

Russell Kelfer

**The Fruit
of the Spirit
Is...JOY**

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Series: The Fruit of the Spirit

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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The Fruit of the Spirit Is...JOY

If there is one thing the world is looking for, it is happiness—*real* happiness. Book stores are filled with best sellers telling people *how to be happy*. Parents are struggling with ways to make their children *happy*. Politicians are crying out from the street comers that they are the key to returning happiness to the people. If you were to ask those you know to make a list of the things they want in life, basically they would wish for happiness for themselves and those they love.

Even Christians, who claim to live in this world yet for another, basically want similar things. Just measure our prayer lists by that standard. We pray that Aunt Susie will get well. She's unhappy sick. We pray that Bill will find a job. He's unhappy out of work. We pray that Ronald will find a wife. He's unhappy single. We pray for things that will make people happy, assuming that once they are happy, they will be better able to cope with things eternal.

It has become such a rage that a whole new (though it's not really new) kind of "evangelical" thrust has arisen in this decade. It promises health, wealth, and happiness on planet earth to those who handle God's Word in the proper manner, and who handle God in the proper manner. If they just have enough faith, God will give them what will make them happy.

The problem, of course, is that they are confusing happiness with joy. As a result, they are promising something God may not want us to have. We can always have joy. God has promised us that. But from the world's perspective, we may not get the things that bring us happiness. Paul would have been happier out of jail, but even chained to a Roman guard, he had joy. Why? He was in the Will of God. It wasn't in John's plan book to end up in exile, but it was in God's. If circumstantial happiness is God's best for God's best people, then Jesus missed out on His Father's best. Rejected, refused, ignored, dishonored, accused, tried, convicted, and executed... that was God's plan for His Son. He

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had no place to lay His head, no glorious robes of kingly attire, no golden chariots to whisk Him from town to town, and no team of experts to plan and to execute His design for the church.

All Jesus had was His Father and His Father's Word, but that was all He needed. He was never less than flooded with joy. So He gave us that Word, and He gave us His Spirit, and added:

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. (John 15:11)

We can have as much joy as Jesus had, and it will come from the same source as His joy, which did not come from things, experiences, circumstances, or acceptance. His joy came from an inner relationship with His Father that was so secure that He did not even speak without His Father's speaking through Him. Then He went back to the Father and sent His Spirit to us and told us that the fruit (or character) that His Spirit would produce in us, when He was being allowed to be Himself, would include that same quality of joy that He had.

It is the appropriating of those aspects of His nature that He has bequeathed to us that we are studying in this series. This lesson begins a look at Paul's promise that when we are walking in the Spirit, the Spirit in us will produce joy.

JOY EXPLAINED

Joy is not an easy word to define. We tend to confuse it either with a feeling or with an expression of a feeling. That is easy to understand. In fact, of the Old Testament words that are translated "joy" in our English Bibles, several of them carry the connotation of "shouting for joy" or "singing for joy" or in some other way expressing outwardly an inward enthusiasm. The key is that whenever that joy was a lasting joy, it was always connected to an enthusiasm over either who God was, what God had said, what God had done, or how God had done it.

You take the Old Testament usage and trace it back, particularly in the Psalms, where most of those expressions occur, and you will see that pattern. This is confirmed in the New Testament where the term "joy" came to mean "an inner expression of excitement over spiritual things". Joy came to be a portrait of the believer who was looking at life through the lens of the Spirit, and thus who saw everything from God's vantage point. If it wasn't eternal, it didn't produce joy. Happiness, maybe. Joy, no.

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We know this is true, because New Testament joy is a fruit of God's presence in your life (Galatians 5:22) and because New Testament joy is a quality of life that the believer is expected to have all the time is clear:

Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, rejoice.

