

WITH JOY
Live Fully
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Tonight is simply two verses from Galatians 5 concerning the fruit of the Spirit. Today we look at the theme of joy. The second fruit of the Spirit is joy. The Christian experiences two kinds of joy. The first joy that is common to all people whether or not they are Christians. We might call that human joy. The second kind of joy is the kind that only the Christian knows.

When we look at human joy it's easy to identify at least five different kinds of joy that is shared by both the saved and the unsaved. Both the Christian and the non-Christian have celebrative moments in their life where literally joy dances. The birth of a baby, a wedding, a significant anniversary, maybe a family reunion, a graduation, a promotion. Great happiness and a sense of well being comes at those key moments in life. They are joy producing celebrative moments.

A second common moment of joy for the Christian and the non-Christian is the joy that comes when you've achieved something. The joy may be the simple satisfaction of a day's work done or a semester of studies past. It may be the contentment of a large project that you've been working on for some time that has now successfully been completed. It may for others mark the first time purchase of a home at last. It's no longer just rent.

Or it may be paying off the mortgage. An achievement! Thirty years have gone by, it's done and you proved it could be paid for.

Maybe the achievement is a bad habit that has been licked or students have made the honor roll or you're gone down on your sixteenth birthday and gotten your driver's license. An achievement.

The third area where Christians and non Christians alike share in human joy is joy in relationships. It's true that all of our relationships are marred by sin and therefore no relationship is perfect. But there is great joy in relationships. There may be great joy in a marriage. There may be great joy within a family, great joy within a friendship. There may simply be a deeper inner sense of satisfaction because another person is close, is a friend. The joy of relationships.

A fourth area of joy that the Christian and the non Christian shares is the joy that comes when you get a good break or just plain get lucky. It may be a rebate on taxes which was totally unexpected or IRS comes through and says you paid way too much last year. It may be that you've been able to get an unbelievably good deal on something you've wanted to get for a long time and you feel so good that you've made a deal like that. Or maybe you've received an unanticipated bonus. You thought your boss didn't like you at all and he gave you a nice check. Or for others it may be as a student a passing grade when you deserve to be failed. Some streak of luck.

A fifth area of joy that is enjoyed by the Christian and the non-Christian alike is simply life itself. Life may be richly textured even for the unbeliever. Sometimes as Christians we have the mistaken notion that all non-Christians are miserable. That's not always the case. There is a joy for many simply just being alive.

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Of course we're rational enough to realize that believers or non-believers may be joyful or unjoyful. I've known some none Christians that appeared to be more joyful than some that were supposedly Christians. Ever known any grumpy Christians?

No matter how joyful the non-Christian is they are still missing the fullness of joy that can only come through Christ. Non Christian joy inevitably falls short for it has no permanence. It is only for a while. Ecclesiastes admits that life is winding down and says the trouble come and the years approach when you will say, I find no pleasure in them. Death is a trap door beneath the feet of our existence waiting to open at the unexpected moment. I have known joyful non-believers who seem to be richly getting along with life but I have never met a joyful unbeliever on a deathbed. The joy of the unbeliever can never be permanent. The joy of the non-Christian may be compared to standing water in a cistern. It has no source to replenish it and make it living. The joy of the Christian is as water springing out of an artesian well.

In what ways does a Christian experience joy that is simply not available to the non-Christian? The New Testament points out five ways that Christians experience joy that if you don't have Christ you will not experience joy on these levels.

The first kind of joy is the joy of salvation. When you open the New Testament, when you come to the gospels, you will find that immediately when you start of reading of even Jesus' birth it's so exciting. His coming into the world is bringing salvation. Everyone is joyful. Even the one who is to announce Jesus' ministry, the prophet John the Baptist. He isn't even born yet. When his aunt Mary arrives to visit, his own mother Elizabeth from within the womb, John the Baptist leaps in recognition and Elizabeth is astute enough to recognize that the baby in her is leaping for joy at the recognition of the mother of the Messiah. When Mary receives her mission she receives it gladly. Angels bring news of a great joy, which shall be to all people. When Jesus' life and ministry and passion are completed and he is resurrected from the grave the women ran from the tomb trembling but with great joy. When Jesus had finished appearing to his disciples for 40 days and ascended into heaven they went back to Jerusalem with great joy. There is the joy that the Christian knows because Christ has triumphed over death. He has triumphed over the devil. He has triumphed over sin. He has ended our separation with God. It is all true. He's real. He's God's Son. He's our Savior. Joy!

