

**The Fruit of a God-Filled Life:  
Justifiable Joy  
John 16:20-24  
April 6, 2008**

One of the favorite songs we sing with the kids in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School is “I’ve Got the Joy...” In fact, it’s so popular we’ve got two versions. But I’d like to try the traditional one with all of you now...

“I’ve Got the joy, joy, joy, joy....”

This morning we’re going to talk about “joy” as we continue in our series based on the Fruit of the Spirit as found in Galatians 5:22-23: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*  
Galatians 5:22-23

It’s safe to say that joy is one of the most elusive fruits for us as believers. Part of the problem is that joy is often misunderstood.

We tend to **equate “happiness” with joy** but they are two totally different ideas because they each spring from a **different source**. One comes from the **world around me**. The other comes directly from the **Spirit of the Living God**. Happiness is dependent upon what is “happening” to me. If people treat me well, if things are going well in my life, then I’m happy. If my circumstances aren’t favorable, then I’m unhappy.

Joy, on the other hand, streams throughout Scripture as a quality of life that **transcends the events** and disasters which may happen to God’s people. Joy is a divine dimension of living that is not shackled by circumstances.

If we want to see this fruit ripen in our lives, we need to guard against three common Joy Busters and we need to cultivate some Joy Builders into our lives.

## **JOY BUSTERS**

Before Paul wrote to the church at Galatia about the Fruit of the Spirit in chapter 5, he asked a very penetrating question in Galatians 4:15: “*What has happened to all your joy...*”

That question needs to be asked in the church today. Let’s look at **three common joy stealers** that often give us long faces.

### **1. Unsatisfied expectations.**

It has never ceased to amaze me how sad I can get **when I don’t get something that I want** – especially if I was expecting to get it. I can actually grieve the loss of something I never had! But I expected it. I **thought I deserved it**. Unsatisfied expectations.

If the truth were known **some of us are discontent** with our lives. Maybe your expectations for your **marriage** have not been met. Or, maybe your **kids** aren't living like they should. Perhaps you don't have everything you want – a bigger **house**, a nicer car, and a better job.

That spirit of discontentment **can rob us of joy**. Listen to how Paul discovered the secret of being content with what God had given him in Philippians 4:12: *“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”*

He also **had to “learn”** how to live with unsatisfied expectations. Likewise, we must learn to live with plenty or with little. **Contentment doesn't come when we have everything we want but when we want everything we have.**

**2. Unresolved conflict.** Your joy will evaporate when you allow conflict between yourself and another person to go on. That's why **Jesus places such a high premium on forgiveness!** Forgiveness is God's **unilateral prescription** for conflict, and the fruit of forgiveness is joy.

Hebrews 12:14-15 challenges us: *“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”*

We addressed this last week when we established that **love keeps no record of wrongs**. If you're still itemizing people's mess-ups, **the fruit of joy will be squashed** in your life.

**3. Unconfessed sin.** This third joy buster is perhaps responsible for chasing more joy out of lives than any other. Guilt can cut off your joy faster than anything I know. Sin can send joy far away.

**David understood this** very well. Take a look at Psalm 32:1-5: *“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’ -- and you forgave the guilt of my sin.”*

I love how this Psalm ends. **After David owns his sin, his joy returns.** Notice verse 11: *“Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!”*

Did you catch that? He was not able to rejoice and experience the joy of the Lord until he confessed his sins! That's very similar to what David wrote in Psalm 51:7-8: *“Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.”*

Before we move on to some positive joy builders, **I want to give the Holy Spirit an opportunity right now to do some pruning in your life...**

• **Do you have some unsatisfied expectations** that have led to a spirit of discontentment? If so, decide to do whatever it takes to learn the secret of wanting everything you have and not necessarily having everything you want. When you do, you'll begin to experience joy in even the small things of life. Confess your discontentment to Him right now.

• **Are you involved in some conflict** with someone? If so, **confess** it to God and make plans to meet with that person face-to-face so that you can **be reconciled** and get back on your journey to joy.

• Is God's hand heavy upon you because of **some sin that you've not confessed and repented of**? Don't keep silent any longer – it will only chew up your joy. Acknowledge your sin and taste the joy that was once yours.

Friends, I have some great news this morning. Lost joy can be restored. David had bottomed out spiritually. His joy was a long-lost memory. And yet, he boldly prays in Psalm 51:12, "*Restore to me the joy of your salvation...*" God honored his prayer, and He will honor yours.

## **JOY BUILDERS**

Ok, those are the joy busters.

### **1. Recognize God as joyful.**

When I first discovered Zephaniah 3:17 I had to read it several times because it was such a new thought for me. Listen to how God feels about you: "*The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.*"

**God delights in you and breaks out into song when He thinks about you!** That's hard to believe, isn't it? I love how the Living Bible paraphrases this verse: "Is that a joyous choir I hear? No, it is the Lord himself exulting over you in happy song."