(Philippians 4:4)

Rejoicing, that is, the process of expressing joy, was to be:

- a) In the Lord– Based on His Presence, not on circumstances.
- b) Constant– Always the Christian's position.
- c) More prevalent in times of distress or difficulty– As James wrote,

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet various trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

(James 1:2,3 ESV)

So much, then, for man's definitions. So opposite are God's ways from man's that God's joy in us would actually become greater, the more difficult the situation. The less there was to be happy about; the more there would be to be joyful about, because God was about to glorify His Name, transform His children, or demonstrate His nature. In simple terms, then,

Joy: a heart attitude that reflects excitement and pleasure over things eternal.

A more complex, but complete definition, might sound like this:

Joy: a supernatural inner excitement over who God is (His Worth), what God has said (His Word), what God has done (His Works), and how God has done it (His Ways).

This joy reflects itself in the act of rejoicing.

Rejoicing: demonstrating, by praise to the Father, or by expressions of contentment and enthusiasm to those about us, that God is who He says He is.

Rejoicing is expressing joy. It must be done, as we shall see in our study, either by praising God to God, or demonstrating God to man. Our study of joy will take on several aspects and will take several lessons. The overall outline looks like this:

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- I- Joy Explained: A definition of joy
- II- Joy Explored: Learning to meditate on the Worth, Word, Works, and Ways of God
- III- Joy Expressed: Nature sings; so should we.

JOY EXPLORED

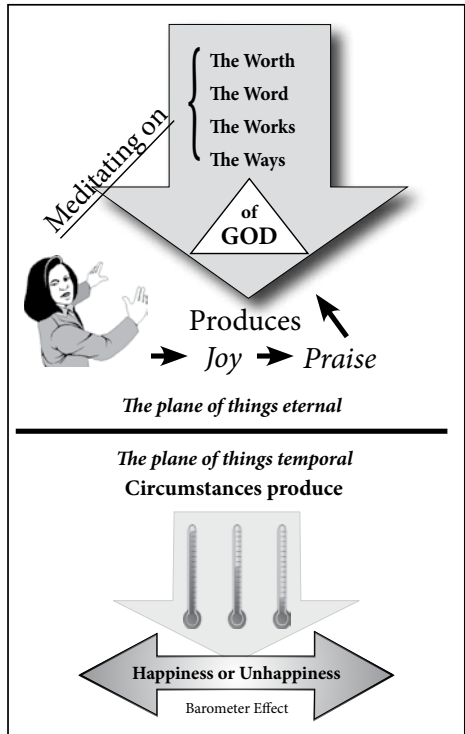
That, then, is what Joy is. It is a supernatural expression of God's nature that fills the spirit of the Christian when he allows God to do so. It demonstrates and multiplies itself by meditating on the Worth, the Word, the Works, and the Ways of God. As it does, we see life from God's perspective, and in spite of life's circumstances, we maintain an attitude of excitement and contentment that is unaffected by pressures; in fact the worse things get, the more joy ought to abound in us. Natural? No. Supernatural. That is the plan of God. And as He demonstrates His joy through you, particularly when you have no cause for happiness, the world is amazed. Once the world is amazed, you have an audience. That is why you are to...

be ready always to give an answer to every man who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

(I Peter 3:15b)

If we know what joy is, then how do we appropriate it; or if it is already resident within us, how do we release it? This diagram shows us, I believe, an overview of God's plan for joyfulness.

On the plane of things temporal, circumstances are the key ingredient in determining what makes us "happy" or "unhappy". The barometer of circumstances rises and falls based on how we "feel" (our emotional state), how our body feels



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(our physical state), our frame of mind (our mental state), and our frame of circumstances (what is happening to us). If our body is not aching, no one has rejected us, we are in a good state of mental health; if the car hasn't gone up in smoke, the plumbing isn't leaking, and the kids aren't screaming at the top of their lungs, we bounce around with a smile on our face, greet friend and foe alike with a beaming smile, and exude happiness. But let any of those four crucial factors change, and our happiness fades from disappointment to discouragement, even to depression. Has God changed? No. Have we changed? No. Has God's plan changed? No. The circumstances of life that create happiness have changed, and that barometer is expressed in our faces and in our responses.