It's no wonder that when you open the New Testament and find people experiencing salvation that they're overrun with joy. Jesus said that salvation is like a man who was wandering along through a field and discovered a treasure and he went and sold all that he had to buy the field so he could buy the field so he could have the treasure. And he sold all that he had with joy. The good shepherd when he finds the lost sheep says rejoice with me I have found my lost sheep. We're that lost sheep. We're the coin that the widow lost and when she found it she called everybody and said, Rejoice! I have found my coin!

We're the son who was lost to the father that when the father found him again says, Rejoice and be glad for my son was lost but is now found.

In Acts we find the joy of an African man back on his way to Ethiopia after Phillip met him with the gospel and he had received Jesus and he went on his way with joy.

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When the Philippian jailer is converted with his whole household they received thanksgiving and with joy expressed salvation because they had come to believe in God.

The song is true if you want joy, real joy, let Jesus come into your heart. That's the best joy in the world – the joy of knowing that you are God's son, or daughter. Real joy.

A second kind of Christian joy is joy that is the result of the progress of the gospel. When we are saved we rejoice in what has happened to us but immediately we turn around because our joy is not selfish. We express joy over what is happening elsewhere. Joy that the Lord is coming into another person's life. Joy that the work of God is progressing. Joy that the church of Jesus Christ is being built. Joy that ministry in the name of the Lord is expanding. That is to be a real source of joy for us.

Some who have rejoiced over their own salvation perhaps have showed little interest or concern over the salvation of others. The reason is you'll never joy over the progress over the Lord's word unless you carry a burden for that work. Unless you want the Lord's work to succeed in another person's life.

If we fail to pray for the Lord's work or serve faithfully in the Lord's army or support the Lord's cause it's difficult then to be joyful over the progress of the gospel because that joy comes as a result of our own investment.

Jesus talks to us very plainly about the joy of investing our lives in the extension of the kingdom of God. Even now the reaper draws his wages. "Even now he harvests the crop for eternal life so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together." John 4:36.

Our joy in seeing others come to Christ parallels that of the seeking shepherd of "When he finds the lost one out of the 99 joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors and says rejoice with me. I've found my lost sheep." Jesus is telling us over the expansion of his gospel over the growth of his body, his church, he's saying, I'm joyful over what's happening. I want you to share the joy with me. And we rejoiced.

In the early church when the believers heard of the conversion of the Gentiles in Acts 15:3 "It made all the brothers glad." So having a heart for God's work, having a heart for the progress of the gospel, being joyful in that progress is part of Christian joy.

The third experience in Christian joy comes with the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2 describes the beautiful moment in our life when we open ourselves in the deepest levels of our personality and give access to the Spirit of God and our lives become filled with praise and adoration and language we do understand and language we don't understand. In fact when the exhilaration of the Spirit's presence became felt on the day of Pentecost the believers were so happy that they were mistaken as being intoxicated. I would say that that is a rather high level of joy. A high level of sensory experience that you are so bouncing that people mistake it as something else. But Peter goes right on in Acts 2 to promise us that when we come to the Lord the Old Testament scriptures themselves promise us that we would receive times of refreshing from the Lord's presence. In such moments we find the joy of the Lord to be our strength.

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The fourth aspect of Christian joy is the joy we have in the midst of struggle, suffering, and stress. That is the least place we would expect to find joy. But that is certainly one aspect of Christian joy that stands out singularly by itself from all other forms of joy. We are to joy in our times of struggle, sufferings and stress. Why? Three reasons why we're to rejoice in such times.

First, sometimes our suffering is so unjust that it truly gives us an opportunity to be one with Christ's own sufferings. His sufferings were so totally unjust and yet he rejoiced to do the will of his Father. Sometimes our sufferings are themselves so unjust that it gives us the opportunity to be more one with Christ.

