

Series: "The Fruit of the Spirit"

Last week I began a series of messages on the fruit of the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is in us and controlling our lives, what are we going to be like? How will we act? The fruit of the Spirit shows us. These 9 character traits will be evident in us. These provide a good gauge, a good of how mature we are in our faith – how spiritual we are.

In my last message we looked at the first fruit of the Spirit: *love*. Love is, above all else, the trait that should mark us if we're followers of Jesus. Let's move on to the second fruit of the Spirit mentioned: *joy*! "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy...." (Galatians 5:22). If the Holy Spirit is in us and controlling our lives, we're going to be a joyful person!

Other Scriptures link the Holy Spirit to a life of deep inward joy. 1 Thessalonians 1:6 speaks of joy "inspired by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit inspires or breathes joy in us! Romans 14:17 says the kingdom of God is "righteousness and peace and joy *in the Holy Spirit*." The kingdom of God is a joyful realm! The Bible says God gives believers the Holy Spirit as a "down payment" or "first installment" of the kingdom of God. God wants to give us a preview *now* of the joy we'll experience when we enter God's kingdom! In other words, having the Holy Spirit, living life in the Spirit, is having a little sip of the kind of life we will have in God's kingdom – and that includes being *joyful*!

So, Christian joy isn't something we pump up and generate on our own. It comes when the Holy Spirit is a dominant, controlling factor in the way we live.

Another way to look at it is to realize it's the *joy of Jesus* in us! The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of *Jesus*! The Spirit is Christ Himself residing in us.

Jesus was a joyful person. Unfortunately, we don't often picture Him this way. Many artist's drawings paint Him as a thoroughly serious, somber man. Years ago I saw one of the films that Hollywood produced on the life of Jesus, and Jesus kind of sleepwalked through the film – a wooden figure who showed little emotion; a bland, colorless caricature of the real Man from Nazareth. Jesus once said to disciples: "These things I have spoken to you, that *my joy* may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). Notice, He says, "I want you to experience all the joy that's inside of Me!"

Let me say a word about what this joy is like that's produced by the Spirit. It's not the same as being happy. Most people feel a sense of elation and happiness *some of the time*...you find a better job or get a nice pay raise, a new grandchild is born, you get back the biopsy or MRI report and everything's fine. But what happens when these circumstances change? Joyful feelings often leave us: a loved one or a close friend is diagnosed with terminal cancer, it's a rainy Monday morning and you wake up with a miserable cold, you go to the gas station and pay to fill up your tank with gas! Where's the joy then?

Happiness, feeling great about life, depends a lot on *outward circumstances*. Christian joy is different from these normal happy feelings that come and go, depending on what's happening in the moment.

Joy is rooted in God – in God's goodness, God's faithfulness, God's abiding love. Circumstances change; God doesn't. The Greek word for joy is “chara” – from the same root as “charis” (grace). Christian joy rooted in God’s grace. It comes as a result of God's mercy and kindness towards us, though we don't deserve it.

Joy is given to us as a gift from God when the Holy Spirit is in our life. *Because of this, we can have joy even in the worst of times.* It’s an “in spite of” joy! We see this “in spite of” joy in Jesus’ own life. In the prayer of Jesus recorded in John 17, as the cross looms on the horizon, Jesus prays, “I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them” (John 17:13). The Apostle Paul knew this "in spite of" joy. He spoke of himself and the apostles, suffering hardship for the gospel, "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Corinthians 6:10). There are times when I’ve been inspired by Christians who exhibit joy even when they are going through painful and difficult experiences, and have no earthly reason to feel any joy!

So followers of Jesus should be joyful people!

Then how come so many aren't! I'll bet all of us can think of Christians who are real grumps! Sourpusses. Just no fun to be around. We probably know some professing Christians who are critical, negative, joyless human beings! Hopefully we're *not* one of them!

I'm not suggesting that we should never feel sad or dejected or discouraged. Those feelings come as part of life. It's important not to deny or repress these emotions when we have them. But even then, we can have a joy inside of us, rooted in God. God wants us to be joyful people!

