

INTRODUCTION

We’re in a series on the Fruit of the Spirit which I’m calling “Grace-Fruit: Jesus Living in Me.” Fruit is the outward expression of the inward nature. When you see a plum hanging on a tree, you can say, “That’s a plum tree.” When you see these nine virtues displayed in the life of a Christian you can say, “There’s a Spirit-filled Christian.”

There is one fruit of the Spirit, but there are nine flavors. We find the list in Galatians 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

Last week we talked about *agape* love, and I asked you to display the face of someone in your mind that you’ve had a hard time loving, and then let Jesus love that person through you. One of my friends, said, “It wasn’t just one person for me, I had to use a split screen.” Another friend was listening and said, “That’s nothing. Mine looked like the TV display area at Don’s TV!” Whether it’s one difficult person or 100, Jesus can love those unlovely people through you.

Today we’re going to talk about joy. I’ve always loved the word “joy” and the name “Joy.” In fact, my very first girlfriend was named Joy Thompson. I was in the 3rd Grade and Joy was Little Miss Peanut at the Peanut Festival in Dothan. My only trouble was that one of my friends, Alan Silverman, liked Joy too. There were only two Jewish families in Florala and Alan’s family was one of them. We competed for Joy’s attention, and she seemed to enjoy it. I’ll never forget the day that Alan Silverman said, “David, my mother said that I have to marry a Jewish girl, and Joy isn’t Jewish, so I guess you can have her.” Yes! I didn’t understand much of the Bible then, but that was the first time I said, “Thank God for the Jews!”

But joy is more than a name. It’s a powerful, positive reaction that we display when we’re filled with the Holy Spirit. As followers of Jesus Christ, we have something so rich and valuable that everyone in the world is looking for it. It’s joy.

Years ago some archaeologists were excavating around the ruins of the Mamertine prison in Rome. Thousands of Christians were imprisoned there before they were sent to the Coliseum to fight wild animals and to die as martyrs. The archeologists found a fragment of a letter among the ruins. It was written during the 3rd century, during the most intense time of persecution against Christians. We don’t know who wrote it, but the message of this letter is powerful: “It’s a bad world, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than the pleasure of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They have overcome the world. These people are the Christians—and I am one of them.”

It is a bad world—an incredibly bad world. But God offers to fill you with His joy. All these gifts of the Spirit are grace-gifts, that’s why I call this series Grace-Fruit. But of all the nine virtues, joy is the closest to grace. Grace and joy are twins, not identical, but they are born from the same root word. The Greek word of grace is *karis* and the word for joy is *kara*. You might say that Joy is grace enjoyed. In this message I want to talk about what joy is; then where you find joy; and then how you express joy.

I. JOY IS A CHEERFUL ATTITUDE IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE OF LIFE

Some confused souls believe it is the role of our federal government to make us happy and keep us happy. Our Declaration of Independence does mention three inalienable rights given to us. But these are given to us by our Creator; NOT by our government. And contrary to what some people assume, these three rights aren't life, liberty, and happiness. They are life, liberty, and the PURSUIT of happiness.

And pursue it we do! Americans devote much of their time and energy trying to find happiness. Many surveys have asked Americans, “What is it that you most want in life?” And the overwhelming majority of Americans answer: “I want to be happy.” Then the survey often follows-up with this question, “What would it take to make you happy?” The #1 answer to the second question is, “I don't know.”

What people need is JOY not happiness. Happiness comes from the word “hap,” which means “luck” or “happenings.” Happiness rises and falls with what happens in your life, but joy remains constant regardless of what happens. Joy is an inner attitude of cheer that manifests itself through outward celebration.

Joy is an important word in the Bible. Joy appears 158 times and “rejoice” appears another 198 times. In the Old Testament there are 27 different colorful words to describe joy. Some of the basic meanings are to “run around with delight;” “to shine like the brightness of the son;”

When missionaries to the Eskimos in Northern Alaska were trying to translate the Bible into their language, they discovered there was no Eskimo word for “joy.” So the missionaries looked to see what the most delightful experience in the village was. They discovered the happiest, most joyful moments were in the evenings when they fed their sled-dogs. The dogs would leap and wag their tails and yelp for joy—this made the Eskimos smile as well. And so they used that experience to translate the word joy. So when you translate the passage from Luke where it says, “After the resurrection, the disciples saw Jesus and were full of joy.” For the Eskimos, it would read, “When the disciples saw Jesus, they wagged their tails with delight.”