When the apostles, for example were flogged with leather whips, perhaps with metal bits on the ends of the whips in Acts 5 they left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name. Why were they joyful? Because that opportunity was giving them a moment to identify more deeply with the Lord's own sufferings.

A second reason for joy in struggle and suffering and stress is because while suffering in itself is not good, it produces good. Romans 5:3-4 tells us to rejoice in suffering. Why? Because suffering produces Paul says, staying power. Perseverance. Patience. It produces the ability to weather a crisis and find that you weren't swamped. The walls of your life didn't fall down. The rains didn't come in. The house that was built upon rock stood. It gives you a confidence. That staying power produces character and that character produces hope because you know you lasted that one out. If you've lasted that one out with God's help something deeper has happened to you in the process.

James therefore says the same thing as Paul in James 1:2-3 "Consider it pure joy my brothers whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance... [then he goes on to say] this produces maturity in your life." As believers in the Lord we do not run from adversity. We have our share of adversity and loss like everyone else. But in the midst of that suffering and adversity we know that God is able to work out things in our life that make us better people. So we may rejoice that a process is at work in us. Not rejoice in the devastating thing that's happened but rejoice that God through that devastating thing is able to work something for good in our life.

A third reason why we rejoice in suffering is because suffering should always be contrasted against the coming glory. The intensity of my present struggle and stress holds no comparison to what God has for me in the future. Jesus himself says that so very clearly in Matthew 5:12 "Rejoice and be glad when you're persecuted for great is your reward in heaven." He points us to the future. "Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven." Jewish believers in the first century, many of them lost all their property. The writer of Hebrews says to them, "You sympathize those Christians in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions." You experienced all that with joy. Why? Because you compared it to the future glory. The Lord tells us, "Now is your time of grief but I will see you again and you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy."

We've almost, as Christians, become defensive talking about heaven. Propaganda and the enemy has so used it against us. "That's the trouble with you Christians. You don't resolve your crisis now and you expect everything will work out in the sweet by and by. You're pie in the sky

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thinking sort of people.” We get defensive about that and we don’t talk sufficiently about heaven. But I’ll guarantee you this and this is guaranteed by Christ’s own resurrection, by God’s word that whatever struggle, suffering or stress any one of us is going through it’s not to be compared to the glory that is coming and knowing the glory that is coming we’re told to rejoice in the present because the depth of our agony is going to one day be matched by a greater depth of exhilaration and joy. So we are told rejoice. We rejoice in the progress of the gospel. We rejoice in the filling of the Spirit. We rejoice in the midst of struggles, suffering and stress.

And finally we rejoice in our future hope.

Paul says, “We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Jude says that one day God is going to present us before his glorious presence without fault and great joy. And Paul reminds us “In this we greatly rejoice though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief and all kinds of trials.”

We have a hope that is coming. All these are five ways in which we experience or express joy. But they are simply facets of the one truth that our joy is really in the Lord. And it is the Lord that gives us the salvation. It is the Lord that gives us the progress of the gospel, the filling of the Spirit, the joy in the midst of struggle, suffering and stress and who himself is preparing a place for us. So Paul says to believers that are under pressure, writing himself from a prison cell, “Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice!”

I want to close this message with what I call joy releasers.

On the one hand we recognize that true Christian joy flows from the indwelling presence of Jesus. But on the other hand the scriptures teach us that there are some practical steps that we can take to live fully with joy.

Ephesians 5:19-21 lists three practical steps. 1 John 1:5-10 lists a fourth. There are more than these but these four are sufficient to get us started, if you’re having problems of being joyful in your life and you’ve already come to Christ. If you haven’t come to Christ start with getting saved. But if you’ve come to Christ and your joy is blocked let me suggest some joy releasers.

