



**The Fruit of the Spirit is Joy,
Something Better than Happiness**
Philippians 4:4

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS JOY, SOMETHING BETTER THAN HAPPINESS
Philippians 4:4

Babies make dads do silly things. And dads love it. One thing dads are good at is making their babies laugh.

I learned how to do that during my rookie year as a dad. Andy was a few months old and just starting to respond with a smile or a giggle. So, I came home from the office for lunch one day, and after lunch, I took the toy on his high chair and starting playing with him. It was one of those spinning toys, like this one, with a suction cup to stick to the high chair. So, I stuck it on my head and started spinning it. And Andy started laughing. And the more I did, the more he laughed. So, after about ten minutes of this, I had to go back to work. As soon as I walked into the office, one of the secretary's looked at me and starting laughing. And she said, "I know exactly what you did, because my son did the same thing." The suction toy left a perfectly round hickey on my forehead! It was about 5 inches in diameter. And it lasted about a week! Thanks to Kathy's make-up job, it was a bit less noticeable. That's what you do when you're a rookie dad. And it was worth it, to make my baby laugh at me.

So, to all the dads who do silly things to make your kids laugh, and all the other great things you do for your family, Happy Father's Day!

This morning, we're going to take about joy. "The fruit of the spirit is ... joy." And all of us want more of it.

Jesus said, "A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit." And then He said, "You shall know them by their fruits."¹ In other words, *the way you live proves what lives in you*. And that's what we're talking about this summer.

The fruit of the Spirit is proof that *Christ* lives in us. The fruit of the Spirit includes the character traits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But there's more to it than being a nice person. The fruit of the Spirit is proof that *Christ* lives in us. God's desire is that we would be "conformed to the image of His Son." God is constantly at work in us; molding us to look like Jesus, to love like Jesus, and to live like Jesus in every way. What we see in Jesus is what others should see in us.

Again, *the way you live proves what lives in you. Therefore, when you look in the mirror, do you see the fruit of the Spirit? When others look at you, do they see the fruit of the Spirit? Do they see joy in you?*

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS JOY

Of the hundreds of verses in the Bible on joy, I want to focus on three. The first is from Paul, when he said, "The fruit of the Spirit is ... joy" (Galatians 5:22). Joy is a product of God's Spirit living in us. The second verse is from Jesus, when He said, "(Everything I have spoken to you is so) that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11, ESV). The third

verse is also from Paul, when he urged the Philippians, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice” (Philippians 4:4, ESV).

Joy is a product of God’s Spirit living in us. Joy is the desire of Jesus’ heart for us. And, joy is a command, really an invitation. Joy is to be a way of life practiced by every follower of Jesus. “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.”

Joy includes happiness, the two are often used interchangeably. But I like what John Piper said, that happiness is too “flimsy” a word to define joy. Happiness tends to be circumstantial. My favorite team winning makes me happy. A funny movie makes me happy. Chocolate ice cream makes me happy, and running out of chocolate ice cream makes my unhappy. When something good happens, we’re happy. Happiness is temporary, but joy is something so much more.

JOY THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE

Joy is used in so many contexts in the Bible, and I want you to hear some of the ways joy is described in the Bible and how you experience joy in your life.

Joy is gratitude for waking up every morning and being alive. “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24, ESV). Every day is a blessing from God.

Joy is the pleasure of God’s presence. David said, “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11, ESV).

So many times in Israel’s history, joy was the celebration of deliverance from oppression and suffering. “When the Lord brought back his exiles to Jerusalem, it was like a dream! We were filled with laughter, and we sang for joy. And the other nations said, ‘What amazing things the Lord has done for them.’ Yes, the Lord has done amazing things for us! What joy!” (Psalm 126:1-3, NLT).

Joy is new life in Christ, gratitude for our salvation, praise for the Gospel, the thrill of our new relationship with God. “We have been justified by faith, and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1-2, ESV). Even in heaven, Jesus said, “There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10, ESV).

Joy is our hope of heaven, of spending eternity with Him. The Bible says, one day, we will “stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy” (Jude 24, NAS).

And now, in the present, joy is the experience of answered prayer. Jesus said, “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24, ESV).

Joy is a grateful heart. “Rejoice always ... and in everything give thanks” (1 Thessalonians 5:16, 18).

Even though life is not always filled with happy days, joy is present in our suffering. After losing his family and his wealth, Job said, “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be

the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). The prophet Habakkuk said, “Though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!” (Habakkuk 3:17-18, NLT). James, the brother of Jesus said, “Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2-4, NAS). Joy knows that all suffering is temporary, and that God can use our suffering for good.

