

The fruit of the Spirit, part 2: Joy

The key to healthy friendships, businesses,
and marriages

Message for Sunday, January 24, 2016
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 4:4;
John 4:14

Children's Message: Colossians 1:16 “All things
have been created through him and for him”

If you were to take a fish and place that fish on the
beach, you would watch its gills gasp and its scales
begin to dry up. Now, is that fish full of joy?

Absolutely not. How would you give that fish joy?
If you covered it with a mountain of money, would
that make it joyful? No. What if you got it a beach
chair, some sunglasses, and a Coke, would that fill
it with joy? No. What if you bought it a brand new
wardrobe of designer clothing, would that make it
full of joy? No.

How could you fill that fish full of joy? Simple: just
put it back in the water. Do you know why that fish
can never have joy on the beach? Because it wasn't
made for the beach; it was made for the water.

Well the Bible says that you and I were made for
God. It's when we give our lives to God that we
find real joy in our lives – joy that nothing can ever
take away.

Message “The fruit of the Spirit, part 2: Joy”

*Shuffle to the pulpit with head bowed, face
downcast, voice forlorn.*

Today I want to speak to you about happiness.
(*sigh*) I especially want to talk about—and I say this
with great emphasis—the joy and happiness we
have because Jesus is alive in us.

Don't worry: I promise I won't take very long. If
you're getting bored, just hold on for a bit and we
will all soon be able to go home.

Jesus has shown us God's love:

- he has forgiven our sins;
- he has given us a new life!

Imagine: if we did not have this hope in Christ, life
would be depressing.

Well... can we pray now? OK.

Oh, Lord. Thank-you for all the wonderful gifts
which make life so good. Thank-you most of all
for your Son, Jesus Christ, who brings peace
and joy to our lives. Amen.

*Step down from the pulpit, and with my regular face
on.*

Now, wasn't that the most inspiring sermon you've
ever heard?! — What!! I don't hear people saying,
“Yes.” Don't you like my sermons? What was
wrong with that one?

[Pick someone out of the congregation who is
obviously amused and got the point.] You tell me.
Why didn't that sermon inspire you?

Bring out at least these points: (people may spot
things in my style that I'm not even aware of!)

- posture
- monotone voice
- expectation of boring
- don't sound happy
- depressing, not inspiring

Mimic some parts of the sermon, and see how
ridiculous they really are. Invite the congregation to
laugh along with me now. Enjoy it!

- Today I want to speak to you about happiness.
- If we did not have this hope in Christ, life would
be depressing.

Isn't it great that we can have some fun laughing at
ourselves? Especially to do that in church!

One thing which I am convinced of is this: Jesus
was not a dull, sombre, boring person. The things
that he said and did show a person who believed life
was to be enjoyed, not endured. And it showed in
his relationships with other people. Children loved
to be around him; he was a favourite guest to have
at meals and parties.

Since we have the Spirit of Jesus dwelling in us,
then his joy will naturally flow into our lives, too.

Here is our theme Bible verse for this series:

Galatians 5:22-23, New International Version:
The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience,
kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and
self-control.

1) Joy is the natural result—the fruit—of following Jesus

As an example, I'd like to tell you about Robert Reid. His hands are twisted and his feet are useless. He can't bathe himself. He can't feed himself. He can't brush his teeth, comb his hair, or put on his underwear. Strips of Velcro hold his shirts together. His speech drags like a worn out audiocassette.

Robert has cerebral palsy. The disease keeps him from driving a car, riding a bike, and going for a walk. But it didn't keep him from graduating from high school or attending university from which he graduated with a degree in Latin. Having cerebral palsy didn't keep him from teaching at St. Louis Junior College or from venturing overseas on five mission trips.

Robert's disease didn't prevent him from becoming a missionary in Portugal. He moved to Lisbon, alone, in 1972. There he rented a hotel room and began studying Portuguese. He found a restaurant owner who would feed him after the rush hour and a tutor who would instruct him in the language.

Then he stationed himself daily in a park, where he distributed brochures about Christ. Within six years he led seventy people to the Lord, one of whom became his wife, Rosa.

