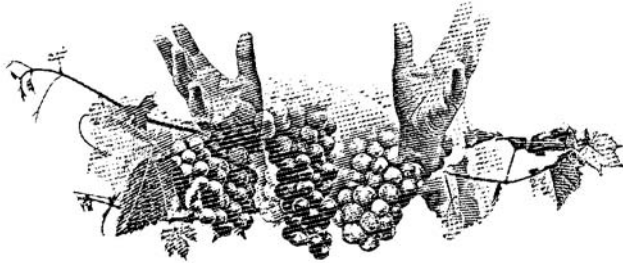


The Fruit of the Spirit Is Joy



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 our lives, 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 Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *John 16:33*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Reflect on the truth that joy comes from doing the will of God.

Feel: Express gratitude and gladness in all situations.

Do: Cultivate a positive influence in personal and social relationships.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. Know: Joy in Living for Christ

A Fellowship with Jesus provides us with immense resources to overcome every difficulty and circumstance. How do we access these resources in our own life?

B How can we always rejoice in difficult experiences?

C How does focusing on our problems, apart from God, make them worse?

D In what ways can we bring joy to God? How do we allow Him to live out His gift of joy in us?

II. Feel: Practicing an Attitude of Praise

A How can gratitude, thankfulness, and praise bring us joy?

III. Do: Living the Joy

A How does praise please God and bring Him honor?

B How does being loved by God contribute to our joy?

C In what way does obeying God make us joyful?

D The expression of praise, gratitude, and thankfulness promotes mental and physical health. As a class, list three ways of expressing joy to God.

► **Summary:** Joy comes from doing God's will. Obedience brings us into harmony with the laws of life. Gratitude and gladness for salvation inspire joy. Expressing joy in social and personal relations commends our faith to others and acts to encourage them, bringing honor to God.

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?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Joy is the logical response to God’s love and care, as seen in what Christ did and continues to do in, and for, us.

Just for Teachers: In this lesson we focus on joy as a fruit of the Spirit. Focus on the difference between happiness (which is a reaction to positive circumstances) and joy. Emphasize that if we trust God and have a consistent sense of gratitude toward Him, joy is a natural result.

How happy are you? According to the best research, 50 percent of your capacity for positive feelings may be genetic. Another 10 to 15 percent can be attributed to socioeconomic status, marital status, health, income, and similar factors. The remaining 35 to 40 percent is the result of unexplained variance. To sum it up: happiness is something that happens—or fails to happen—to you, maybe even before you’re born.

Christian joy is something else entirely. God wants to give it to you whether or not you have “happy genes.” Let the joy of the Lord be your “unexplained variance.”—See Wikipedia contributors, “Happiness,” Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happiness>.

Discuss With the Class: One can argue that most human activity ultimately is intended to bring about happiness. What is missing from most of these efforts?

Consider This: In what way is Christian joy the natural response to the security and stability that comes from God’s unconditional love for us?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Stress that the Bible indicates that God wants us to approach the Christian life with an attitude of joy. Help your students to understand what biblical joy is and is not. Emphasize especially that being a joyful person does not mean that one is always outwardly joyful, although an outward expression of joy has its place.

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Bible Commentary**

The main words in the New Testament usually translated as “joy” or “joyful” are *chara* and *chairō*, respectively. *Chara* refers to the outward state of being joyful or rejoicing, while *chairō* refers to a calm, inner state of joy. These words, like our word *joy*, don’t necessarily have spiritual significance, although only God can provide the constant inner joy that the Christian has. The main difference between Christian joy and generic joy or happiness is what the Christian rejoices in. A Christian always can be joyful, knowing that what he or she rejoices in is constant and unchanging.


I. Outward Joy (*Review Psalm 98:4–6 and James 5:13 with your class.*)

The people of the Bible were demonstrative. When they felt joy or gladness about something, they were not shy about expressing it. Not only did the various biblical authors not frown on this, they encouraged it. Sometimes they commanded it. For example, Psalm 98:4 tells all humankind and nature to make “a joyful noise” to the Lord (*ESV*). To avoid any possible misunderstanding, the psalmist goes on to specify the different varieties of blatantly loud musical instruments one might consider using to do it: lyres, trumpets, horns.

It also is significant that the psalmist summons nature to praise God by doing what it does anyway, the sea roaring, for example. It should be the same for the Christian. We don’t really need to be told to rejoice. How can we not rejoice?

