

Galatians 5:22-26

Gal 5:22 (NKJV) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴ And those *who are Christ's* have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

We are studying the word “**joy**” which is the Greek word “*chara*” - a word that signifies rejoicing and gladness.¹ We saw previously that joy represents the way that believers view their present circumstances in light of God’s plan for their future.² We also saw that “**joy**” is never dependent on a believer’s circumstances, but is fully rooted and grounded in God’s sovereign control of all things. Happiness, on the other hand, is a by-product of a person’s circumstances. If their circumstances are good, then they are happy, and when their circumstances are not good, then they are unhappy. So, happiness is something that is very fickle, fluctuating, ever-changing, unpredictable, and erratic. It can change in just a moment of time based on a person’s circumstances. Joy, though, is not rooted in the believer’s circumstances, but it is securely grounded in the promises that God has provided for that believer.

It seems that many Christians have the notion that joy is a kind of spiritual emotion that someone has, an uplifting feeling and excitement when things are going well. I appreciate that it is very difficult to put emotional experiences that we have into words – similar to telling someone what a juicy, well-cooked steak tastes like, but in reality “**joy**” is not an emotion. “**Joy**” is the deep confidence that is developed in the believer’s life knowing that God is in complete sovereign control over every circumstance of life, and that His promises are eternal and unchanging. It is one of those fruits of the Spirit that produce a continuing sense of well-being in the believer. It is ironic that when a believer truly has this kind of understanding of God’s sovereignty and care in their life, that their joy is often the greatest when their circumstances are the most painful and the most trying.³

If I can say it this way, joy is not something that you can manufacture. It is not something that someone can have by exercising some kind of strong power of their will. My personal understanding of joy is that it is not something that the believer just create. It is not a quality that they can just automatically have or even develop in their life. It is a supernatural gift, or “**fruit**”, of the Holy Spirit’s work in a believer’s life, and is not something that comes from ourselves. It is that supernatural ability that allows a believer to respond to God with thanksgiving and contentment when things are NOT going well, or when very difficult circumstances develop in their life. Either you have it or you do not have it, and you cannot have it apart from obedience to Christ and a full reliance on who He truly is. Joy is a supernatural by-product of spiritual obedience, not someone’s favorable circumstances. It is not an actual emotion, but a deep sense of well-being that comes from knowing that we are rightly related to God. Stated another way, the joy that God gives to us is deep, it is abiding, it is supernatural. For instance, Paul wrote the following in [Romans 5:3](#) when he said,

¹ Zodhiates, 1467.

² Harris, *chara*, ep.

³ Precept, *Galatians 5:22*, ep.

Ro 5:3 (NKJV) **And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;**

The NASB says “**exult in our tribulations**”. The ESV, NIV, and RSV say “**we rejoice in our sufferings**”. The ASV says we “**rejoice in our tribulations**”. This is not a normal emotion. This is not something that just comes naturally to someone. This is not something that we can just manufacture because we want some joy when things are not going well. Listen to what Paul stated in [2 Corinthians 8:1-2](#),

2Co 8:1 (NKJV) **Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: ² that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.**

In reality, I think it would be accurate to say that joy is actually a kind of paradox in a committed believer’s life. It is something that almost seems to flourish and increase in the midst of various afflictions and difficulties. This is the enigma and paradox of joy. It is almost something that we could call an “oxymoron”, or a contradiction. So often the Scriptures speak of joy as being something that they actually experience the most during trials, afflictions, sadness, and suffering. For instance, [Hebrews 10:32-34](#) says the following about the Hebrew believers who were enduring great suffering and affliction because of their faith in Christ,

Heb 10:32 (NKJV) **But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³ partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; ³⁴ for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.**

Paul makes this remarkable statement about joy in [2 Corinthians 6:10](#) when he says,

2Co 6:10 (NKJV) **as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.**

He says that in the very midst of his personal sorrow that he is still able to rejoice. It is as if nothing could defeat him simply because his outlook and his perspective on what God was doing in his life always outweighed the trials that were taking place in his life.

We must see from a Christian perspective, that none of this is natural. In the world, this certainly is not something that is normal, but for the Christian, this is actually the proof of the power that joy brings into the believer’s life.⁴ This cannot be defined as a human joy, as a kind of joy that a person produces and creates on their own. Biblical joy is supernatural and its creator is the Holy Spirit. [Romans 14:17](#) says it this way,

Ro 14:17 (NKJV) **for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**

[1 Thessalonians 1:6](#) says something similar,

⁴ Verbrugge, 600.

