

COLLECTIVE

Life in the Spirit series (Lesson 9): Fruit of the Spirit – Joy (Part 3)

Read: Galatians 5:16-25

For our CG lessons this year, we will focus primarily on Life in the Spirit from Galatians 5. In our previous lesson, we learnt about the 2nd Fruit of the Spirit – Joy – and that Joy is a having a Feast. Today, we continue on the 3rd part of our study on Joy: -

Joy Is Having a Faith

We must first understand that **the basis and most important foundation of our joy is our faith in the Gospel.**

The gospel tells us the great truth of what God has done through Christ to save the world, because of his love and grace. In the gospel, God promises us forgiveness, eternal life, and a future filled with hope for the whole creation.

Just by trusting in Christ alone, we are united with Christ through the Holy Spirit and are counted righteous in Christ before God. Being justified by faith we now have peace with God and no longer face condemnation. We receive the forgiveness of our sins. We are born again into a living hope by sharing Christ's risen life. We are adopted as fellow heirs with Christ. We become citizens of God's covenant people, members of God's family and the place of God's dwelling.

So by trusting in Christ, we have full assurance of salvation and eternal life, for our salvation ultimately depends, not on ourselves, but on the work of Christ and the promise of God. Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This truth alone is the most important basis and foundation of our joy.

The gospel is therefore **not just a formula or a mechanism** to get to heaven, but it is the good news of what God accomplished through Christ. And these things can never be taken away, because they are rooted in **who God is** and **what God has done.**

The joy that is generated by our faith in these truths and promises can therefore **be present in our lives** even when there we are suffering, going thru disappointments, challenges, or being treated unjustly. Such things **cannot** and **do not** have to take away the inner joy in our lives as they are the fruit of the Spirit.

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If you read the book of **Psalms** – the Bible’s book of praises – the single largest category of “praises” were actually laments – a passionate expression of grief or sorrow! People were bringing their personal pain, their experience of injustice or oppression, their physical or verbal attacks, and their life-threatening illnesses to God.

Their songs were totally honest about these things. They did not pretend that everything was fine and try to look happy in front of others. And yet, by bringing all their suffering into the presence of God, they were able to turn back to hope, to praise, and even joy because of their unshakeable faith that God was sovereign and would never abandon them. That kind of joy enabled them to cope with the pain, because it was the **by-product** of faith in the living God.

Think of **Habakkuk**. His country was facing a devastating invasion that might destroy everything. He was trembling with fear at the prospect. But even in such circumstances he knew he could trust in God and rejoice in him.

In his remarkable affirmation of faith he says:

“Though the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails, and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen, and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”

(Habakkuk 3:17-18)

In the context of our lives, we could paraphrase it as :

“Though my business and career are not growing, sales and promotion opportunities are not coming, though I am being overlooked, misunderstood, treated unjustly, though there is no sign of finding my life partner, though there seems to be no signs or recovery from my illnesses, or relief from the pain of the loss of a loved one, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior (Name 3:17-18)

Jesus commanded his followers to rejoice when they were persecuted. Some of the times when the Apostle Paul had the most inner joy was when he was chained up in a stinking prison, sometimes after being beaten. He would have been cold, hungry, weak, and in great pain. Yet he had the joy of the gospel of Christ within him. And when Peter wrote to Christians who were already suffering a lot under persecution, he said that they were filled with “inexpressible and glorious joy”. It was the proof of the genuineness of their faith, refined and tested by fire. So, in the Bible, the joy that is produced by the Spirit, and the joy that comes from having faith in the gospel – is a strong, robust and resilient joy that is not wiped out by suffering.

True joy is (therefore) not the absence of sadness, but it is when joy overcomes and overwhelms sadness.

Now, if joy is such essential fruit and value in the life of Christians who are filled with God’s Spirit, why then is it so often missing in our lives? Why are people so often miserable?

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Maybe because we simply forget. It's easy to get tired and frustrated and fall into self-pity. And self-pity is the great enemy of joy. When we are feeling down and having self-pity, we need to make ourselves remember the great truths and promises of God. We need to go over them in our minds until we realize how inconsistent we are when we say we trust in God yet still feel miserable and sorry for ourselves. That is why **regular meditation of the Word of God is so crucial**. It develops **the belief in the truth of what God says OVER the reality of our situation**.

*(for example, when you are discouraged, remember the promise of God in **Jeremiah 29** that says "I have **plans** for **you**, **plans** to prosper **you** and not to harm **you**, **plans** to give you hope and a future")*

Now at this point, we do need to be careful. We need to distinguish between, on the one hand, Christians who are suffering the ordinary struggles of life and may need some encouragement to hold on to their joy in the midst of their troubles, and, on the other hand, Christians who are suffering the illness of clinical depression. Depression can be a real and devastating illness and there are physical and psychological causes that need wise and professional medical care, just as for any other illness. So if we have a Christian friend who is suffering from that kind of medically diagnosed depression, we should not simply tell them to "cheer up, snap out of it, and be joyful in the Lord." That can be very insensitive, and will add to their suffering, for "being joyful in the Lord" is exactly what they long to do, but can't. Loss of joy in life is one of the worst symptoms of depressive illness. And getting joy back is not just a matter of "trying harder." Depression is an illness, not a failure or a weakness.

But, at the same time, there are also Christians who suffer from depression, and yet they testify to the fact that they still have their underlying assurance of the truth of the gospel and the love of God. They know that God can be trusted, even when life is at its darkest. And knowing those things deep down means that they can know joy as an objective fact or truth, even when they don't have joyful emotional feelings.

Discussion/Reflection

1. Is there a difference between joy as the fruit of the Spirit and ordinary cheerfulness and happiness? If so, what makes that difference?
2. Do you know of examples of people (including yourself) who have suffered greatly and yet still showed joy in their faith?