Tony Snow was a political journalistic and commentator, and White House press secretary for President George W. Bush. Before he lost his two-year battle with cancer at the age of 53, Tony Snow, a devout Christian, wrote this,

“God relishes surprise. We want lives of simple, predictable ease – smooth, even trails as far as the eye can see – but God likes to go off-road. He provokes us with twists and turns. He places us in predicaments that seem to defy our endurance and comprehension – and yet don’t. By his love and grace, we persevere. The challenges that make our hearts leap and stomachs churn invariably strengthen our faith and grant measures of wisdom and joy we would not experience otherwise ... The mere thought of death somehow makes every blessing vivid, every happiness more luminous and intense. We may not know how our contest with sickness will end, but surely we will know we have felt the touch of God.”²

Joy is loving Jesus. Peter said, “You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy” (1 Peter 1:8, NLT). “Inexpressible.” Peter could not find words worthy of describing his joy and love for Jesus.

Joy is our expression of worship and praise. “Clap your hands, all peoples; shout to God with the voice of joy” (Psalm 47:1, NAS). “O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord, let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation” (Psalm 95:1, NAS).

The Bible is filled with stories and examples of joy. The Bible is filled with joy. But too often, we’re not.

JOY IS ...

Joy is the chief pursuit of humankind. Life is a search for meaning, happiness, and joy. And we search for it everywhere. We work long hours to make a lot of money, hoping that more money will allow us to buy more stuff, and more stuff will make us happy. Some people party their lives away trying to feel some kind of thrill. And so many Americans turn to entertainment. To late night entertainment, to YouTube videos of cats, to anything to make us laugh for just a second. We’ll do anything to pass the time, combat the boredom, and fill the emptiness. But none of it gives us lasting joy.

A lot of Christians don’t experience joy either. We ought to be the happiest, most joyful people in the world. But too many of us are sour, grumpy, complaining, and pessimistic. We are the most blessed people in the world. We have received the grace of God. We look forward to

seeing Jesus face to face and living with Him forever in heaven. Our lives should also be filled with joy and laughter and happiness. Proverbs says, “A joyful heart makes a cheerful face” (Proverbs 15:13, NAS). We are the most blessed people in the world, so look like it!

I realize joy comes easy for some people. Some of you just have that kind of personality. You’re always smiling and like sunshine. My wife is like that. The first week Kathy and I were married, every morning she got up, threw open the curtains, and started singing, “The hills are alive, with the sound of music.” It was cute ... for about week, but after that, we had to have a talk. Kathy is a third grade school teacher. This past year, she came home from school one day, and I asked, “How was your day?” And this is what she said, “Oh, one of the boys stuck his head in the toilet, but other than that it was a great day. I just love my job!”

Joy is easier for Kathy than it is for me. And her joy is not just the product of her personality; she’s just able to connect to the joy of the Lord better than I am. I have to think myself into joy. I have to hear truth and meditate on that truth to move my heart and experience joy. So, these are my thoughts from the week.

- Joy is defined as delight, elation, gladness, satisfaction, and yes, happiness.
- But joy is more than a good mood or things going our way.
- Joy is a deep-seated, soul-level sense of knowing that all is well, regardless of our circumstances, because we trust that God is in control.
- Therefore, joy is hope, joy is confidence, joy is godly optimism.
- Joy can be spontaneous, a reaction to something exciting.
- Joy makes us want to tell someone about our good news. Joy has to be expressed.
- Joy celebrates. Joy sings and shouts. Joy worships.
- Joy is also peaceful and content. Joy is being soul satisfied. Joy sleeps well at night.
- Joy is to be a way of life, a virtue, a character trait, a part of one’s identity.
- Joy is anticipation. It is gladness in the present over what has not even happened yet. Joy is experiencing the promise of God’s future blessings in advance, in the present.
- Joy is not the absence of problems or pain. Joy is knowing that God is with us in our problems and pain.
- Joy is a refusal to despair.
- Joy is experiencing the presence of God.
- Joy is experiencing the affection of God.
- Joy is a sense of utter blessedness, and feeling the lavish love of God.
- Joy is loving God and being loved by God.
- Joy is transcendent; it lifts us and connects to something beyond this world. Joy is thinking about heaven and imagining the day when we will see Jesus face to face.
- Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. Joy is proof that Christ lives in us.