1Th 1:6 (NKJV) And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,

That which strengthens me the most about this word “**joy**” is that the world cannot take it away from the believer, even in the midst of the worst of circumstances.

One of the major problems of the charismatic movement is its pre-occupation with God giving things to the believer – specifically great health and great wealth. The very erroneous idea that every believer is to experience perfect health and to always have every financial need met in their life is a terrible misunderstanding of Scripture. It is a very serious ungodly focus. Just a simple study of the word “**joy**” should reveal to anyone who is Biblically serious that afflictions, sufferings, and trials are often just a normal lot of the average Christian life. For those who teach such false doctrine, what happens when they do not get what they want, when a believer gets some deadly cancer, or when all that someone has is destroyed in a tornado or hurricane? What happens when our circumstances are not favorable, or what we wanted them to be? Well, what happens is that people lose their joy, they lose their hope in God, and they lose God’s perspective on their life. I am convinced that this desire for health and wealth that the charismatic movement has created in people has become an idol, something they worship, a kind of false spiritual entitlement that they believe the Word of God promises them. Nothing could be any further from the truth. Our hope and our joy is not based on what happens to us, but clearly on what has happened for us and what will happen for us in the future. What God has done for us in Christ is where our hope and our joy truly exists.

Let me just mention a few of the obvious places where joy cannot be found – things that are certainly self-evident to anyone who is truly walking with God.

- 1) Joy cannot be found in pleasure. The greater someone’s search for pleasure, the greater will be their ultimate disappointments. Pleasure is incredibly fleeting and has only a temporary nature to it. We call this “hedonism”, or pleasure seeking, high living, self-indulgence, debauchery, decadence, self-gratification. It is what the world loves and embraces, but is something that the Word of God clearly declares can ruin and destroy a person’s life. It ultimately leads to depression and discouragement.
- 2) Joy cannot be found in unbelief. I think of all of the people who refuse to come to Christ. They are arrogant in their unbelief, and they are always without joy. Voltaire, who was one of the most prominent infidels of history declared at his death bed that he wished that he had never been born and cried out that he had been abandoned by both God and man. He said that he knew that he was going to hell, yet was still unwilling to come to Christ.
- 3) Joy is not found in money or riches. Some of the wealthiest people on the planet are the most miserable. They have everything that their heart could desire, but still find themselves miserable and completely unsatisfied. I think of someone like Warren Buffet who is one of the wealthiest men in the world. He is fairly old, but is still consumed with earning money that he can never take with him.

Now, one obvious way to experience joy is simply to focus our life on God and those things that are eternal. The more that we focus our heart and mind on temporal things, the greater will be the

disappointments that those temporal things create in our life. As a Christian, you can certainly dwell on the difficult moments and all of the things that maybe are not going your way, but in the end dwelling on the wrong things will rob us of the joy that God wants to give to us. I think it is perfectly okay to come to God with those things in life that are difficult and disappointing. The Psalms are full of chapters based on this reality – of coming to God with our hurts, with our discouragements, and with the unfortunate things that so often happen in our lives. However, if we do that, it is critical that we leave those things with Him. It is a wise choice not to always be complaining to God. I am not sure that complaining actually helps anything simply because it is a reminder of the things with which we are disgruntled. [1 Thessalonians 5:18](#) is an appropriate verse at this juncture when it says,

1Th 5:18 (NKJV) in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

This is one of the ways that God has determined that we might have His joy – when we refocus our life on what we know to be his actual will for our life. Being able to give God thanks for difficult things that often happen to us is not always easy, yet in the midst of those trying moments, God will strengthen us when we find ourselves giving Him thanks even when things are not going as we may have wanted.

I.e., God often allows very difficult and trying circumstances into our life to help us develop this quality of being able to give thanks in everything. I cannot miss that “**this is the will of God in Christ Jesus**” for my life. I am always amazed when I read the book of Philippians which is the primary book in the New Testament that addresses joy. What amazes me is that when Paul wrote it, he was in prison and had no idea as to what was going to be his final outcome. Yet in the midst of that very difficult circumstance, he still had great joy.

