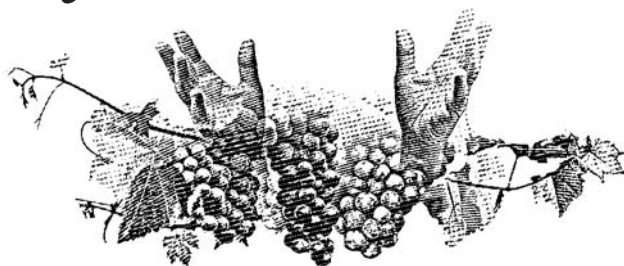


The Fruit of the Spirit Is Joy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalm 139; Luke 15:4–24; John 15:10, 11; Heb. 11:16.*

Memory Text: “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (*John 15:11, NKJV*).

Joy and happiness are not necessarily the same thing. Happiness is the result of favorable circumstances; joy, in contrast, is the result of being—as in being connected to Jesus, the True Vine.

In Psalm 4:7, joy and happiness are contrasted: “You have given me greater joy than those who have abundant harvests of grain and new wine” (*NLT*). The “greater joy” comes from knowing and trusting God; happiness is a result of pleasant circumstances, such as an abundant harvest. Inward joy is steady as long as we trust God; happiness is as unpredictable as a harvest. Inward joy defeats discouragement; happiness covers it up. Inward joy is lasting; happiness is temporary.

Joy is a delight in life that runs deeper than pain or pleasure. This type of joy stems from an awareness of God's presence in one's life, allowing us to rise above circumstances and focus on the goodness and love of God. At the core of Christian joy is the fact that God has acted and is acting to save those who trust in Him.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 16.*

The Command to Rejoice *(Phil. 4:4)*

Many believers allow themselves to be victimized by their circumstances and consequently vacillate between spiritual highs and lows. For them, to rejoice seems unreasonable, even impossible. That is why the command is to rejoice “in the Lord” *(Phil. 4:4)*.

We can’t always rejoice in our circumstances or in other people, because both of these elements may be negative. However, we can rejoice in the Lord, because He is always good, and He never changes.

Our spiritual stability is directly related to our knowledge of and commitment to God. Knowing Him helps us live above our circumstances and provides stability. That’s why the psalms were written in poetic form and meter and set to music—so the people of Israel could memorize Scripture and sing hymns in order to deepen their knowledge of God. Knowing Him makes everything else seem less significant.

Read Psalm 139; Romans 8:28; and 1 Peter 1:8, 9. What reasons are given there for us to rejoice? How can we learn to rejoice in these promises of God?

Do you need other reasons to rejoice? How about because God saved us, adopted us, and promised to give us an inheritance in Jesus Christ *(Eph. 1:1–11)*? When Christ returns, we will enjoy His presence and the heavenly place prepared for us *(John 14:2, 3)*. Until that time, it’s a joy to know that God has promised to supply all our needs *(Phil. 4:19)*. Furthermore, we have the privilege of serving the One we supremely love. That includes sharing the good news with the lost and encouraging fellow Christians to increase their love and service for Him. It is also a joy knowing we can pray to God at any time *(Heb. 4:15, 16)*. Finally, we can rejoice knowing that death does not have the final word *(1 Cor. 15:54)*.

Despite these promises, and despite all the reasons we have to rejoice, we all struggle with sadness, discouragement, and pain. These are the “facts of life” here and now. No matter our circumstances, how can we learn to find the joy that’s offered us in Christ? What choices are we making that can greatly impact whether or not we avail ourselves of the joy that could be ours?

The Joy of Christ

To understand fully a Christian's joy, we must look at the joy-filled lifestyle of Christ. Where did His joy come from? What were the principles by which He lived?

What role does joy have in three of the most popular parables Jesus told? What's the common element in all three stories?

The Lost Sheep (*Luke 15:4–7*)

The Lost Coin (*Luke 15:8–10*)

The Prodigal Son (*Luke 15:11–24*)

These three parables give us insight into the heart of God. It is a heart that is willing to celebrate. It is the pure joy of God, the joy of reaching the lost. No wonder that, despite His trials and suffering, Jesus was anointed with joy, for He knew that—because of what He would accomplish—many people would be saved.