The Bible also indicates that it is completely appropriate to express joy at positive circumstances. Aside from the many instances in the Bible in which important figures rejoiced in times of good fortune, James 5:13 tells us that if we are happy, we should sing songs of praise. Here is a key concept: be happy; rejoice in good circumstances, *but remember where they come from*. Remember that although they are nice, they are not the only thing, or the main thing. The God who gave them to you is the main thing, and He’ll be there in bad circumstances, as well as the good ones.

Consider This: Both passages we’ve examined associate joy with a response of worship, whether of God just for being God or because of particular things He may have done for us in our lives. Should all worship be marked by expressed joy? Should all joy be expressed as worship?

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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?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

II. Joy Inside (Review *Ecclesiastes 3:1–4*, *John 16:33*, *Romans 12:15*, and *1 Peter 1:6* with your class.)

In psychology, one symptom of psychosis is “inappropriate affect,” or showing the wrong emotion for a given situation. For example, giggling when describing how one was abused as a child. The truth is that there are situations in life that cannot be met with smiles, laughter, or loud music. The same Bible that tells us to “rejoice always” also tells us that there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh” (*Eccles. 3:4, NKJV*). At other times it might be more appropriate to calmly, quietly appreciate what we have.

For the Christian, what all these situations have in common is that our lives are built on the solid foundation of God’s finished work for us in the past, His continuing presence in our lives, and what we know He will do in the future. So, whatever current circumstances may require from us, we can approach life with an underlying sense of joy.

Consider This: According to the Bible, when is it appropriate to mourn? (See *Matt. 5:4* and *James 4:8, 9*.)

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Emphasize that while joy, as such, is not the central goal of the Christian journey, it certainly is inseparable from it. Where Christ is, we find joy, as well. And what joy it is to know that God guarantees He will take us through anything this world sends our way.

Thought Questions:

- 1 As the fourth-century church father John Chrysostom points out, nowhere in the Bible do we have evidence that Jesus specifically smiled or laughed. As such, what biblical evidence do we have that Jesus was Himself a Man of joy? How did He display His enjoyment of God, life, and other people? (See *Matt. 9:14–16* and *11:18*.)
- 2 According to the Bible, what causes the Christian to be joyful? (See *Ps. 40:8*.)
- 3 How does the Bible suggest that we approach difficulties that by human logic could cause us to lose our joy or happiness? (See *Luke 6:22*, *Rom. 8:28*, and *Phil. 4:4*.)

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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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**Application Questions:**

- 1 Philippians 4:4 can be seen as a commandment to rejoice. If we are to assume that rejoicing is emotionally based, how can we be commanded to rejoice any more than we can be commanded to feel any other emotion? If not, what is the author trying to say?
- 2 While we can't necessarily will ourselves to feel joy, we can adopt habits and attitudes that will make it easier to approach life joyfully. What might some of these attitudes and habits be?
- 3 How did the people of Israel display their joy in the Lord? What can we learn from these modes of expression, and how can we adapt them to our given cultural context?
- 4 What is the role of Scripture in helping us to cultivate our capacity for Christian joy?
- 5 Many people are afraid or find it unpleasant or an intimidating experience to witness to others. How can a correct understanding of Christian joy make it easier and more comfortable to share our faith with others? How might a detectable sense of joy make others more receptive to our message?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The following activity is meant to emphasize the centrality of joy to the Christian life and experience in such a way as to make joy real in the approach to one's own life. Choose the activity that is most suited to your class's capabilities or temperaments.

- 1 Resolve to spend at least one evening during the following week doing something for others. Visit lonely neighbors; volunteer at a soup kitchen or perform some other community service; involve yourself in something civic, such as a community meeting. Attend your church's weekly prayer meeting or Bible study. Start your own Bible study, alone or with others. The possibilities are endless. Compare how you feel after this to your feelings after allowing yourself to fall into inertia, for instance by watching television. How do you feel about yourself? How do you think God feels about you? Remember it. Do it again. Report back to the class.
- 2 Resolve as a class to perform some simple community-service project. For example, place flyers around the immediate neighborhood of the church requesting that cans and nonperishable food items be placed in bags to be collected the following week. After distribution of the items, return to a potluck meal. Discuss how it made you feel.

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 to find happiness? 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? Explain your answer.
- 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?