

Renca Dunn:

Hello, women all over the world. I am so happy that you are here with us. Maybe some of you women are gathered with your church watching on the big screen, or maybe others of you are sitting around at a coffee shop. And I hope that you're there, because I love coffee shops myself. And maybe some of you are comfortable at home with your slippers and a robe. And my favorite robe is a Sherpa robe. I have one at home. I hope that wherever you are, however you are, whoever you are that you know, you are welcome here, and that you are comfortable and enjoy watching this weekend of presentations and topics.

Renca Dunn:

I'm going to be discussing unbreakable joy, but first the word unbreakable, we're going to put a pin in that, and jump to the word joy, first. Because you can't understand unbreakable until you understand joy and what that means. So for example, you just say unbreakable, it doesn't have any context. You don't know what it means or what it does, which is why we're focusing on joy. We'll, discuss unbreakable a little bit later.

Renca Dunn:

Joy has several different components, but we're going to focus on three main things, like a sense of joy, what the concept of it is to give you a picture in your mind. Joy is foundational, not conditional. That means that joy is a firm foundation. It doesn't depend on things or other factors. Like, "That helps me find joy," that would make it conditional. Second joy is built, not bought. You can't go to the store and buy joy and say, "Woo, I got it." Or get it quickly. No, joy is a process that is built over time, and I'll expand more on that later. Third joy is internal, not external. There are many different external factors in our lives and they influence us. But joy is internal, and it influences things around us. Because it starts from the heart, from our relationship with God.

Renca Dunn:

I will expand on each of those three points. First, joy is foundational, not conditional. I want you to envision what a house looks like. If you're going to build a house and it has no foundation, it, for sure, is going to become subject to weather or other circumstances that are going to destroy it. It will fall flat. First, you must dig a hole, put in cement. Well, at least I assume it's cement. If you are a construction worker or you know how this actually works, apologies, if I am not being accurate here. I know there's some kind of foundation, maybe it's even metal or wood or whatever, but the point is you start with a firm foundation and build up from there.

Renca Dunn:

And that's what joy is. Joy is a foundation. Joy is not the walls. It's not the windows. It's not something that can easily be thrown up, and then falls back down. It is the foundation. So I want you to have a picture of a house in your mind, when you think of that.

Renca Dunn:

I also went to the dictionary to see what it defined as joy. Well, it says, that joy is an emotion, it's a feeling, feeling good, feeling inspired. Goodness gracious, that's it. I kept looking and looking and thought, okay, no, honestly, I think that's a mistaken perspective. No wonder many of us confuse joy. We

struggle with how to define it. We think, I don't have any joy. But you need to look at the dictionary to help us understand part of joy. Sure. But actual joy is not a feeling. It is not an emotion.

Renca Dunn:

We need to back it up and look at what the Bible says about joy. It's not influenced by external circumstances. The Bible says that joy has several parts, and part of it is emotional, yes. It's not void of feeling, but it's not only that. It has different aspects, just like a house and its foundation. It has different parts of it that all work together. There's a worldview, and it's only one sliver of that entire picture.

Renca Dunn:

Joy has so many different components and parts, but it requires the collective to be a full picture. Again, no wonder we are confused about what joy is. We often confuse it with happiness and there is a little bit of crossover, but it is not synonymous. Yes, there is a relationship between happiness, which is temporary, and joy. But what is happiness? It is a little more temporary, more short lived, like pumpkin spice lattes. And trust me, I love my pumpkin spice lattes. Oh, and an iced pumpkin spice latte, come on. Can I get an, amen?

Renca Dunn:

Yeah, iced pumpkin spice lattes are just, hmm. I am happy in that moment that I am drinking it and consuming it. And then just like that, it's gone. And I throw it away and, yeah, I'm happy. Maybe I have a bit of a caffeine rush, but that's going to end too. I'm going to go about my day. And maybe another example, if I come back from a date and it was a great date, I'm happy in that moment, yes. But that person's going to leave. The date's going to end. That feeling is going to dissolve.

Renca Dunn:

It's not the same as joy. Joy is a firmly rooted situation. I want you to envision a tree. It has roots underneath the ground that keep it firmly planted in the ground. Those roots are the tree's foundation. And out of that grows the beautiful trunk and branches and leaves, and sure the leaves change color, they fall, they change. The leaves are a better representation of what happiness is, because that comes and goes in different seasons.

Renca Dunn:

And happiness is good, don't get me wrong. But we can't depend on happiness to make you feel like you were close with God. Your relationship with God is not based on happiness. It's based on joy. And joy is not what the world gives you. It's what God gives you. And that's why it's really important for us to have an appropriate perspective on what joy is first. It is foundational. It's actually one of the hardest things, or the hardest thing to find, especially during hard times.