Joy isn't happiness. It's so much more. Let me give you a couple of quotes from some spiritual giants in my life. Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade wrote: “Joy is like the sun, always shining even when night falls or clouds cover it. Happiness is like the moon, waxing and waning. Happiness is born in the mind; joy in the heart. Happiness comes from humans; joy comes only from God.” Dr. Adrian Rogers wrote: “Happiness is like cosmetics; Joy is like character. Happiness comes from outside circumstances; Joy comes from within. Happiness meets surface needs; Joy meets your deepest needs. In times of suffering, happiness usually evaporates and disappears; but joy often intensifies in times of suffering.”

In fact, the best time to check your joy level isn't when things are going great in your life. It's when things are lousy. It's easy to have joy when you feel good, and when everyone loves you and all your bills are being paid. But can you still rejoice when your world crumbles in?

James wrote, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” (James 1:2-3)

Joy becomes more valuable when you find it at the darkest, most depressing times of your life.

This past week I asked my Facebook friends to give me their definition of joy. I got some really good ones. Tracy Hacker wrote, “Joy is the feeling deep down in your soul when you know God has you in the palm of His hand, no matter your circumstance, no matter the trial or hardships you face, it’s Him, and nothing else.”

I love the story found in Acts 16. Paul and Silas had been arrested, beaten, and thrown in prison. They were fastened into stocks. The only stocks and bonds they knew weren’t from Wall Street; they were actual wooden stocks around their necks and iron bonds on their hands and feet.

So picture Paul and Silas with bleeding backs kneeling side-by-side with their heads in those wooden stocks. Did they complain about their rights and demand justice be done? No, they decided to display their joy. The Bible says at midnight they started praying and singing songs to God. They didn’t allow their circumstance to control them; they chose to control their circumstance. They started rejoicing in God. I don’t know that they sang, but early Christians mostly sang the Old Testament, so they might have been singing the words from Nehemiah 8:10, “The Joy of the Lord is my strength; the Joy of the Lord is my strength; The joy of the Lord is my strength; Oh, the joy of the Lord is my strength!”

Maybe God started tapping His toe along with the music and when God taps His toe, things happen. There was an earthquake that shook that prison. Nobody was killed, but the stocks came open and the chains fell away. Joy had won the day. The jailer, who was responsible for the prisoners prepared to fall on his sword and kill himself for losing prisoners. But Paul said, “We’re all here!” The jailer said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” He did, and that night the same man, who had bloodied their backs, washed their wounds and found the joy of the Lord himself.

II. JOY IS A CHOICE TO ALLOW JESUS TO CONTROL YOUR PERSONALITY

Joy isn’t a feeling; it’s a choice. Our joy comes from Jesus, so the extent to which you surrender your personality to his; the more you will experience His joy. It’s not MY joy that is valuable; it’s the Joy of Jesus. Jesus said, “I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!” (John 15:11 NLT)

When I was very young we would visit my great aunt Nellie who lived in the Florida Panhandle. Aunt Nellie didn’t have any running water in the house. She just had a well. Sometimes I got the job of filling up a bucket from the well. I’d drop the bucket attached to a rope into the well. I couldn’t see it because the well was deep and dark, and when I thought it was full I’d wind it back up. But I never got a full bucket of water. Aunt Nellie went with me once and taught me how to fill up the bucket. She said, “David the only way you can tell when the bucket is full is when you hear it overflowing.” That worked. I’d listen to hear if water was overflowing the bucket, and that’s how I knew it was full.

That’s the same way you can know that your life is full of Jesus: His joy will be overflowing to others. If you’re looking for joy, don’t focus on joy, focus on Jesus. He is the source of our joy. C.S. Lewis said it well: “It is not so much the joy of the Lord we are seeking as the Lord of Joy Himself.”

One of the meanings of the word joy is “shining and brightness.” When Moses spent time with God on Mt. Sinai, he came back to the Hebrew people and they noticed there was a supernatural glow about his face. He couldn’t hide the fact that He had been with God. The best way to express the Joy of Jesus is to spend time with Him.