Now some are better actors than others. Some temperaments and personalities can handle circumstances overtly better than others. So some people seem happy more of the time than others. Even the ability to appear happy in the midst of tribulation is not the same as having joy.

Joy is a supernatural inner quality that is a part of the nature of God Himself, and it is only released in our spirits when we view life's circumstances from God's perspective: and we either give it back to God in the form of praise, or express it to man in the form of quiet confidence and gentle enthusiasm, even in the face of adverse circumstances.

That's why we must undergo trials. It is through those trials that the nature of God is put to the test, and when allowed to do so, is free to demonstrate itself to a world who cannot be happy unless circumstances deem it so.

But, as we noted with the fruit of love, it doesn't just happen. Joy is the product of focusing on and meditating on the worth, the words, the works and the ways of God. When you do that, even if, and especially if, your temperament normally does not reflect a happy spirit, you will be the constant expression of joy, and a watching world who knows how unhappy you can be will want what has changed you. You cannot control their circumstances; therefore, you cannot make them happy. You can show them how to find joy. Then it won't matter what happens to them, they can rejoice always.

We generally teach our children, often simply through omission, to pray for circumstances rather than character and to

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exhibit happiness based on happenings, rather than to actually get excited over trouble, because trouble releases joy. Then we wonder, as they grow older, why they are off chasing things and success and acceptance in order to find happiness.

Do you want the joy of the Lord to be your strength as in Nehemiah 8:10? Then begin today to meditate day and night, night and day, without stopping, on the Worth, the Words, the Works, and the Ways of your God. As you do that, your life will be transformed into His perspective; you will stop viewing life through the telephoto lens of circumstance, but rather through the wide angle lens of eternity, and your heart will become a reflector for the joy of God.

Learn to Meditate on the Word of God

The Scripture promises joy to those who learn to meditate on the Word of God...the amazing things that God has said. A good way to view this phenomenon is to look at Job, who lost his joy in a sea of circumstances, only to have it return when he was forced to go back and worship God for His Word, His Worth, His Works, and His Ways. It wasn't until Job stopped talking long enough to listen to God speak that He was able to regain his perspective.

Now when we say "meditate on the Word of God", we don't just mean "meditate on the Word of God". Got it? I didn't think you would. We don't just mean meditate in the Scriptures. We mean meditate in the Scriptures, on the Scriptures. There is a great deal of difference. Meditate, in particular, on what the Word is and on what the Word promises about itself. This generates confidence in the God whose Word it is and permeates the spirit with joy. Listen:

Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts. (Jeremiah 15:16)

Joy comes from digesting the Word of God, provided that you are called by His Name. The Word brings conviction only to the unbeliever; but to those who are called by His Name, it literally produces joy. It changes the perspective to eternal things and creates an internal excitement over God...what He's said, what He's done, and how He's done it...that transcends the circumstances of life that appear to be justified in bringing sadness. Here is a good passage to memorize.

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For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

(Isaiah 55:10-12)

How would you like to be so filled with joy that all of nature around you would literally surround you with anthems of praise? How would you like to be so saturated with the Mind of God that God's very creation would join you in rejoicing? The Word of God produces that kind of joy. It never returns void; it always accomplishes what God desires it to accomplish; and in the process, it produces such a quality of inner excitement over who God is, and what He has said that even the trees of the fields appear to be applauding your hilarious enthusiasm in Christ. The Word produces that kind of joy.

In John Jesus explains that it is His plan for us to have that joy from meditating in His Word or abiding in it; in fact, that is why He spoke to us as He did, through the Word. Listen:

These things I have spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

(John 15:11)

“Here is why I spoke to you of abiding and obeying, of vines and branches, so that as you receive My Words, you might be filled with joy, the same quality and magnitude of joy that I have,” Jesus seemed to be saying. In fact, the very same joy.

The Word is the only thing that can keep your perspective from falling apart when the world falls apart. It lifts you to heavenly spheres, reminds you of eternal values, encourages you from God's vantage point, and points toward a time known as eternity when death and sorrow and pain and suffering and dying will no longer be present to harass us. As it lifts us up to an eternal plane, it gives us joy.