In the church, we have joy when we are in unity with other believers. [Philippians 2:2](#) says,

Php 2:2 (NKJV) fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind.

[3 John 4](#) says,

3Jn 1:4 (NKJV) I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

We have joy when we believe God, believe His Word, and entrust our life into His care. [Romans 15:13](#) says,

Ro 15:13 (NKJV) Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I love what Nehemiah declared in [Nehemiah 8:10](#),

Ne 8:10 (NKJV) Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this day is holy* to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

I would like to close out the study of the word “**joy**” by saying that joy is something that we can kill in our life. Any believer can take good qualities in their Christian life and hinder them by bad choices, so there are several things that we at least need to be aware of if we want our joy to be constant in our life. First of all, living in unconfessed sin in our life will certainly eliminate our joy. If as a believer I insist on being selfish, rude, indifferent, unkind, greedy, immoral, bitter, resentful, or any negative thing for

that matter, then I will lose my joy. I just have to confess these things to God so that the joy He wants me to have will not be hindered. Secondly, living with an unforgiving spirit will certainly hinder my joy. Hebrews talks about a “**root of bitterness**” that springs up in a person’s life and defiles many people. If my life is defiling other people because I simply cannot forgive someone for something that they may have done to me, then I doubt that I will be able to have any joy in my life. A third area that can easily kill our joy is anger. In many ways, anger could be considered the very opposite of biblical joy. Most people would say that the opposite was grief, sorrow, or pain, but I have never met anyone who was an angry person that had real joy in their life. In fact anger is a great thief of joy. Fourthly, always being discontent with how our life is going will steal our joy. People who are never satisfied with what God is doing in their life and how He is managing their life will rarely or ever have any kind of meaningful joy. Paul learned that in whatever state he found himself that he was able to be fully content. He says this in [Philippians 4:11-12](#),

Php 4:11 (NKJV) Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: ¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

How can we personally know in a very practical way whether or not we are discontent? The answer is simple – are we always complaining, are we a complainer, someone who is never satisfied because of things that we do not like. That is the undeniable evidence that we are discontent. Discontent always leads to being disgruntled and annoyed with people. We find ourselves being irritated and frustrated with almost everything in our life, and the ultimate result is that it will steal our joy. I am personally convinced that people who are always grumbling about life and things over which they have no influence and no control actually have chosen to be that way. It has become a way of life, a bad habit of their life that they simply are not willing to break. In my mind, becoming discontented with everything that happens to us and around us is simply contrary to the will of God for our lives. In reality, it is those annoying and frustrating circumstances that reveal the depth of our real love for God and His will for our life, and ultimately it reveals whether we even know what real joy is.

There are many other things that can hinder our joy, but suffice it to say that we want to allow God to remove out of our lives all of those things that we know the Holy Spirit would not be approving of in our life. I am more than convinced that there are a multitude of undesirable things that are happening in our world and often times in our lives – things that we would change if we could, but cannot. What I do know, however, is that the longer that I dwell on those things that I cannot change and cannot really impact, the greater will be the loss of joy in my life. In Philippians 4:8-9, Paul said these amazing words as a deep encouragement as to what God truly wants us to do.

Php 4:8 (NKJV) Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things. ⁹ The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

I have to develop the practice of dwelling on those things that are good rather than those things that are bad. The other night, all of my family that lives near us came over to go swimming and celebrate

Memorial Day with some hamburgers and hotdogs. It was a fun day and all of the grandkids were having a great time. However, in the midst of all of that my well pump stopped working and we had no water. We have these very large corn farmers who have eight eight inch wells that pump as much water out of the aquifer in one day as the entire city of Aiken uses. We thought our well had gone dry, but we simply needed a new pump and got that installed the next day. To keep things in perspective, though, I shared with everyone how in Zimbabwe they have no running water in the bush, and some of the women walk over 3 miles to get to the nearest well, then carry two five gallon buckets of water back to their hut. Some of them do this three times each day. All I have to do is call a well guy and he will come and fix my well so that I have plenty of water. I have so much to be thankful for, and so we chose to dwell on that which is good. You have to choose to do this as your way of life. If you choose otherwise, you will have no joy.

Having joy in what God has done for us is our joy. Let us rejoice and be glad!

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