When you’re full of the joy of the Lord, it’s hard to keep it secret. People can just see it in your face. There’s a story from the days of California Gold Rush about three prospectors who found a rich gold vein on the property they were mining. They were thrilled, but they were also afraid that when word got out, other miners would crowd them out before they could file a claim. So, they all three took a vow of silence to keep it a secret.

They traveled into the nearby town to file the claim and to buy more equipment. True to their vow, they didn’t say one word about the gold. After they filed the claim and loaded up the equipment they started back to the mine. When they did a crowd of people followed them. They stopped and asked why the people were following them. They said, “You didn’t say anything about gold, but we could see it in your faces that you had found something very valuable.” Their faces were aglow in anticipation of the wealth that they would receive, and their expressions had given them away.

That’s a great testimony of a Christian. Our very faces should be aglow with the overflow of the joy of the Lord. When I was in seminary, I worked at a general aviation fixed base operator. I fueled the aircraft and parked them in the hangars. There were some mechanics there and I would sometimes help them repair the engines. One day, one of the older mechanics said, to me. “I just gotta’ know what’s different about you? You seem to be happy all the time. What is it?”

What he called happiness, I call the joy of the Lord. So as we were changing out the spark plugs in that airplane engine I was able to tell him the difference Jesus had made in my life.

Is the joy of Jesus overflowing in your life so people can see a difference?

That’s what joy is, and that’s where you’ll find it. Now how can you express your joy?

III. JOY IS EXPRESSED BY GIVING

The best expression of joy isn’t a shining face, or dancing around with delight. The best expression is seen when you have an unselfish attitude of giving. The Bible says, “Remember the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed [that’s the word *makarion* which means a joyful life] to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:35) Here are four ways to express the Joy of Jesus.

A. Give thanks in every situation

Joyful people develop an attitude of gratitude. Sour people are grumbly hateful, but joyous people are humbly grateful. The Bible says, “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Jennifer Alden gave me this definition of joy on Facebook. She said, “Joy is thankfulness in all things.” I agree. Psychologists say that gratitude is the healthiest emotion. Have you noticed the most joyous people are the ones who are the most thankful? Take a moment this week and make a list of blessings for which you need to thank God. Write notes to people who have blessed you and thank them. The more thankful you are, the more joyful you’ll become.

B. Give away your material possessions

The Bible says, “God loves a cheerful giver.” The word “cheerful” comes from the word *hilaron*. It’s our word hilarious. God loves hilarious givers. In His parable about the sower Jesus spoke about some people who have the seed of God’s Word planted in their hearts, but the worries of this world and possessions choke out the good seed. The biggest sin among Christians today is the sin of hoarding and materialism. We accumulate more and more stuff and then we worry that someone may take our stuff, or that someone might have better stuff. Materialism and greed destroys joy. Generosity feeds your joy.

J. L. Kraft who founded the Kraft food company was a committed Christian. He came to the point where he was consistently giving away 25% of his wealth. He said, “The only investment I ever made which has paid consistently increasing dividends is the money I have given to the Lord.”

C. Give yourself in serving others

Many of my Facebook friends said that the letters J.O.Y. stand for “Jesus first; Others second; and Yourself last.” That’s a good formula for joy. Our model and source of joy is Jesus. The Bible says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2) Did you catch that phrase, “who for the JOY set before Him, endured the cross?” He didn’t see joy IN the cross, He saw the joy past the cross in the resurrection and ascension. Joy gives us the ability to look through the tough times of life to the reward God offers.

D. Give hope to those who need it

Another Facebook Friend, Belinda Shook, said, “Joy is sharing Jesus.” The most joyous people I know are those who share their faith on a regular basis. In fact, whenever a Christian comes to me and talks to me about how they’ve lost the joy of their salvation, my first question is this: “When was the last time you shared your faith with someone?” When you don’t share the good news with people that Jesus loves them and can save them, then you become spiritually introverted. You can become stale and sour.

Do you know what creates JOY in heaven? It’s not when 5,000 Tylerites sing praises to God. It’s not when we give a million dollars to feed the hungry. The one thing that creates joy in heaven is when one person turns from their sins and puts their faith in Jesus. Jesus said, “There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (Luke 15:10)

CONCLUSION

Joy is a choice, not an emotion, but you can use your joy to faith (not fake) your way into the emotion of cheerfulness. You can choose to exchange your spirit of sadness for a garment of praise. According to Isaiah 61:3, God makes this promise to people who mourn: He will “give them beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” When you wake up every morning, you have a choice. You can wallow in the ashes of the world, or choose the beauty that God offers. You can give in to mourning, or you can have the oil of joy covering you. Are you burdened down with a spirit of heaviness? You can choose to put on the garment of praise. Joy is a choice!