Renca Dunn:

Our lives are hard. Society is hard. Things come up in the world and it feels like it is caving in. It feels like too much. Now, can you still find joy through all of that? The Bible is full of stories, and it doesn't say, you're going to find happiness through hard times. I mean, if you think it's in the Bible, you show me, bring it on. But it does not say that. It's not going to say, you will find happiness through hard times.

Renca Dunn:

It's impossible. It doesn't say that. It says, you will find joy through hard times. It's tough to distinguish the difference, but they are different. Joy is foundational. It's rooted. It's planted. And through that, you grow from hard times, just like a tree. Like an evergreen tree, it can sustain wind and damage and all sorts of environmental factors. The leaves can blow off, the branches can break off, and yet, if its roots are strongly rooted and planted in the ground, then nothing is going to shake it. Nothing's going to break that tree down.

Renca Dunn:

That's what we need to have in mind, when we are rooted in joy. We are rooted in joy, because we are rooted in the Lord, not in the things of this world. We do often forget that joy includes struggles, frustrations, pain, grief. Joy is in all of that.

Renca Dunn:

My second point is that joy is built and not bought. We really live in a microwave era. We're like, "Come on, come on, chop, chop, chop. Let's go. Let's go. Let's go." It's like a fashion show. "One, two, three, strike a pose. Go, go, go! Stella, go! Becky, go! Mary, go!" And they're just going, going, going, cycling through.

Renca Dunn:

Society doesn't stop long enough to pause. Just like our social feeds. We're looking through the news, inundated by triggers all day long. So much information. Do we understand the concept of how joy is built? No, we don't. We want joy and we want it now. We don't understand that it is a process.

Renca Dunn:

One of my favorite metaphors and pictures of joy is the joy of motherhood. The joy of marriage. The joy of farming. Now, the joy of motherhood. Let me preface this by saying, I myself am not a mother. I don't have kids. I've never been pregnant. But I have so many friends who are mothers, and it is the biggest gift to them on earth. And I hear their stories, from all my mom friends. And when they see their baby for the first time, they notice that it is a bundle of joy. And the baby didn't just pop out instantaneously. We know it took nine months. And now I'm not going to get to the point about how we got to the part before the nine months.

Renca Dunn:

But the nine months of being in the womb, a growing... The moms aren't doing crazy things. They're not skydiving and living recklessly. They go through an entire process of morning sickness, of routines and rituals to help the pregnancy along. They're like, "I need my space," or, "Oh, the temperature's too hot. Can you turn it down?" Or "I have these different cravings," and it's all happening while the baby is growing inside their stomach. And it's a process. And then that process ends and the bundle of joy comes. And there's so much joy that is experienced in seeing the finished work of that baby.

Renca Dunn:

Same thing with marriage. You don't just find a person, get married, and everything's hunky-dory. You're going to have conflicts, ups and downs, ebbs and flows. It's a hard process. And yet still there is joy to be found in marriage.

Renca Dunn:

Now, the joy of farming, maybe you're wondering why I would even mention that, but I'm from the Midwest. And I did live in DC for 12 years before I came here to the Midwest. And I just have a high respect for farmers. My dad was a farmer, but, of course, as a kid, I didn't really pay attention to what he did or have respect for that. But now as I'm an adult, I have such an awe and reverential respect for the hard work that goes into all the food that we eat. We're just eating different things on our plates, but we don't know where it comes from.

Renca Dunn:

That a truck had to bring it, and before that people had to harvest it, that before that people had to sow and plant the seeds, and farmers had to wait and wait and wait. The second the seed was planted, it didn't sprout forth, a fully ready plant for harvest. It took so much time. But if you have witnessed that, please send me a message on Instagram, on Facebook, let me know. But you're not going to see it. Seeds take so much time to grow and they need water and sunlight. And then thankfully, when all the conditions work out and their harvest happens, that's great. And then it ends up on your plate, and you eat it. That's all the joy of farming.

Renca Dunn:

It took hard time, a hard effort to reap that harvest. And it doesn't matter if it's a good harvest or a lousy harvest. It still takes so much time and work. Same with marriage. Same with motherhood. Nothing happens instantaneously. We need to remember that as we go through the process, joy is built.

Renca Dunn:

Just like a woven rug. Back in the day, rugs were really hard to make. It took a lot of work today. We know we have machinery, but back then people had to make it by hand. They had to use grains and grind it all together and make the threads. Just one thread. Then they had to do that all over again, and weave it through the loom. And after one row was done, do the next row, and the next row, and the next row. All the way up the loom until they had the final finished product. I want to show you a quick video of how that looks.

