rescued this week in England from being held as slaves for up to 30 years. Can you imagine what it's like to live with no hope of rescue? Louie Zamperini crashed into the Pacific in World War 2 and spent 47 days floating on a six foot raft in those shark-infested waters with Japanese planes strafing them, but never hitting them. Where was hope for him during those long, uncertain days?

In Dantes Inferno the gate of hell has this inscription over it: "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." Hell is a place of no hope of escape. Don't go there. Thomas Watson wrote that if people in hell could look ahead thousands of years and see just a speck of light, of hope, that would fill hell with hope. But there isn't any. Many live with the delusion of hope for heaven. They'll say, "I hope I'm going to heaven. I've tried to be a good person." The gospel of grace and faith alone hasn't yet penetrated those hearts.

But you who have been regenerated by the gospel of Christ have been born again to a living hope. The best is yet to come. God assures you in verse four that He has an inheritance waiting for you. In verse five He assures you that until the time when you receive your inheritance, He is going to keep you by His power. You'll never be lost. So what is your response? You greatly rejoice in all this. Verse 6 says, "In this you greatly rejoice!" You're rejoicing in hope. What about all the struggles and difficulties and suffering, though? Verses 6-7 assure you that you will have trials, but for a little while – in light of eternity a few brief moments of time. Trials will end. And verse 7 says God has purpose in your trials. He is using these struggles to grow your faith. And through these trials, in verse 8, while you don't see Jesus now, you do three things – you love Him, you believe in Him, and then in view of all this, you don't just have a few crumbs of joy. No, you have mountains and oceans of joy. You don't live as a believer in Christ in the present with your chin dragging all over the place, full of misery and sadness and worse.

Let's get a running start at the last part of verse 8. How do you respond? You rejoice! No, you greatly rejoice. But there's more. You greatly rejoice with joy. Don't you just love that. Rejoice with joy! And what kind of joy is this? Inexpressible joy. You can't explain it. Do you see this hope? We know God's got it all in the bag for us. So we greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible, and if that's not enough, Peter adds this, "Full of glory!" Glory is bright. Whatever we're going through, God wants us to experience brightness of spirit. He wants us to see all of life through the brightened eyes of hope. Wherever you are, whatever you are experiencing, no matter how hard it is, and right now, you may be with David, "Why are you in despair, O my soul? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him!" You may not understand, but hope in God. Better days are coming.

And let's notice verse 9, which takes us right back to our future hope: "Obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls." From the living hope of verse 3 to the salvation of your souls, verse 9, with all this goodness in between. This is rejoicing in hope! Listen, when you are down, please take this passage and live with it for a week or more. Chew on it and drench your heart in it. Fill your spiritual hot tub with it and jump in. Greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory!

Healthy endurance rejoices in hope and...

**Knows God is at work in every trial in your life** – "persevering in tribulation."

Here's another one of my favorite Greek words – *thlipsis*, pressure or squeezing. And persevering is that famous word *hupomeno*, to stay there when you'd really like to desert ship. Hang in there. So life right now is like a pressure cooker, and you'd really like to jump out, but God has a purpose for these pressures, these trials. He wants you to stay right there, even though it may be hard. The thing that keeps you in there, like we saw in 1 Peter 1:7-8 and we know from James 1:2-5, is that you know God is in this trial and has purpose for it.

Friends, this is such a key to the Christian life. So many Christians talk about all their troubles and trials and difficulties and never mention God at all. But this is why we can count it all joy and find staying power under trials – God is in it and has purpose for it. So when life may be squeezing the pudding out of you, life may turn ugly, know God is in it. You may lose everything, like Job... bam! bam! bam! bam! and it's all gone. All that he worked for gone, even his children! Then a double bam! bam! with oozing ulcers all over his body, plus a wife who now tells him to curse God and die! I think that was Job's biggest *thlipsis* of all! But later Job said, "When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold!" That's persevering in tribulation.

Easy? No! You may be in a pretty tough *thlipsis* right now that isn't easy! Martyn Lloyd-Jones says nothing is more emphasized in the New Testament epistles than this quality of patient endurance, that quality of spirit that keeps on going whether things go well or not. You know God is in control. You know He is in this trial. You don't understand why He allowed this awful thing to happen to you, but You are going to trust Him knowing He is in this trial for His glory and your good.

Healthy endurance means rejoicing in hope and hanging in there under pressure, but it also requires that you...

