

COLLECTIVE

Life in the Spirit series (Lesson 7): Fruit of the Spirit – Joy (Part 1)

Read: Galatians 5:16-25

For our CG lessons this year, we will focus primarily on Life in the Spirit from Galatians 5. We have just completed the 1st Fruit of the Spirit – Love – in our previous lessons. Today, we start our study on the 2nd Fruit of the Spirit – Joy.

Love, joy, and peace—the first three on Paul’s list of the fruit of the Spirit—are like a triplet. They come together. Jesus linked them very closely in his farewell conversations with his disciples:

- Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)
- As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. (John 15:9-10)
- I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:11)

And, to continue the picture, joy and peace are like twins. They come together as a pair even more often than love, joy, and peace come as a triplet. And Paul is particularly fond of the two words, joy and peace. This is the kind of thing he loves to say: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17). “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)

In fact, Paul speaks of joy twenty-one times and peace forty-three times in his letters! But we can see in those verses in Romans that for Paul, joy and peace are not just incidental by products of the Christian faith. They are not just happy feelings. Look at what else he says about them in just those few verses above:

- Joy and peace are key signs of the kingdom of God, just as important as righteousness. These are things that happen when God reigns—true joy and peace are born.
- Joy and peace are the way we are to serve and please God—not in solemn anxiety.
- Joy and peace are essential ingredients in our Christian hope—we are to be filled with joy and peace.
- Joy and peace are evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit overflowing in our lives.

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So it's not surprising that he includes joy and peace in the fruit of the Spirit! These words are not just describing a cheerful, contented emotional state. This is something profound and at the heart of our Christian life and witness.

Let's think first of joy. What brings you joy? What makes your eyes sparkle? What makes your heart leap up and down? What gives you a glow of pleasure and makes you smile, laugh, or whoop out loud and throw your arms up in the air for joy and want to hug everybody around you?

When I ask myself that question, four things come to mind very quickly, and each of them connects with something very true about Christian joy as the fruit of the Spirit. These four things bring me great joy – having a family, having a feast, having a faith, and having a future.

Joy is having a family. Joy fills us when we're with family sharing the love that binds us all together. Such as when we are with close friends where we just enjoy being in each other's company for a meal or a drink. Or when we see the happy faces of our loved ones. Or when we are out for a day with our spouse, girlfriend/boyfriend. However, there are some who, sadly, have very little joy, or no joy at all, from having a family. There are all kinds of reasons for that: cruel parents, marriage breakups, lonely singleness, death, feuds, hatreds, and even persecution by non-Christian family members. But when people belong to Christ, even if they do not have the joy of a vibrant and loving human family, or even if they endure the pain of a broken and abusive family, or loneliness, or death—when they belong to Christ they have the joy of a new family among God's people.

Joy is having a feast. This sort of joy springs up when we get really good news, particularly if it was unexpected or anxiously waited for. Then joy turns to celebration. Such as when you got accepted to the college of your choice, or when you get a dream job, close a business deal, after all the hard work and anxiety. Or the day when you asked someone to marry you, and she said "Yes!". Or the joy of getting news that a loved one had come safely through a surgical operation or recovered from serious illness. Or the news that you are about to become a parent/grandparent. When there's really good news, we celebrate it with joy, as we do for birthdays and anniversaries. Many cultures celebrate such moments by having a great party-meal. We mark moments of joy with food and drink.

Joy is having a faith. Sometimes we are filled with intense joy when we're in church worshiping God with other Christians. There are moments when the words of the Scriptures or the music and words of certain hymns and songs are so rich, when they remind us so powerfully of what God has done to save me, that our heart almost bursts with joy. We know deep down that I can't be what I am, or where I am, apart from the forgiving grace and daily embracing love of God. And when the worship, especially the music, reminds us of that, there are times we cannot sing because our eyes fill up with tears of joy and our voice is choked up with gratitude to God.

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Joy is having a future. We are filled with joy when we're out enjoying God's creation. We love the pleasure of being alive in God's world. We feel joy in just being able to run or walk out in the open air, or go for a swim in the sea or a lake. It's a joy that is stuffed full of gratitude to God. This is God's world and we love and enjoy it—as God meant us to—and as the Psalms celebrate with great joy. But there is another part of that joy, and it is knowing that this creation we now enjoy so much is only the womb—the groaning womb—of the new creation. So we look forward, not just to “going to heaven,” but to our resurrection bodies in the new heaven and earth that God is creating. What joy that will be! And it will be forever!

Discussion/Reflection

What is your definition of joy? Do you have the kind of true joy as described in the Bible?