

# The Fruit of the Spirit is Joy

July 17, 2022 P.M.  
West Side Church of Christ  
Searcy, Arkansas  
Nathan Guy

## Scripture Reading

*"The fruit of the Spirit is...joy" (Galatians 5:22).*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the year 248, Cyprian (an early Christian bishop in the city of Carthage), wrote to his friend Donatus. The topic? Just who are these Christians. Cyprian wrote these stirring words:

This seems to be a cheerful world, Donatus, when I view it from this fair garden under the shadow of these vines. But if I climb some great mountain and look out over the wide lands, you know very well what I would see -- brigands on the road, pirates on the seas, in the amphitheaters men murdering each other to please the applauding crowds, and under all roofs I see misery and selfishness. It is really a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. Yet in the midst of it, I have found a quiet and holy people. They have discovered a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of this sinful life. They are despised and persecuted but they care not. These people, Donatus, are Christians...and I am one of them.

According to Paul, the Christian's life, attitude, and demeanor can be summed up in one word: "joyful." The Greek lexicon says this word actually means "the experience of gladness."

## **A SUPERNATURAL JOY: GOD'S JOY**

If you have children, then you'll appreciate this line from Ray Romano. He says "everyone should have kids. They are the greatest joy in the world, but they are also terrorists. You'll realize this as soon as they're born, and they start using sleep deprivation to break you."

We know the feeling. But Katie and I can't imagine a more joyful day than when we welcomed Grace into the world. There was incredible pain that day. The kind of pain that in any other situation would cause you to wonder if God is even present, or if he cares about the suffering of my wife on the surgeon's table. But that's because joy is something far different from agreeable conditions or the absence of pain and sorrow. It's something deeper, more powerful, more sustaining, and bubbles up in the midst of the pains of the world, then transforms into a gushing river that overwhelms us, and defines the moment. So much so, that when we look at a picture from that day, the pain is never even mentioned. Whatever that is—this thing called Joy—I want more of it. Don't you?

What Paul is talking about in Galatians 5 is not a joy that comes naturally because of our circumstances; it's a sustained sense of abundance, goodness, and love, hope and promise in the midst of the most difficult circumstances.

For you and me, on our own, we might experience something like that a handful of times in our life. But God's joy—not ours—the kind given by the Holy Spirit, is not momentary, but everlasting. Like love, this is not a human-will-power-produced kind of joy; it's God's joy given to us.

Listen to the language. In John 17:13, Jesus says to the Father, “Now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have *my joy* complete in themselves.” In Romans 14:17, Paul says “for the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and *joy in* the Holy Spirit.” When Paul first writes to encourage the Thessalonians, he says “you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy *of* the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 1:6). And perhaps the clearest passage of all, Paul nearly signs off the book of Romans with this beautiful benediction: “May the *God* of hope *fill you* with all joy and peace in believing, so that *by the power* of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom 15:13).<sup>1</sup>

### ***A LONGING FOR MORE***

Did you notice how Paul links joy with hope? Hope looks out to the future. It speaks of anticipation, not present possession. Joy is only partly a comfort of having; it is even more so an insatiable (even painful) *longing* for more. C. S. Lewis once said “the very nature of joy makes nonsense of our common distinction between having and wanting.”

---

<sup>1</sup> See also Luke 10:21 & Acts 14:17.

I’ve benefited tremendously from some thoughts on joy given by Sam Wells, who preaches for St. Martin-in-the-Fields church near Picadilly Circus in London:

Joy isn’t an all-at-one-go thing. You know how it is. You hear a sublime piece of music – you go out and get everything by that composer. And it’s too much to take in. You read a beautiful book and you buy everything that author ever wrote. And you can’t swallow it when it’s a mountain of books. Joy is something you taste, you touch, you glimpse – and then you have this certainty it’s going to keep coming your way and it’ll never run out. It’s something you never get the whole of. There’s always more to come. The best is yet to come.”<sup>2</sup>

### ***JOY IN THE MIDST OF FEAR AND SORROW***

The best is yet to come. Because we know that, because we live with glimpses of it, signposts of it, for the first time in the history of the world we can see joy not *instead* of sorrow, but in the *same context* as sorrow! Right in the midst of it!

At the resurrection, the women ran from the tomb with fear *and* great joy (Matt 28:8). If you find yourself under tremendous persecution, says our Lord, “be glad and leap for joy, for they persecuted the prophets the same way” (Luke 6:23). James says “consider it all joy when you encounter trials” (James 1:2). Or, as the Message puts it: “consider it a sheer gift.” And the followers of Jesus did just that! In Acts 5, The apostolic pair was told “we’ll beat you!” And they said, “beat on, but we can’t help but speak what we’ve seen and heard.” The people didn’t like it. They gave them a hard time about it. And the text says “they went on their way rejoicing that they could suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41). This is not human-produced joy. It flows from the Spirit of Jesus. Jesus, who “for the joy set before him, endured the cross” (Heb 12:2).<sup>3</sup> It made Paul long for—not just accept, but long for—the opportunity to suffer for Him, and to be conformed to the image of His death (Phil 1; 3).