Renca Dunn:

(silence)

Renca Dunn:

Did you see that rug? It took a lot of work. Again, that emphasizes the point of how joy is built and not bought.

Renca Dunn:

Lastly, joy is internal and not external. Many external things influence us, that's for sure. And that relates more to happiness, that temporary quick thrill that we get. And that is external related to places or people. We are happy in that moment, but joy starts from within. And then it overflows and influences the things around us. It's not the other way around. When I mentioned that joy is built and not bought, I talked about motherhood, marriage, all those things are internal processes as well. Same with farming and the seeds in the ground. Everything starts inside, when it relates to joy.

Renca Dunn:

Now, I do want to discuss what kind of joy or the different parts of joy that are related to God. We need to look at what the Bible says. I always love the small words like, in, of, by. They're simple little words, but they are key. They are key to understanding the joy. I've always said that to friends and family over the past couple years, "Look at the words, in, by, of, we got to pay attention to those, because the Bible from cover to cover, so many instances, especially in the Old Testament. Over a 100 times, the word joy is mentioned, and it has 15 different Hebrew words for joy.

Renca Dunn:

In the New Testament, in the Greek, it's over 60 times, we see the word joy mentioned, and there's eight different Greek words for that. Every instance of joy has the word in or of or by connected to it. For example, joy in the Lord, joy of the Lord, Joy in Christ, not just joy, it's joy in Christ. Joy in, of, by pointing back to God every time .it's easy to confuse it with joy that maybe the world gives us. And sure the world can give you joy, but it's going to be like ashes. It's going to dissolve super easily. It's like quicksand.

Renca Dunn:

When joy is rooted in the Lord, the type of joy that he gives us, that is eternal, that's permanent, and it's internal. I love analyzing that. The English word joy, we have joy, and then we have rejoice. But for the Hebrew word, maybe there's 15 different translations. And then the Greek, there's eight. For English, we have maybe one or two rejoice, joy. But ASL, we have so many variations as well. If the Hebrew has 15, we have joy like this, like this. We have many different options, and from a perspective in ASL, to communicate the concept of joy.

Renca Dunn:

Wow, Joy rooted in the Lord. I like Romans 12 verse 12. It says, we rejoice in hope. And we rejoice in hope through suffering. Wow. The Bible tells you that through your struggles, through your frustrations, through everything you experience, there is still joy. It's not hiding from you. Where are you finding your joy? Are you going to find it in the things of this world? No, the Bible says you will still find it in these hard times, in the sufferings, in the hardships. We find joy in hope, in Christ. That key word, in, of, by. It's important where we find our joy and it's always going to be found best and most in Christ alone.

Renca Dunn:

Remember joy is not a mood. You say, "Eh, I am not in the mood. I'm not feeling it. Eh, today, I'm not feeling joyful. No." Yes, although joy is a feeling, partially a feeling, it is foundational. It is built. It is internal. And I want to discuss Nehemiah. It says that the joy of the Lord is our strength. Now, it's telling you the joy of the Lord is our strength.

Renca Dunn:

So I want you to understand the context of Nehemiah, in that time. When the wall is being built, people were not happy. They were grieved. They were distraught. They were realizing the error of their ways. The temple wall had been destroyed. They were trying to figure out what to do next. But they still said, "The joy of the Lord is our strength."

Renca Dunn:

How do you think you would feel in that situation? "Oh, right. Yep. Amen." And just carry on your way? No, I'm saying to you, I'm also not just preaching this to you, I'm preaching this to myself too. I need to practice it as well. Each of our different topics that we have today, we are not, any of us, experts on everything. We are still learning ourselves. I still struggle. I still have to navigate through a lot of different, tough things. But the point is we need community to surround us, to support us. We need the church. We need to remind each other constantly. Otherwise, we will forget.

Renca Dunn:

Remember, what you consume is what you become, what you feed your mind, what you feed your soul, what you feed your heart. We eat food for our physical bodies, yes, but we often forget that we need our spiritual food. We feed things to our minds as well, to our heart, and it influences our whole being. It can cause joy to become unrooted in ourselves, and that's not right. Or we can decide to feed our souls from the Lord, from the body of Christ, and that joy will be reinforced and be stronger and stronger.

Renca Dunn:

So let me clarify. I don't mean that if you're having a bad day or you're feeling depressed or grieved that you need to hide it or sweep it under the rug, that's not what I mean at all. We are all humans. We all need to process the feelings that we have.

Renca Dunn:

Honestly, I'm going to be blunt with you. I think too many of us struggle with toxic positivity. We go through hard things in life and we share about it. And heard people that say, "Oh, you just pray about it. Okay, hun. Oh, you just give it to Jesus, you'll be fine." Ys, of course, pray and give it to Jesus. But grief hurts, I'm frustrated. And if someone just says, "Pray about it," and gives me a little gold star and sends me on my way, what does that do for me?