I got this description from Max Lucado, another preacher. Lucado writes:

I heard Robert speak recently. I watched other men carry him in his wheelchair onto the platform. I watched them lay a Bible in his lap. I watched his stiff fingers force open the pages. And I watched people in the audience wipe away tears of admiration from their faces. Robert could have asked for sympathy or pity, but he did just the opposite. He held his bent hand up in the air and boasted, "I have everything I need for joy."¹

Joy doesn't come from material things or outside forces. Joy is on the inside. It is completely independent of circumstances. That is why the apostle Paul is able to say:

Philippians 4:4, New International Version:
Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Paul had the credentials to talk like that. During the years that he had been following Jesus, he was scorned, beaten, stoned and left for dead, arrested, imprisoned, and shipwrecked. Once while he was in the city of Philippi with his co-worker Silas, they were severely beaten by a mob, and then thrown in the jail to boot. Their feet were locked in stocks so they couldn't even get up and move around. The account of this is Acts 16, and verse 25 tells us that at midnight they were "praying and singing hymns to God."

Again, we see that joy does not come from everything going well in life. Its source lies much deeper than that.

Where does joy come from, then? Well, Paul's admonition gives us a clue: "Rejoice in the Lord always." Our joy is in the Lord. Jesus is the source of our joy.

When Jesus was giving his followers advance notice that he would be killed, he also gave them these words of comfort, his promise to them:

John 16:20-22, New International Version:
I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

They will be cruelly hurt when their friend and Lord is taken from them. But they will be filled with joy when they are reunited with him.

The source of joy is being with Jesus, being with God. That's why Paul is able to sing praises to God right after being beaten almost to death. He prayed and then sang: he was with God. That's why Robert Reed can say he has everything he needs for joy: he abides in Jesus.

¹ *The Applause of Heaven*, by Max Lucado, page 7. Another great Lucado book!

I have a picture of joy in my mind: I see a beautiful fountain; the water comes gushing out from the top, pours down its sides, and from there spreads out into a pond or goes away down a stream. The joy just keeps on pouring out, regardless what is happening. You and I are that fountain. That image is based on something Jesus said about those who live in him:

John 4:14, New Revised Standard Version:

“Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

Jesus living in us is our joy. Being in the presence of God, knowing that I’m loved just as I am, knowing that my sins are forgiven—this is the source of joy.

In that picture I just described, the fountain doesn’t keep the joy to itself. The fountain pours out joy to everything and everyone around it. That is the natural response when we have experienced God’s love in our lives. We want to share the joy, the good news, with those around us.

You can say to someone, “You should go to church.” You’re telling them it’s their duty to do that; something they have to endure like the rest of us. That doesn’t sound very attractive!

But what if you say to someone: “I have this wonderful friend who always lifts me up, no matter how low I feel. I just love being around him. I’d be glad to introduce you to him sometime.” You might still get turned down, but it will more likely be a “No thank-you.” Or you might hear, “That sounds marvelous. Where can I meet this person?”

Next Steps:

- Release the joy that is inside you
- Share the joy with one other person (or more!)

a) Release the joy that is inside you

If you have given your life to Jesus Christ, he is already alive in you. His joy is already in you. All you have to do is open up and let it out.

Your nature might be crabby and cranky. The cup isn’t half-full, it’s half-empty; in fact, it’s 90% empty. When other people smile and laugh, you ask them if they’re feeling OK.

Believe it or not, joy is inside you, just waiting to burst out. I invite you to pray something like this: (If you haven’t surrendered your life to Jesus Christ, of course, you can do that at the same time.)

Lord Jesus, I’ve given my life to you and I believe you are with me. I hear about the joy you bring, but I don’t feel it. Help me to live by faith, and not by feelings. I give you permission to work in my life, to shape and mold and change me into a person of joy. Now that I think of it, it will be fun to see the looks on the faces of other people when they see what has happened to me. Help me to tell them what—WHO—has made the difference in my life. Amen.

b) Share the joy with one other person (or more!)

Joy isn’t like jam. It’s not meant to be kept in jars. It begs to be let out.

Think of someone to whom you’d like to give some good news—some *great* news! Think about why you’d like to do that: because you care about this person, and want them to have this amazing joy in their life, too.

Make up your mind now that it won’t hurt your feelings if the person says, “I’m not interested.” That’s because it’s not about you; it’s about them. Love focuses on others, not on yourself.