Years ago I learned a little chorus based on Isaiah 61:3. It says, “Put on the garment of praise for the Spirit of heaviness; Lift up your voice to God; Praise with the Spirit and with understanding, Oh, magnify the Lord!”

To be joyful isn’t just a good choice; it’s a command from God. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16 says, “Be joyful always.” In Philippians 4:4 Paul wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord, always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” He was in prison when he wrote that. He didn’t say, “Rejoice in your prison” he said, “Rejoice in the Lord.” The Bible never says, “Rejoice in your bank account.” Or “Rejoice in your house.” Because if those things are your source of joy, when they’re taken away, your joy goes away with them. The Bible doesn’t say, “Rejoice in your good health, or rejoice in your sharp mind.” You could lose your health or mental acuity in a moment, and where would your joy be? You’ll never find a word in the Bible that says, “Rejoice in your Big Screen TV” or “Rejoice in your iPad.” Or “Rejoice in your car.” All of those things are temporary and will someday be gone. But if you’re rejoicing in the Lord, your source of joy will exist long past the world, as we know it.

Adrian Rogers was a friend of mine and the pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis before he graduated to heaven seven years ago. He once told a story about how a member of his church came to understand the meaning and power of real joy. This lady wrote him a letter recounting her experience. She wrote that early one morning as she was preparing to go to work, she was listening to a recording of Adrian’s message about joy he had shared a few weeks before. She had written down a quote from his message and said that the Holy Spirit used it to really convict her. Adrian had said: What is the source of your joy? If a tragic or traumatic thing happens—a child dies, your car is stolen, your home burglarized, valuable possessions lost—and you lose your joy, then you might well consider where your joy comes from. If your joy is in things—or even a person—and you lose that, you can lose your joy. But, if your joy comes from the Lord, and He is enthroned in your heart, that joy cannot be taken away.”

She was still meditating on that message, when she got into her car to drive to work. She turned on the Christian radio station she listened to, and Steve Green was singing a song entitled, “That’s Where the Joy Comes From.” She was amazed at how the words of that song supported what she had just heard Pastor Rogers say. Some of the words in the song say: “Thieves may try to rob my treasure; But they don’t hold the key; That leads into the sanctuary; Where God’s Spirit lives in me.” The chorus says, “This joy that I have that I’m singing of; Is from the Lord, from the Lord. That’s where the joy comes from. That’s where the joy comes from.”

Let’s pick up the rest of the story from the letter she wrote to Adrian: “Soon after I arrived at work, one of my sons called to tell me that, when he drove to our house about 10 a.m., he found all of the doors open, and the house terribly ransacked, and quite a lot of our belongings stolen. Right then, I realized that the Lord had been preparing me for this that very morning. I thought of the words of the song, and what you had said in your message, that came so clearly to my mind. If I ever wondered what it’s like when God speaks to a person, I know now.

When I got home, I saw the awful sight. I never even felt like shedding a tear. It took us all afternoon to straighten up the mess the burglars left. And yet, this feeling of joy kept popping out. I want you to know that day is a day I will never forget—not because of the burglary, but because of the way that God spoke to me, and prepared me through your message. And, the fact that I really saw today that Jesus alone is the source of my joy. Now I know firsthand that thieves may rob my treasures, but they don’t hold the key that leads into the sanctuary where God’s Spirit lives in me.”

How’s your joy today? If Jesus is the source of your joy, your joy will be the same yesterday, today, and forevermore, because Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever more!

OUTLINE

I. JOY IS A CHEERFUL ATTITUDE IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE OF LIFE

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” *James 1:2-3*

II. JOY IS A CHOICE TO ALLOW JESUS TO CONTROL YOUR PERSONALITY

Jesus said, “I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!”
John 15:11 NLT

III. JOY IS EXPRESSED BY GIVING

“Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” *1 Corinthians 9:7*

- A. Give thanks in every situation
- B. Give away your material possessions
- C. Give yourself in serving others
- D. Give hope to those who need it

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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