

This morning, I am in the third week of a sermon series that I've entitled "The Spirit-Formed Life." During this series, I will be looking at what is known as the fruit of the Spirit, a phrase Paul uses in Galatians 5:22 to describe the kind of character that is formed in the person who lives under the influence of the Holy Spirit, walking not according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit of God. In case you're unfamiliar with the concept of the fruit of the Spirit, it comes from Paul's words in Galatians 5:

Galatians 5:22-23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.

This, Paul says, is what the Spirit produces in the life of the person who walks in step with God's Holy Spirit. People marked by love, not hatred, hostility or indifference. Joy, not despair or cheap thrill-seeking. Peace, not anxiety or conflict. Forbearance or patience, not anger, irritability, or impatience. Kindness instead of meanness, callousness or cruelty. Goodness instead of selfishness, corruption, or perpetrating evil. Faithfulness instead of faithlessness, unreliability, or a lack of integrity. Gentleness instead of harshness, abusiveness, or aggression. And self-control instead of living a chaotic, out of control life enslaved to desires. And Paul tells us that these qualities will be ours in increasing measure as we learn to walk with the Holy Spirit of God and to yield ourselves in obedience to His fruit-producing work in our lives. That is the Spirit-formed life.

This morning, we will be looking at the second characteristic on the list: joy. Let me break this down in three parts.

1) The elusiveness of joy

The joy that the Spirit produces in us is different from what we would call happiness. The word happiness, which derives from the word "hap," which is an Old Norse word meaning chance or fortune, is a spontaneous response to temporary pleasures. You find an outfit you really like, or you watch a great movie, or you witness a beautiful sunset, and you feel pleasure for a brief time, until your fortunes take a turn for the worse and the outfit no longer fits, or you're too busy to enjoy another movie, or a rain storm spoils the sunset. Life is hard, sometimes unbearable, between the loss and the physical pain and the emotional turmoil and the relational struggles. If we went around the room and shared with each other some of the things that have happened in our lives or that we are currently dealing with, we would hear stories of relational loss, death, depression, mental and physical illness, abuse, and so on. Life is really, really hard.

As I look around the world, it seems to be the case that as belief in God has gone down, **the rates of depression and anxiety have skyrocketed, as have deaths of despair** – deaths due to suicide, drug abuse, and liver disease. One of the main reasons is that when you remove God from the equation, you need to look to the things and people of this earth to fulfill you, to give your life joy and meaning. And this world can be a terrible, heart-breaking, anxiety-provoking, envy-inducing place. Nothing in this world can truly satisfy the deepest longings of our heart. And even when you do find something that will satisfy, it doesn't last. As the writer of Ecclesiastes put it:

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 - I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. ¹¹ Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

True lasting happiness is elusive in this world. But it's not just the Bible, but science that argues this as well. As Tim Keller wrote in *Making Sense of God*:

“On January 7th, 2007, the New York Times Magazine ran an interesting article called ‘Happiness 101.’ It described positive psychology, a branch of psychology that seeks to take a scientific, empirical approach to what makes people happy. Researchers in this field have found that if you focus on doing things and getting things that give you pleasure, it does not lead to happiness but produces what one researcher has dubbed ‘**the hedonic treadmill**.’ You become addicted to pleasure, and your need for the pleasure fix keeps growing: You have to do more and more. You’re never really satisfied, never really happy.”

If anyone has ever chased the high of an addiction, you know this to be true. Pursuing happiness, or even momentary relief from pain, in the things of this world is a sure way to make yourself miserable in the long run. Plus, whatever we have, there is always someone with a better spouse, a better body, more money, better life circumstances. The truth is that as long as we are locating our happiness and peace in this world, we are at the mercy of our circumstances. After all, even the best marriages end, the best jobs do not last, the best vacations come to an end. But there is a better way.

As C.S. Lewis put it in *Mere Christianity*: “Most people, if they have really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely,

something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, **can really satisfy**. I am not speaking of what would be ordinarily called unsuccessful marriages, or holidays, or learned careers. I am speaking of the best possible ones. There was something we have grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in the reality. I think everyone knows what I mean. The wife may be a good wife, and the hotels and scenery may have been excellent, and chemistry may be a very interesting job, **but something has evaded us**... If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.”

What we desperately need in this cruel world is not a happiness that depends upon our circumstances, but a joy that does not depend upon our circumstances, a joy that can not be destroyed by cancer or divorce or unemployment or mental illness. In fact joy, the Greek word “chara,” is connected to the word “charis,” or grace, and is a positive state resulting from recognizing grace or favor. And that is what the Holy Spirit gives us. That is the fruit that grows in us as we walk with God.

2) Spirit-filled joy is independent of circumstances because it is located in the Lord

Jesus promises that those who follow Him can have joy:

John 17:13 - “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.”

John 10:9–10 – “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

Jesus offers us His joy. But listen carefully to how the writers of the Bible express this truth about joy:

Philippians 3:1 - Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice **in the Lord**! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

Psalm 37:4 - Take delight **in the Lord**, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Philippians 4:4–7 - Rejoice **in the Lord** always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Now, it's not only hard, but unkind to tell someone to rejoice always. After all, how do you honestly tell someone to be joyful always? Am I supposed to instinctively feel joyful when a loved one dies, or I find out I have cancer, or when my spouse divorces me? That's the false teaching of the law of attraction, something that you often find in prosperity gospel pockets of the church, where you are taught to declare "I am healthy" and "I am happy" even when you're sick and miserable, out of a mistaken notion that your words will attract health and happiness. That's not Biblical; that's magic. We do not always feel joy, nor should we, especially in tragic circumstances. After all, even Jesus, who offers us His joy, was called a man of sorrows in Isaiah 53:3, and Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1 about times of despair when he felt the sentence of death upon himself.