First, sing. Let psalms and hymns and Spiritual songs come forth from you. You may sing like a crow but if God had only wanted nightingales and canaries he would have just made those birds. But he made crows and sparrows and he likes all the chirps in the forest. It’s not the beauty of our voice that counts. It’s the quality that’s coming from our heart and song is a way that God created to get into our emotions and get truth out of our emotions. Show me a person who is a sad and I’ll show you a person that doesn’t sing. Singing is a part of being released in joy, released from your heart psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God. Let the shower be the place if necessary but release it to the Lord.

Second, live with thanksgiving. If you want to release joy in your life be a thankful person. every one of us has the choice of focusing most in our life upon the good or the bad. Upon what’s wrong or what’s right. Thankfulness forces us time and time again to focus upon what’s good. What we can be grateful for. How we can thank God. If your emphasis is upon criticism and being corrective rather than upon being creative and constructive you will operate on a low

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level of joy. Let your emphasis be upon the creative and the constructive rather than the negative, the critical, and the corrective. Receive everything with thanksgiving.

How it changes our attitude towards struggle and stress when we can receive it and receive the persons we're having the difficulty with thanksgiving.

A third joy releaser is learn to relinquish. Paul uses the word "submission" and then goes on to detail a number of relationships where submission is called for. But I simply would put it in these terms. So many times we let somebody else rob our joy and we say, "It's because 'that' happened is because I am the way I am. I had that loss or that person won't change. How can I ever be happy because that has happened? How can I ever be joyful that's occurred?" But that's moving responsibility for joy outside of ourselves, giving it to somebody else. But the Lord has never turned the keys of our life over to somebody else. There comes a moment in our experience and I realize that this moment may come only after great Spiritual struggle. I'm not anyone for waving a magic wand and say just say the right formula and it all happens. Sometimes it happens after great struggle but there must come a moment in every believer's experience or every person's experience with the Lord when they're wrestling with a situation that will not change, ultimately has to relinquish that situation, give it to God and say, "God, I cannot do anything about it. I can't do anything about that person. I can't do anything about that situation. God, it's yours and I give it to you and I'm not going to let my joy rest in that. I'm not going to let my joy rest in whether that situation comes together or not, I give it to you. It's yours. Take it as you will."

That is a deep and profound moment when we can simply relinquish to God our life and trust him and say, "Lord, I trust you. Without you I'm a sinker anyway!"

I want the changes God wants to make in me not the changes I want to make in somebody else. God, change me! I relinquish that to you.

A fourth joy releaser is that we walk in fellowship and obedience to the Lord confessing our sin to him when we have failed. 1 John 1:5-10 "If we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with God and the blood of Christ cleanses us from all our sins. If we confess our sins he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Known sin in our life will block the release of Christian joy. But a purging of that sin will bring release. If you do not deal with sin in your life you will be like David in Psalm 32 who found that day and night God's hand was heavy upon him and he was miserable. But once he deals with it he can talk about the man whose transgression is forgiven. Jesus said it very up front to us "I have come that my joy might be in you and that your joy might be full." No half-full joy.

If there was a gauge on your life today and it said empty – half-full – full. And the gauge was joy. Where would the needle be? Jesus says that "I have come that my joy might be in you and that your joy might be full." Then the scriptures have gone on to tell us the five ways that Christian joy expresses itself. And the way to begin releasing joy in our life.

I pray, Lord, to you now that these words will be a great help and encouragement to all of us. We do ask for your joy in our life. O God, for people who are here that are hurt and burdened and laden with life and its difficulties. We ask your presence in this moment. You, the giver of joy. Come be present! Turn water into wine within lives for whom the

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wine of life has run out. Bring salvation here Lord to people in this sanctuary today who do not know you and have never discovered the joy of knowing you and walking with you. Let this be a day of salvation where we rejoice and are glad because the Lord has come. For others of us in this room who are passing through valleys and difficulties in our life, we have let something rob us of our joy. We take these moments of prayer to ask, O God, restore unto us your joy. Help us to sing. Help us to give thanks. Help us to relinquish. Help us to walk in obedience and confession. Lord, restore unto us your joy. The joy of the Lord is my strength! Bring joy! Smite the clouds of sin and sadness. Move your joy into our life that our joy might be full. In the name of the Lord we ask. Praising him for all things. Amen.