When most people think of Jesus, they think of this [SHOW PICTURE OF SOMBER JESUS]

But the way the Bible describes God, maybe our picture of Jesus should be more like this: [SHOW PICTURE OF LAUGHING JESUS]

When we recognize God as joyful we will be even more drawn to Him. He finds great joy in you! He exults over you in happy song.

**His joy can be transmitted directly to us by His Holy Spirit who lives within us.** That's exactly what Nehemiah discovered in Nehemiah 8:10: "*...The joy of the LORD is your strength.*"

I pray that we'll experience the Lord's joy as well.

## 2. Rehearse God's attributes in worship.

The Westminster Confession states it well: our chief end is to **glorify God and enjoy Him forever**. We've been designed to respond in worship through both reverence and rejoicing.

Psalm 66:1-4: *“Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious! Say to God, ‘How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you. All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name.’”*

I can't begin to tell you how many times I've come to church feeling low, and left feeling loved. Part of the reason is that worship is an intellectual and emotional reminder of the greatness of God, and that puts the rest of life into perspective.

As we rehearse who God is by celebrating His attributes, the fruit of joy will begin to blossom in our lives.

**3. Reaffirm your commitment to others. The first two joy builders have to do with how we view God and how He views us.** We must also make sure that we are living in biblical **community** with others. We can't do it alone. Romans 12:15 challenges us to *“rejoice with those who rejoice...”* If you're not in fellowship with believers, your joy will leak out.

We need each other.

## 5. Release your problems to the Lord.

In Acts 16, the authorities beat Paul and Silas. After they were severely flogged, they were thrown into prison and chained. It is a terrifying situation, but verse 25 says that *Paul and Silas “were praying and singing hymns to God...”* This **word for praying** is **not the word used for making requests** but rather the **word used for praise**, or worship. Instead of asking God to get them out, they turned this tough situation into an opportunity for rejoicing.

James 1:2 challenges us to *“consider it pure joy...whenever you face trials of many kinds.”*

This reminds me of what Matthew Henry, a Bible scholar from the 1700's wrote in his diary after some thieves robbed him and took his wallet: “Let me be thankful first, because I was never robbed before; second, because, although they took my wallet, they did not take my life; third, because, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because, it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.”

This takes a conscious decision. We're commanded to work at it. While we can't manufacture joy we can **give our problems to the Lord** by leaning on Him with everything we've got.

## 6. Remember that your troubles are temporary.

*It will be like a woman suffering the pains of labor. When her child is born, her anguish gives way to joy because she has brought a new baby into the world. You have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy.*

John 16:21-22 (NLT)

I've never been through childbirth, but I've seen it on TV and it looks awful. Yet **people keep on having kids – on purpose!** Why? Because the troubles are temporary, and the reward is eternal.

The same thing is true of all of our troubles. They really are bad, but Jesus is with us now, and ultimately we'll be with him forever. One of the most powerful joy builders is to **keep your focus on the prize, not just the problem.**

**6. Remain close to Jesus.** As we established last week, the only way to experience the fruit of the spirit is to be obedient to Christ and submit to the Spirit on a **daily basis**. In one of the great paradoxes of the faith, **to discover joy we must stop looking for it**, and go looking instead for the one who is Himself joy.

John 15:10-11 puts it this way: *“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”*

If we want the kind of joy that is complete, lacking nothing, then we must remain close to Jesus. Apart from Him we can bear no fruit. Jesus said it clearly in John 15:4: *“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”*

If you want to know why I keep offering **C.L.A.S.S. 201**, “Discovering the Habits of Christian Growth,” again and again and again, this is it. This is the class where you can get hands-on, practical tools to get you on track to **grow in your personal relationship** with Jesus Christ. Here's where you can move **from being a church-goer to being a Christ-follower**. And when you move **from religion to building and sustaining that intimate relationship** with Jesus, you'll have more joy. **I want to be pastor of a joy-full church!** So, I keep teaching the class, and if you want more joy in your life, you need to come!

The only way to have real joy is to nurture your relationship with Jesus and keep in step with the Spirit on a daily basis.

#### Conclusion

Let me briefly mention two application steps.

1. Guard yourself against those joy busters that crash into your life like a tidal wave. Be vigilant. Ask someone to hold you accountable so that you learn the secret of contentment, so that you keep short accounts with people, and to help you get into the habit of regular confession of your sins.

2. Identify one joy builder that you need to work on. Pick one that is weak for you.

As we walk with God into the joy that he has prepared, let's allow Romans 14:17 to penetrate our lives: *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*