We are forced, then, to change our understanding of “joy” to be something bigger, deeper, and longer lasting than “happy feelings.” What did Christ have on the cross? What did Paul have in prison? What did the church have in persecution? An abiding sense that the greatest gift of happiness has come and dwells within you. It means the “search” is over.

---

<sup>2</sup> Sam Wells, “The Discipline of Joy,” Sermon preached in Duke University Chapel on April 4, 2010. <https://chapel-archives.oit.duke.edu/documents/sermons/April4TheDisciplineofJoy.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See also Hebrews 12:11 (“no discipline seems pleasant—*xaras*—but painful; yet it produces a harvest”); 1 Pet 4:12-14, regarding suffering for Christ.

Imagine the great fear that must have engulfed those in the ark, with the unknown but waiting world just on the outside of the timber. But imagine the joy when, after the long wait, the dove returned with an olive branch in its beak. The Ark of the Covenant inspired fear among warring nations due to its role as the receptacle for God’s powerful presence. But when it touched down once again in the city of Jerusalem, King David couldn’t help himself but dance...dance...before the Lord. Joy when the law was rediscovered in the days of Ezra. Joy when Jesus looked up and said “Come down from that tree. For today salvation has come to your house.” The joy of a waiting father as love gave wings to tired feet. The joy of blissful reunion.

### ***EXPERIENCING JOY***

Is it so different today, for you and I? We are able to experience a joy that comes from the sense of being in the presence of God—who will never leave us nor forsake us.

Just think about the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Imagine what it feels like to be a sheep on the side of a lush, green hillside. And your shepherd makes you lie down in those green pastures. He leads you beside the still waters and restores your soul. Imagine the kind of peace and rest you would find in that. So that, even if you were to find yourself walking through the valley of the shadow of death, you would fear no evil, because your shepherd is with you. Imagine if you always had replenishing, so much so that your cup constantly ran over. The passage ends with this wonderful reflection: “surely” God’s relentless tender goodness and mercy “shall pursue me”—when I wander, when I forget, when I resist, when I am afraid—and not just for a short time, but for “all the days of my life.” These are the truths, the promises, the joys God wants you to have, to welcome, and to enjoy.

### ***SHOWING THE SPIRIT: JOY***

The list Paul gives in Galatians 5—the fruit of the Spirit—describes one fruit, because there is one spirit. The fruit of love is also the fruit of joy. And these—love and joy—are meant to be displayed, as the Spirit produces God’s character in you more and more. That’s what sanctification involves. Growing into the likeness of Christ by the power of the Spirit.

So, let me ask: are we showing the Spirit? When you walk with Jesus, talk with Jesus, live with Jesus, smile with and cry with Jesus—when you live your life in the present of your redeemer and friend, you won’t be able to help it. Joy will burst through you. McGuiggan says you don’t have to smile in a way that looks like you slept with a coat

hanger in your mouth all night. But If you are the only Bible some will ever read, what chapter do they get when they watch you? Do they see anxious-ridden guilt and shame, fear and dread rooted in insecurity and self-reliance? Or do they see the refreshing peace that comes from a deep and lasting joy. Overflowing joy, from sheep whose shepherd is a God of limitless grace? Because at the end of it all, God is love and peace and joy.

Hear Sam Wells so eloquently describe it as we close:

Joy when you discover that love isn't just a slushy word or a passing feeling, but that it became flesh in Jesus Christ. Joy when after years of living under the burden of guilt and self-hatred for something you've done, you finally hear the words "You are forgiven" and know it's true. Joy when all your anger and frustration and despair about suffering and cruelty and hatred in the world is transcended when you hear a voice saying "This is what you are to do," and you realize it's your vocation and you have a part to play in God's story after all. Joy when you're going through a hard time and someone from your church leaves a card or brings some food or gives you a look which says "I don't know you very well, but we're both part of the body of Christ, so I'm here for you." Joy when you meet a person very different from you, a person whose face or manner or language you find a little alarming, but in whom you come to discover you've met Christ. Joy when a person says to you, "I don't know if it's something you said, or just doing some of this stuff with you, but I've come to believe in Jesus and my life has been transformed." Joy. Fabulous joy ...

Great joy. Joy of a baa-lamb finding its rickety feet in a meadow; joy of a baby discovering how to swallow; joy of the song, when we have the words, and God has the tune; joy of the harvest, when all is fresh and mellow. The joy of friendship, of those we have known and loved through thick and thin. The joy of forgiveness, when bitterness and failure do not get the last word. The joy of creation, when we hear birds chirrup on a spring morning. The joy of being part of a team, when you believe in what you are doing and where you are going. The joy of the orchestra, about to break into a thrilling crescendo. The joy of a craftsman, perfecting his wood. The joy of today is feeling all our love, and the love for us, that is in the world, and then realizing that that intensity, that love is just a keyhole we look through, and beyond is a shimmering garden of delight. Just a keyhole, and we look together on God's garden, restored and glorious. Great joy. Great, great joy."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Sam Wells, "Fear and Joy," A sermon preached in Duke University Chapel on April 8, 2007. <https://chapel-archives.oit.duke.edu/documents/sermons/2007/070408.pdf>