Consider the significance of the words recorded in Hebrews 12:2, 3. Prayerfully contemplate the words: “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” (*NKJV*). Write some of the thoughts that come to your mind as you meditate on the meaning of these words. What was the joy that was set before Him? Why would the salvation of lost souls be so important to God?

How would you reconcile the idea that Jesus was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (*Isa. 53:3, NKJV*) yet at the same time was a man of joy? Pick a specific problem in your life that causes you sorrow and grief. How, despite this sorrow, can you experience for yourself the kind of joy that Jesus experienced?

Joy in Obedience *(John 15:11)*

Read John 15:10, 11. What is Jesus linking joy to? How, in a practical sense, does this work; that is, why should this lead to joy?

“But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (*Ps. 1:2, NKJV*).

“I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart” (*Ps. 40:8, NKJV*).

There is no greater joy than the joy of being obedient to the will of God. While it may seem to some that an emphasis on obedience to the law of God simply serves to exacerbate an already guilty conscience, the fact is that obedience to the will of God is liberating. Remember, it was disobedience that brought war to heaven and sin and death to this planet. All human pain and suffering are the result of humans stepping outside the will of God. It will be, then, obedience to the will of God through faith that helps restore joy.

Read Psalm 19:8, Jeremiah 15:16, and Matthew 7:21–27. How do they link obedience with joy?

However clear the Bible is that we are not saved by works, it’s also clear that works are an inseparable aspect of what it means to have salvation. Works reveal to the universe the reality of our salvation, the reality of our commitment to God. To call someone a legalist merely because that person is adamant about obeying God’s will is, in a real sense, to fall into the trap that Isaiah warned about: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (*Isa. 5:20*).

How have you experienced for yourself the joy that comes from obedience? Or to ask the question negatively: How have you experienced the pain and suffering that come from not obeying the Lord?

Joy in Tough Times *(John 16:33)*

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’ ” *(John 16:33, NKJV)*.

A long-held belief suggests that if a person is passing through difficulties it is because either that person must be doing something wrong or does not have enough faith. What a crude and cold view of God! Jesus said clearly that in this life we would all have troubles, both the believer and the nonbeliever. However much we love the story of Daniel in the lions’ den, the fact is that most of the Christians thrown to the lions were torn to shreds by the beasts. The same with the three Hebrews who survived the fiery furnace; most Christians tied to the stake were, indeed, burned there!

Read Galatians 6:9, James 1:2–4, and 1 Peter 1:6. What hope, what promises can we take from these verses that could help us during painful times?

Consider the possibility that many believers today do not have joy simply because they are self-centered. However real our problems, by focusing solely on them, we only make them worse in our own minds. In reality, we do have reasons to rejoice, not in ourselves but in God.

After all, doesn’t God say that “the very hairs of your head are all numbered”? *(See Matt. 10:30.)* Think of the promise inherent in those words. If, knowing our security is in Jesus, we would reach out and minister to someone else during our times of trial, we would know that self-pity can be turned to joy by a simple act of the will. “And the Lord restored Job’s losses when he prayed for his friends” *(Job 42:10, NKJV)*.

No matter what you might be struggling with now, reach out to someone who is, perhaps, going through something hard, as well. Surely you know someone who needs help, encouragement, and support. How can bearing someone else’s burdens lighten your own?

Joy That Lasts *(Heb. 11:24, 25)*

“By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin” (*Heb. 11:24, 25, NKJV*). **What principles of the Christian life are found in these verses?** (*See also Luke 9:23, Acts 14:22, Phil. 1:29.*) **How can we link those above verses with the promise of joy?** (*See Heb. 11:16, 1 Pet. 1:6–8.*)

Moses’ decision to turn his back on the throne of Egypt was definitely not politically correct. He might have decided to stay in Egypt and become the next Pharaoh. He might have rationalized such a move to be God’s will for him. After all, it might not have been that hard to do, because there are often so many “good” reasons to make a wrong decision.

Think upon the last time you made a wrong decision based on “good” reasons. What hard lessons did you learn?