The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing [bringing joy to]

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the heart:

(Psalm 19:8a)

Do you long for the joy of the Lord? Then begin to meditate day and night in the Word of the Lord. It will rejoice your heart, give you the very same joy that Jesus had as He walked this earth, and so change your perspective of life that the very trees of the field will clap their hands in unison with you as you send your joy back to God, "Air Mail, Special Delivery," by praise and prayer and thanksgiving.

May I respectfully submit to you that in addition to meditating in the Word day and night, it would be fruitful to spend at least some of the time meditating in the Word on the Word. Worship God over and over for its awesomeness and its perfectness. For example:

Consider its attributes:

- 1- His Word is immutable (I Peter 2:4)
- 2- His Word is eternal (Psalm 119:89,90)
- 3- His Word is all-powerful (Psalm 46:6)

Consider its purposes:

- 1- It will convict you (II Timothy 3:16)
- 2- It will illuminate you (Psalm 119:105)
- 3- It will encourage you (Psalm 119:92)

Then tie God's Words about God's Word together with a thread. Bind them in a sequence to help you remember them, so that as you begin to meditate on one verse, it leads to another, which leads to another, which leads to another until your heart is literally flooded with joy.

That is what we will do as we conclude this lesson. We will simply spend the rest of the time b-r-e-a-t-h-i-n-g the Scriptures, asking God to speak to us through His Word about His Word, and as He does, to change our perspective and fill us with joy. Then I am going to ask you to take as many of these verses as you choose and meditate on them day and night for the next seven days, asking God as you do to fill your heart with the joy of the Lord, because you are seeing everything that happens through the lens of the majesty of His Precious Word. For as we worship through the Scriptures, this is how our hearts will sound:

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Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.
(Psalm 119:97 NKJV)

Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.
(Psalm 119:105 NKJV)

I rise before the dawning of the morning, And cry for help;
I hope in Your word. My eyes are awake through the night
watches, That I may meditate on Your word.
(Psalm 119:147,148 NKJV)

Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your
law.
(Psalm 119:18 NKJV)

Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to covetousness.
Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and
revive me in your way.
(Psalm 119:36,37 NKJV)

I opened my mouth and panted, For I longed for Your
commandments.
(Psalm 119:131 NKJV)

How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed
according to Your word.
(Psalm 119:9 NKJV)

By the word of Your lips, I have kept myself from the paths
of the destroyer.
(Psalm 17:4b NKJV)

Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin
against You.
(Psalm 119:11 NKJV)

All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of
the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, But
the word of the LORD endures forever.
(I Peter 1:24,25a NKJV)

Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven. Your
faithfulness endures to all generations; (Psalm 119:89 NKJV)

O earth, earth, earth, Hear the word of the LORD
(Jeremiah 22:29 NKJV)

For whatever things were written before were written for our
learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the
Scriptures might have hope.
(Romans 15:4 NKJV)

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of
any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old
time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they
were moved by the Holy Ghost.
(II Peter 1:20,21)

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of
God,
(Romans 10:17 NKJV)

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than

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any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12 NKJV)

The words of the LORD are pure words, Like silver tried in a furnace of earth, Purified seven times. (Psalm 12:6 NKJV)

Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke (reprove) you, and you be found a liar.

(Proverbs 30:5,6 NKJV)

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby., (I Peter 2:2)

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

(Matthew 4:4 NKJV)

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (God-breathed), and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

(II Timothy 3:16,17 NKJV)

So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

(Acts 20:32 NKJV)

For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

(1 Thessalonians 2:13 NKJV)

Search from the book of the LORD and read: Not one of these shall fail;

(Isaiah 34:16ab NKJV)

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing (handling) the word of truth.

(II Timothy 2:15)

For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.

(Deuteronomy 30:11-14)

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But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.
(James 1:22-25 NKJV)

Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.

(Deuteronomy 11:18-21 NKJV)

These things I have spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

(John 15:11)

And all the people said, "Amen".

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