The Christian life is meant to be a life of joy. Jesus said, “(Everything I’ve said to you is) so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full” (John 15:11, NAS).

THE STRUGGLE

I realize that joy is elusive for a lot of people, especially those who struggle with depression. You may be one of those. You can’t just shake it off. You can’t just put a smile on your face. I’ve been there and talked with a lot of people who have been there. Depression is real, and anyone struggling with it needs help digging out.

Even highly successful people struggle with depression, as is evidenced by the recent suicides of fashion designer Kate Spade and television chef Anthony Bourdain. Their deaths recall the suicide of Robin Williams several years ago. Robin Williams was one of the funniest people in the world. He was the star on every stage and the life at every party. He was a comedian’s comedian and a great actor, with broad talent from the silly to the serious. According to his friends, he was a gentle man, generous, and cared about everyone he met. But a life filled with fame, fortune, and friends was not enough to overcome his depression. Depression affects people of all walks of life. Over 45,000 people commit suicide every year in the United States. The controversial series *13 Reasons Why* by Netflix takes a look at teen suicide.

If you’re struggling with depression, please don’t hide it. There are people who love you and who can help you. We are willing to walk with you as long as it takes. And God loves you. You may not feel it, but He loves you and He is there. “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18, NAS). And there is hope. “Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning” (Psalm 30:5, NLT). Don’t walk alone. Please talk to someone.

JOY THAT LOOKS BEYOND

Back to those three verses. “The fruit of the Spirit is ... joy” (Galatians 5:22). Joy is the product of God’s Spirit living in us. It is the overflow of walking in and living by the Holy Spirit. Joy is proof that Christ lives in us.

In John 15, Jesus said, “(Everything I have spoken to you is so) that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11, ESV). Jesus later prayed for this. In the garden, the night of His arrest, He prayed to His Father, “I am coming to you, (and this is what I pray), that while they are in the world, they would be filled with my joy” (John 17:13, NLT). His prayer is that we would be filled with joy. Not just when we get to heaven, but now, while we are still in this world.

And when Paul was in prison, under less than joyful circumstances, he wrote a letter urging the Philippian Christians, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice” (Philippians 4:4, ESV). This is a command, a repeated command. But even more than that, it is an invitation. “Come on, rejoice! In light of His great love for us, in light of the hope of heaven, in anticipation of the day when we will see Jesus face to face and live with Him forever in heaven, come on, rejoice!”

But we miss out on joy when there is sin in our lives, when there is unconfessed sin and habitual sin in our lives. We miss out on joy when we pursue personal ambitions, instead of the will of God. We miss out on real joy when pursue it in all the wrong places and in all the wrong ways. We miss out on joy when we don't spend time with God, time in His word, time in prayer and talking to Him. We miss out on joy when we neglect our relationship with Him.

One of the greatest examples of joy is Jesus. Hebrews 12 describes the joy of Jesus, even as He hung on the cross. "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. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:2-3, NIV).

What can we learn from Jesus? Joy is able to look above and beyond circumstances. Joy sees a future and believes in a future. Joy is knowing where we're headed. Joy is certainty of what is to come. Joy is celebrating the future in the present. "For the joy set before Him," Jesus "endured the cross." He was able to look beyond the cross, and therefore, endure the pain and the shame. Joy is looking above and beyond our circumstances, knowing that we will make it through, and celebrating our future hope even in our present circumstances.

I was thinking about the spectrum of joy, and though about two different days I will experience in life. The day I married Kathy was a day of joy, and the day, if it comes for me, that I bury Kathy will be a day of joy. How can I say that? The day I married Kathy was a day of joy because it was the day we began our life together. It was a happy day, but it was much more than that.

And, if it comes for me, the day I bury Kathy will also be a day of joy. It will certainly be a day of tears, but it will also be a day of celebrating a lifetime of memories, a lifetime of family, a lifetime of love. We will be so grateful that we loved her and were loved by her. It will be the day her faith has been waiting for. And we will rejoice over all the blessings we experienced and we will rejoice because she is with Jesus. And then we will cry some more. And we laugh some more remembering family stories. But through it all, there will be joy.

CONCLUSION

Let me recite Paul's blessing for the Roman Christians as a blessing for us. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13, NIV).

NOTES

¹ See Matthew 7:17-18, 20.

² Quoting Tony Snow, from David Jeremiah, *A Life Beyond Amazing* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Company, Thomas Nelson, 2017), page 31.