**Keep your heart close to God all the time – “devoted to prayer.”**

We can't live this way in our own strength. We need God's help. So we have to have a prayerful spirit all the time. Jesus said, "Men ought always to pray and not to lose heart." Ever lose heart? That's God's indicator you need time in prayer. Pray without ceasing is sandwiched between rejoice always and give thanks in everything in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-8. Every day you must pray. You can pray kneeling, standing, sitting, walking, driving (with your eyes open), with others, in your small group, when we gather as a church to pray. Nehemiah shot up a flare prayer when he went in to talk to the king. If you are going in to talk to someone about something really important, you might want to spend much time in prayer before the meeting and then fire off a few flare prayers as you walk into the meeting.

What is prayer but practicing the reality that God is. He is for you. He is listening to you. We need Him. We want to submit our hearts and lives to Him. Daniel was commanded not to pray, but he kept on praying three times a day just like before. If you are a preacher, you are forced to pray. My frequent prayer in preparation and on Sunday mornings, especially when I wake up and realize I've got to preach today is, "Lord, I need your help here!" Or just, "Lord, help me!"

James Boice said the only reason we might fail to pray is that we don't think we need God's help, or we don't believe God is a loving heavenly Father with His ears and heart open to our needs. Give yourself over to prayer. Prayer maintains from our side that personal connection with God. Prayer worships and adores and confesses, but it is also a time to evaluate our lives before our Lord. Pray through the fruit of the Spirit. Then pray through the members and friends list. I'm always encouraged when people tell me they've been praying for me. Question: If God's work in our church depended on your prayer life, how would we be doing?

Mark #5 is...

### **HEALTHY GIVING – vs. 13**

"Contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality." It's amazing, but when God saves us and gives us a new heart, He opens our hearts to others. You see it in the early church in Acts 2-4. One of the first things they are doing is giving. They weren't commanded to give. They just wanted to. Peter doesn't say, "Okay people, now it's time to sell some of those camels and chariots and fishing nets and give the proceeds to the church." There are no laws about giving except, God loves a cheerful giver. One couple got in trouble trying to impress people about how much they were giving in Acts 5, but these early believers just gave! It's beautiful.

Ephesians 4:28 says, "Let him who stole steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need!" Titus 3:14 says we're to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs. And 1 Timothy 6:17-19 says rich people are not to fix their hope on passing wealth, but be generous and ready to share.

So giving is clearly a mark of a healthy Christian. Nothing that we possess is really ours. It's not Washington's either. God has richly blessed most of us compared to others in this poor old world – imagine if you lived in the Philippines and were looking at a totally wrecked property with no insurance. God has entrusted to us what we have and we will give account to Him of how we used all this stuff we have. That's called stewardship. So let's look briefly at these two aspects of healthy giving.

**Be ready to share your resources where this is a need.** Contributing means sharing. And needs means just that, needs. Not wants. So where there is a definite need, a tornado or fire or famine or something has happened and right now this person or this family is absolutely up against the wall financially, share with them. This has nothing to do with giving people stuff when they won't work for it. God clearly says, if someone isn't willing to work, he shouldn't eat. Even the worms work their way through the soil looking for good meals. Birds don't sit around expecting other more enterprising birds, early birds, to go fill their mouths when they are too lazy to get up and look for their own worms. Rabbits don't come running into the dog's open mouth.

But if a believer is anything, he or she should be a giver. We aren't here to get, but to give. We need to keep things in biblical order. We need to make sure we're taking care of our own family. 1 Thessalonians 4:11 says we are to work quietly and not be dependent on others. We need to work to pay off our debts. I love hearing people talk about scrimping and saving so they can pay off their debts as soon as possible, or as Ramsey says, rice and beans, beans and rice, and you don't see the inside of a restaurant unless you're working in it!

But a mark of a healthy believer is one who meets genuine needs. And giving may include giving your time, your skills and service, meals, books, an ear, or energy to help someone find a job. Our brother Dan has touched untold numbers of lives right here in that effort. Far better to teach someone how to fish rather than just giving him a fish, although he may need a fish for the moment until he gets on his feet financially. But then he needs to also be a giver.

And then God says healthy giving means keeping an open heart and life to strangers. "Practicing hospitality." This is just beautiful. Hospitality literally means loving strangers. Someone called it the grace of the open heart. It means embracing strangers and making them feel at home. It's that willingness to open up your life to people you don't know. It is too easy to get comfortable with the people you know and develop this little club, and as a church we need the grace of the open heart to strangers. Some are better at this than others, and there aren't any rules or laws here, but we do need to pursue and work hard at getting to know people who come and sit with us every Sunday to worship the Lord! Invite new people to your home, to go out to eat, to join your small group, to go play golf together.

Healthy endurance and healthy giving! This Thursday is Thanksgiving Day. Tonight we have the wonderful opportunity to gather and give thanks to our God. He has been so good to us! You may be going through harsh trials, and you may have major needs right now. But we can and should all give thanks to our heavenly Father.