

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Joy, Galatians 5:22-23

The Bible mentions “joy” and “rejoicing” nearly four hundred times. While some of the instances of “joy”/“rejoicing” record people’s responses to their experiences, the volume of references indicates that the emotions represent something more than merely the incidental recording of human feelings. Surveying the Bible’s teachings about joy reveals an emotion inseparably connected to God’s presence and a defining character of the life He intended humans to live. This lesson continues our exploration of the “fruit of the Spirit”¹ Paul lists in Galatians 5:22-23 and will consider the joy the Holy Spirit seeks to create within the lives of those who dedicate themselves to following Jesus.

“The joy of the LORD”

- God intended life to be enjoyable.
 - God designed the creation to meet humanity’s needs; He created it to provide meaningful work (*cf. Genesis 1:28; 2:5, 15*), to provision them (*cf. Genesis 1:29-30*), and, most importantly, to host His relationship with them (*cf. Genesis 3:8*).
 - More than pragmatism, however, drove God’s design of the creation; He invested things like beauty into the world and gave humans the capacity to both appreciate, and participate in, that beauty (*cf. Genesis 4:22; Exodus 31:1-11; 28:2, 40*).
 - Ecclesiastes’ commendation of joy (*Ecclesiastes 8:15*), when paired with the features of God’s creation, offers an insight into life as God intended it – life in this world should be enjoyable and a source of joy.
- God created a world of abundance to be a source of joy, but:
 - Human rebellion introduces “disorder and every vile practice” and fills the world with “violence” (*James 3:16; Genesis 6:11-12*).
 - Human rebellion also corrupted the relationship God intended humans to have with the creation; rather than harmony, tension now exists between humanity and the earth (*Genesis 3:17-19*).
- While the world can still be a source of joy (*cf. Isaiah 9:3*), God never intended human joy to focus on the creation. Instead, God intended the blessings of the creation to remind humanity that He is the ultimate source of joy. Consider, for example, joy’s connection to God:
 - God, who gives “every good gift and every perfect gift” (*James 1:16-17*), authors the things that give us joy in life.
 - Joy does not, however, exist in the gifts God gives but instead dwells in His presence (*1 Chronicles 16:27; Psalm 51:11-12*)

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- Real, abiding joy can only be accessed through a relationship with God (*Psalms 16:5-11*).
- God's joy, centered on our loving relationship with Him, offers a source of strength to us (*Nehemiah 8:9-10*).
- Jesus – God in human form (*cf. John 1:1, 14*) - promised to give his followers the full measure of his joy if they “abide in [his] love” (*John 15:9-11*).
- God's joy, the joy Jesus promised to ‘fill up’ in his followers, connects to the Holy Spirit's presence in Christians' lives (*Acts 13:52; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; Galatians 5:22*). Joy connects to the Holy Spirit because he evidences our relationship with God and mediates that relationship on our behalf (*Romans 8:14-17, 26-27*).
- Because biblical joy comes from one's relationship with God, real joy does not depend on the circumstances of one's life.
 - The apostles, for example, rejoiced over their suffering (*Acts 5:41*)
 - In fact, life's difficulties can become a source of joy because they have the potential to strengthen one's connection to God (*James 1:2-3; Romans 5:3*).
 - Suffering can be a source of joy because it allows us to follow Jesus' example (*1 Peter 4:13*).
 - Even the joy associated with heaven does not center on being in heaven but on dwelling with God (*cf. Revelation 21:1-4*).

Applications

- God intended life to be enjoyable, but that joy is a by-product of a life with Him rather than a goal one should pursue.
- Biblical joy, therefore, focuses on God rather than on us.
- While our joy roots itself in our relationship with God, we should remind ourselves that:
 - God intended us to enjoy life, and the blessings He offers to those who lovingly submit to His will often take material form (*cf. Deuteronomy 28:1-14*); we must not dismiss the importance of material blessings and their value in life.
 - While the New Testament informs us that joy can be found in suffering, we should not seek suffering, nor should we neglect to help suffering individuals (*cf. James 1:27; 2:14-17*).
 - Even though we should be joyful people, God understands that hardships can overwhelm our joy and compassionately accommodates our grief (*cf. John 11:34-36*).

God gives us the blessing of joy. The joy He extends to us grows out of the relationship with Him He makes possible through Jesus and is not, therefore, dependent on this present life. Do you have a relationship with God that allows you to experience that joy?



REJOICING IN SUFFERING

Acts 5:12-42

The apostle Peter repeatedly wrote that Christians should rejoice in suffering. We do not usually link joy and suffering, yet Peter tied the two together. This morning we considered the joy that ought to define Christians' lives and, in this class, we will use Peter's comments about joy and suffering as a starting point for discussing joy's place within our lives.

Peter and suffering

The first half of Luke's record of 'the acts of the apostles' reveals Peter's leadership among the disciples in Jerusalem (*cf. Acts 1-12*). Having been challenged by Jesus to step into that role (*John 21:15-19*), Peter took the lead in talking about Jesus and his kingdom and connecting it to the growing group of people dedicating themselves to following Jesus' teachings. The Holy Spirit supported Peter (and the other apostles) by enabling them to perform many "signs and wonders" that attracted large crowds of people and convinced them to listen to their message about Jesus (*Acts 5:12-16*). The Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem, jealous over the attention the apostles were receiving, arrested them, beat them, and ordered them to no longer "speak in the name of Jesus" (*Acts 5:17-40*). Rather than being intimidated or fearful, the apostles rejoiced and "did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (*Acts 5:41-42*).

Peter's joyful response to his suffering positioned him to write to other Christians who were suffering. In 1 Peter, He instructed his audience to:

- Rejoice in suffering because it results "in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (*1 Peter 1:6-8*).
- Rejoice in suffering because "if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed" (*1 Peter 3:14*).
- Rejoice in suffering "insofar as you share Christ's suffering" (*1 Peter 4:12-19*).

People rarely pair suffering with joy and rejoicing. By combining those experiences, Peter indicates that he had a different understanding of joy than we commonly find in our world. How does the Bible define joy, and how does that definition compare to how our culture defines joy?

How do you think following Jesus helps one realize the joy God intends to define life?



Because real, abiding joy in life depends on one's relationship with God, we need to develop our relationship with God to experience that joy in deeper and more abiding ways. What role do the following items play in that relationship and its joy?

- Scripture (*Psalm 119:16, 111, 162*).
- Worship (*Psalm 71:22-23; James 5:13*).
- Obedience (*Psalm 32:10-11; Proverbs 10:28*).

What other ways do you think we might develop our relationship with God?

We live in a fallen world where sorrow, heartbreak, and pain are real and prevalent (*cf. Revelation 21:*). How do you think we can develop a proper balance between the sorrow, heartbreak, and pain of living in a fallen world with the joy that should define us?