While joy comes from knowing we are within the will of God, the immediate consequences often may be difficult and painful. To believe that when we accept Jesus and obey His Word all our problems will disappear can lead to disillusionment. Becoming a committed Christian is no assurance of money, fame, and influence. Each year thousands are persecuted, some even martyred, for their faith.

In the end, our hope, our salvation, everything has to depend upon something greater than this world, greater than what this world offers. How crucial that, no matter what we are going through, we focus on what Jesus has done for us and what He has promised us. Otherwise, we have nothing else but what this world in and of itself offers, and as we all know, what it offers can at times be very bitter.

Further Study: “It is the duty of Christians to convince the world that the religion of Christ disrobes the soul of the garments of heaviness and mourning and clothes it with joy and gladness. Those who receive Christ as a sin-pardoning Saviour are clothed with His garments of light. He takes away their sin and imparts to them His righteousness. Their *joy* is full. . . .

“Who have better right than Christians to sing songs of rejoicing? Have they not the expectation of being members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King? *Is not the gospel good tidings of great joy?* When the promises of God are freely and fully accepted, heaven’s brightness is brought into the life.”—Ellen G. White, *A Call to Medical Evangelism and Health Education*, p. 26, emphasis supplied.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Go through the Bible and focus on the lives of a few well-known characters. How much joy do you think they experienced? How about Noah or Abraham or Joseph? What about Daniel or David or Jeremiah? Or Paul or John the Baptist? What can we learn from their experiences, both the good and the bad, about what Christian joy is really about?
- 2 What are some worldly ways we can be “happy”? How well do these things work? What have you learned about worldly ways of achieving happiness? Are they all bad, or can and should they have their place in our lives?
- 3 How much happiness or even joy could or should we expect in this life, even as Christians who live with the knowledge of God’s infinite love? That is, when all around us we see sickness, suffering, and death, and when we know that many souls are going to be eternally lost, how much happiness should we have? Isn’t it kind of selfish to rejoice in our good fortune while we know that others will perish?
- 4 Why is it that the more self-centered we are, the more miserable we tend to be?
- 5 Why is the hope and promise of eternal life in a whole new earth so crucial to our whole Christian experience? What would we have without it? How important, then, is it that we keep that hope always before us? After all, even if we have it good here in this world and in this life, it’s not going to last, so how ultimately satisfying could it be?

Searching for Truth

by TUNJI ADEEKO

I grew up in a region of Nigeria that included several religions—idol worshippers and animists, Muslims and Christians. I wondered which faith contained the truth. I observed and took part in several religious ceremonies, but still I wondered.

One day some friends and I passed an Adventist church. Someone in our group made fun of Seventh-day Adventists saying they worshiped on Saturday. Everyone else laughed, but I wondered. Do some Christians really worship on Saturday?

I couldn't get to the church to learn about the Sabbath, so I read the Bible looking for answers. I searched for the word *Saturday*, but I couldn't find it. I understood *Sabbath* to mean Sunday, so I didn't find a satisfactory answer there either.

Then I found a tract about the Sabbath and read that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. As I studied the Bible texts, I became convinced that the Sabbath was God's creation, and Sunday was man's tradition. It made perfect sense.

I began to sense that God was someone I could relate to, someone who created me and wanted a relationship with me. As I continued studying I understood how God so wanted a relationship with us that He stepped into human history and shared what He wanted humans to know about Him.

I found the Bible text that tells us to obey the commandments and have the faith of Jesus. I realized that Jews accepted the commandments but do not accept Jesus. Most Christians accept Jesus but don't keep all the commandments. I just knew God had a church that had the faith of Jesus and kept all the Ten Commandments.

I realized that to worship God in spirit and in truth I had to keep the Sabbath. I remembered the Adventist church I had seen on the road that day and found an Adventist church near where I was studying. I began attending worship services there.

When I went home for vacation I visited the Adventist church I had seen months earlier. My sister was upset when she learned that I was attending the Adventist church, but I knew that I had to find my salvation in Christ, not through any other person. I would sneak away to church as often as I could.

I praise God for showing me the truth. He used a simple church building, my sister's ridicule, a Bible, and a tract to lead me to Him. Your mission offerings help provide the materials that lead people such as me to the Savior. Thank you.

TUNJI ADEEKO *lives in western Nigeria.*