But despite our suffering and sorrow, **we can still make the choice to rejoice IN THE LORD**, even when we don't find joy in our circumstances. And we can give Him thanks for Him in every circumstance, even we are not thankful for our circumstance.

Over and over, we are instructed to rejoice IN the Lord, to locate our joy not in this world but in Him. What does that mean? It means to rejoice in who He is, what He has done, and what He has promised.

Who He is

Thank you that you love me – Romans 5:6–8 - You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Thank you that you are all-powerful – Mark 10:27 - Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

Thank you that you are full of grace and mercy – Psalm 103:8 - The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

Thank you that you are good and faithful – Psalm 100:5 - For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

Thank you that you are just and righteous – Deuteronomy 32:4 - He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

Thank you that you are true to your word – Numbers 23:19 - God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

You are sovereign over everything. You are trustworthy. You know the end from the beginning. Thank you that no matter what I am going through, you are my rock, and I can depend upon you.

What He has done

Thank you that you died for my sins – Isaiah 53:4-5 - Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

You ransomed me from the devil – Mark 10:45 – “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

You forgave me and reconciled me to God – 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 - All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

You adopted me as your beloved child – John 1:12-13 - Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

You have promised me an inheritance in Christ – 1 Peter 1:3-4 - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you.

You gave me your Holy Spirit – Romans 5:5 - And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

You conquered sin and death - John 11:25-26 - Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

We can also thank God for what He has done in our lives:

Psalms 103:1-5 - Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. ² Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits— ³ who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, ⁴ who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, ⁵ who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

What He has promised

Thank you that you are always working all things for good - Romans 8:28-29
- And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

You will use this for my good, to make me more like Jesus or equip me to minister to or empathize with others in a way that I could not otherwise.

You promised to come again to take me to be with you - John 14:2-3 - My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I

am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

You promised to never leave me nor forsake me - Hebrews 13:5 - Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

You have promised instant access to you when I am in need - Hebrews 4:16 - Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

You promised to supply all my needs - Philippians 4:19 - And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

You promised to give me wisdom when I need it - James 1:5 - If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

You have promised me eternal life - Luke 10:17–20 - The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.” ¹⁸ He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. ²⁰ However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

The more that your well-being is located in the Lord, the more untouchable it is. So rejoice in the Lord! In the midst of circumstances that make you want to cry, that make you want to die, when you are experiencing the worst worldly sorrows, when you are in prison or poverty or loneliness or exhaustion, turn your eyes to the Lord and find your joy in Him, remembering who He is, what He has done, and what He has promised.

This takes work – **when you see yourself being controlled by your circumstances, you can stop to rejoice in the Lord.** Remember the Psalmist in Psalm 42:

Psalm 42:5–6 - Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. ⁶ My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.

This does not come naturally. You have to remind yourself in the midst of sorrow to find your joy in the Lord. Recounting the reasons you have to praise Him. As Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote in his book *Spiritual Depression*:

“Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they start talking to you, they bring back the problems of **yesterday, etc.**

Somebody is talking. Who is talking? Your self is talking to you. Now this man’s treatment was this; instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. ‘Why art thou cast down, O my soul?’ he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says: ‘Self, listen for a moment, **I will speak to you.**’...

The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul: ‘Why art thou cast down’—what business have you **to be disquieted?**

You must turn on yourself, upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself: ‘Hope thou in God’—instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way. And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, Who God is, and what God is and what God has done, and what God has **pledged Himself to do.**

Then having done that, end on this great note: defy yourself, and defy other people, and defy the devil and the whole world, and say with this man: ‘I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance, who is also the health of my countenance and my God.’”

Rejoice in and give thanks for who God is, what He has done, and what He has promised.

Philippians 4:8 - Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

3) Rejoicing in the Lord strengthens us for the challenges of life

Nehemiah 8:10 - Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Placing your joy in the Lord strengthens you for whatever comes your way.

As Matthew Henry put it: “The joy of the Lord will arm us against the assaults of our spiritual enemies and put our mouths out of taste for those pleasures with which the tempter baits his hooks.”

2 Corinthians 6:4–10 - Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; ⁵ in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; ⁶ in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; ⁷ in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; ⁸ through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; ⁹ known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ **sorrowful, yet always rejoicing**; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Habakkuk 3:17–18 - Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

2 Corinthians 12:7–10 - Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

There is a joy and a strength available to you in the Holy Spirit to help you, even in the worst sorrows of life. Seek Him, and let Him produce the fruit of joy in you as you come to know Him, who He is, what He has done, and what He has promised.

Alaistar Begg tells a story of a woman coming up to him after a conference and giving him a note. The note told him that she had a believing friend who was suffering from brain cancer and its treatment, and in her chart, the nurse had

written had written as a critical comment on his chart, “mr. x is inappropriately joyful.” She wrote, since then, it has become one of my goals to become inappropriately joyful. Let us be inappropriately joyful in the Lord!

Romans 15:13 - May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.