So how can we have this joy? Here are some steps we can take. ***Give yourself over to Christ completely and unreservedly.*** A lot of us have some form of belief in Jesus. We consider ourselves to be Christians. But we haven’t pulled out all the stops and surrendered our life and will completely to the Lord. The more we hold back from giving ourselves to Christ, the less joy we will have in our heart. Another way to put it: Let the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ in you, take more and more control of your life. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. The more we allow the Spirit to fill us and control us, the greater the joy we will experience.

Next, turn away from sin. There's probably nothing that reduces the joy of the Lord in us more than willful sin, or unconfessed sin. Now we all sin, and when we confess our sins, God forgives us and cleanses us. But it's when we allow sin to go unconfessed, or we deliberately continue to do what's wrong or what we know is against God's will, that the Lord's joy is lost.

King David was a great man of God, but he sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba. That led to other sins like lying and murder. The prophet Nathan confronts the king with the awful things he has done. David repents. In Psalm 51 David expresses his remorse, and his desire to get right with God once again. In that Psalm David cries out to God, “Restore to me the *joy* of my salvation” (Psalm 51:12). David lost his joy when he sinned so badly – and he wants it back! Confess any known sin. Turn from doing wrong. Ask God for forgiveness, and joy can come

Another step in finding joy in our faith is to work hard to get rid of negative, joyless attitudes. Some of us are kind of programmed to be negative, critical, joyless people. Maybe we grew up in a family where our parents were miserable, and didn't have a very positive outlook on life. Maybe growing up, for whatever reason, we didn't have a happy childhood. Our unhappy childhood carries over into adulthood. If this is the case, I think God wants to deprogram us, and breathe into us a more positive, pleasant, hopeful outlook.

Finally, joy is multiplied when we live a self-forgetful life. Some people make it their goal in life to try to be happy. Chasing down joy to grab it for yourself. But some of the most miserable people in the world are those who are self-focused and me-centered. Perhaps you've heard of the acronym: J O Y. **J**esus first. **O**thers second. **Y**ourself last. Joy is a serendipity thing! *Joy doesn't come when we seek it – it comes as a by-product of our forgetting about ourselves and loving and serving God and others.*

God wants His people to be joyful people! But someone may counter: With all of the turmoil and sorrow in the world, how can we be joyful? In fact, do we even have the right to be joyful when so many people in the world are suffering? Fair question. Think of all the heartache and pain our nation has gone through the last few months. Gun violence - mass shootings. Individuals and families trying to survive with the high cost of food and gas, and just about everything else. On the world scene, Russia's devastation in Ukraine. Widespread suffering throughout the world that doesn't capture headlines and news reports. Shouldn't I at least feel a little bit guilty having this joy inside when so many people are hurting?

Well, there's always been suffering in the world. Jesus didn't say "I want you to have my joy if nobody else is suffering in the world." Several other things Jesus said factor in here:

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). Most interpreters suggest that Jesus is saying we are blessed when we mourn over our own sins, and the sin and suffering of others. So there is that tension of truly feeling grief and sadness where there is suffering, and yet still having the joy of the Lord through it all.

Jesus also said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The world is filled with trouble and heartache, but in spite of that, we can be cheerful and joyful, because Christ has overcome the world. Our joy is not rooted in what this world offers, but it's rooted in God, and God's faithfulness and goodness.

Jesus wants His followers to be joyful people! And if we can show joy even in the midst of our pain, we can witness to the love and power of Christ!

There was a man in one of the churches I served whose name was Phil. Phil was a dedicated follower of Jesus. He was a blue collar guy. He served the church in practical ways, using his mechanical and woodworking skills to serve the Lord. Phil didn't say much. In fact, at times, he would talk rather slow, like you had to help him finish his sentence. Every once in a while he'd come to me and say the Lord had given him a revelation. And I listened – he was not a kook –

but a very spiritual man. Though he didn't talk much, *he smiled a lot*. Not a phony smile, but a genuine smile, an occasional chuckle, that revealed a deep joy in the Lord.

Phil developed a chronic illness. Over the years his body wore down. Phil died several years ago. Nancy and I went to his funeral service. Someone who shared a remembrance of Phil told how, even up to the end, Phil kept smiling. And this person said to him, "For heaven's sake, Phil, you don't have to keep smiling!" But he did. Because Phil was a Holy Spirit-filled man, and the joy of Jesus filled his life."

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

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