Renca Dunn:

That is not what I mean or what I want you to do at all. You don't just need to white knuckle yourself through the process, and say, "Oh, I got to be positive. I have to be positive." No, be angry. Feel what you're feeling. But we need to be obsessed with joy. We need to steer away from toxic positivity and realize that we are all humans, that we all have different kinds of emotions, and that as we process them, it's okay. It's part of life. They're not meant to be hidden.

Renca Dunn:

So that's why I mentioned earlier the importance of community and surrounding each other with support, because we do forget. We have another example of Moses and the Israelites. They were wandering in the desert for 40 years, and that was not easy. But all of the Israelites had literally seen with their own eyes the miraculous wonder of God rescuing them from Egypt. They even saw the Red Sea part for them to walk through it. They saw it themselves. And yet for 40 years, as they wandered in the desert, they started complaining. They were griping. They thought, ah, God doesn't care about us. It doesn't matter.

Renca Dunn:

But hold the phone. They saw those miracles themselves. And so how... Today we think, oh, if I saw a miracle, then I would believe, but that's not how it works. We know that the people who even saw it

firsthand struggled to still trust God. So that's why we have to remind each other what is true and what is right. And that we're to be rooted in the Lord, and not the things of this world. We can cry out to God and share our hearts to God, but it's important that we don't complain.

Renca Dunn:

So what is joy? It is what we experience when we trust in God. Joy is not something like a light switch, that you turn it on, whoop having a great day. Turn it off, oh, bad day. Good day. No, it's not that. It's the process of trusting God. And he will take care of you. It's the process of experiencing God. He is everywhere. He is everything. He is with you. You think, oh, he's not here. That's not true. He is in your own being.

Renca Dunn:

Just like a bundle of joy, we look at that baby and we say, "Oh, it's so beautiful," but we don't say it's a bundle of happiness. It's joy, because it was the process to create that beauty. The same thing can be said for when you trust God and you experience him. We need to remember that joy is foundational, that it is not conditional, that it is built and not bought, and that joy is internal and not external.

Renca Dunn:

I want us to remember to be rooted in God. The joy that we have is of him, in him, and by him. And the more time that we work on our relationships with the Lord, the more you will see evidence of that, the more you'll have a spirit of joy within you. It's just like your friendships, relationships with your family members, if you don't get to sit down and spend time with them, you can't possibly know them. That means we need to be spending time with Jesus to get to know him.

Renca Dunn:

So in summary, back at the beginning of my message, I talked about the words, unbreakable and joy. So we finished unpacking joy, but let's spend a few minutes on the concept of unbreakable. Unbreakable means that it is gushing out from within you and cannot be destroyed. I want to show you a short scene from a movie called Unbroken. And that movie has a man and in there, who is a Christian, and they were shipwrecked. And he said, "If you just save me, God, I will serve you forever." And after he saved, he then gets taken hostage. He says, "Okay, if you rescue me, I will serve you forever." Well, then what's going to happen next. It's a great movie. And I want you to watch it really quickly to see this clip that is super powerful and moving as we envision what the word unbreakable means.

Renca Dunn:

(silence)

Renca Dunn:

When you see that scene, honestly, it's a beautiful moment that process of him lifting the beam up with all of his strength. I mean, he's struggling. He's having a hard time. He's using all of his effort, all of his strength, until, finally, it's lifted above his head. That was a process, an arduous process of lifting of straining, until, finally, it was above his head. I just think that's a beautiful representation of the process of joy as well.

Renca Dunn:

Remember, we don't find joy in an aha, instantaneous, I got it, I found the key kind of moment. Joy is a daily reminder, a daily process, a daily building and rooting. When times get tough, and things get stressful or life goes sideways, when the winds of life are blowing against the trunk of your tree, the frustrations and the pressures just seem insurmountable, you have to keep going, because the joy is still there. It's a process every day. It's not a one and done. Or maybe, "Oh, I got it this year, ah, but I'll work on it more next year." It is a process until we are six feet under. And the best part is, once we are done with our time on earth, we get to be with Jesus and experience his joy forever and ever. Read my lips, forever.

Renca Dunn:

I can't wait. I can't wait. All the struggles, all the chaos, all of it is worth it, because joy is here now, and joy is coming, and we will get to experience it forever and ever. We won't have to even worry about the difference between happiness and joy. It will just be pervasive. And so while we are here on earth, we bear through it. We trust God and experience him more, which allows us to be further rooted in joy. And that pervades every area of our life.

Renca Dunn:

Unbreakable joy, peace be with you.