

FIVE FORKS BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH

9244 Five Forks Road

Waynesboro, PA 17268-9612

Tel: (717) 762-2991

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 5:22-23

DATE: February 26, 2023

Series: Some Fruit, More Fruit, Much Fruit

SERMON: Joy – What Makes Jesus Smile? (Also share Communion)

(credit – Bryan Wilkerson, Bible project)

Introduction

About 25 years ago a German researcher studied a thousand churches of every size and denomination all over the world. His goal was to identify the **essential qualities of healthy, effective churches**. He came up with eight. Some of them you would expect—inspiring worship, practical teaching, needs based evangelism, etc. But one of the surprising discoveries was that healthy, effective churches were characterized by **joy**. Members of these churches described going to church as **"an enjoyable experience,"** and nearly 70% agreed with the statement: **"There is a lot of laughter in our church."**

Now I'm sure we'd all agree there's more to church than having a few laughs and enjoying ourselves, but it turns out that **joy is one of the primary things people are looking for in life**, and it is one of the primary characteristics of a healthy, effective church.

I'd like you to pause and **think of a moment in your life when you've experienced real joy**. More than just if your team won the Superbowl.

We're talking about joy as—**a moment of deep gladness, an inner sense of well-being, an experience of sheer delight**. It could be something major or ordinary, recent or from the distant past. Let your imagination take you to that moment. Where were you at the time? What were you doing? Who were you with? And where did the joy come from?

PAUSE

Our theme for the year for Five Forks is **Becoming Fully Mature in Christ**. We are in

the 2nd week of our new sermon series, **Some Fruit, More Fruit, Much Fruit.**

Our Key passage for this series is:

Galatians 5:22-23 The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control.

And the Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of a fruit bearing plant, maturing as time goes on, as a way of thinking about what we should expect in one another if we call ourselves Jesus Followers. We expect more mature plants to produce more fruit as time goes on. In a similar way we should expect maturing Jesus Followers to show increasing “Jesus fruit,” if you will.

We recognize that following Jesus, and becoming like him is a process. It takes time. It takes effort. There are challenges along the way. There may even be some setbacks from time to time. But our hope is that as we do “church” together at Five Forks, we will mature, develop, grow, increase in becoming like Jesus. So that we will be an ever more accurate reflection, or representation of Jesus to our community and world.

Paul tells us that when we allow God's Spirit to live in and through us, Holy Spirit produces Christ-like qualities or virtues. He lists nine of them, calling them the Fruit of the Spirit.

Pastor Bill talked to us last week, about Love, and the evidence of maturing Christlike love in us.

We don't grit our teeth and try harder to be more loving and joyful and gentle, etc. Rather, we stay connected to Christ, like a branch to a vine, and Jesus produces this fruit by the power of his Spirit.

Often, perhaps most of the time, these virtues are treated as **personal attributes** and private virtues. In other words, if I allow the Spirit to produce these qualities in me, I become a more Christ-like individual. That's certainly true.

But these qualities are also **inter-personal qualities—and community attributes.**

That means, these attributes have a significant relational quality to them. The Fruit of the Spirit involve how we relate to each other. In fact, it was a relational problem that prompted Paul to write this section in Galatians. Consider

Galatians 5:13 " For you have been called to live in freedom. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve **one another in love. ¹⁴ For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ But (and here was the issue) if you are always biting and devouring **one another**, watch out! Beware of destroying **one another**..."**

Clearly the church in Galatia is facing a few relational issues. Instead of loving one another, they are being hurtful toward one another. Paul ends the passage with a similar emphasis in **5:26 "Let us not become conceited, or provoke **one another**, or be jealous of **one another**."** Notice the aspect of relationships between people.

It's clear that when Paul teaches about the Fruit of the Spirit, (verses 22 and 23) he's not just talking to individual believers about their private lives; he's talking to a body of believers about the quality of their corporate life. In other words, the Fruit of the Spirit are meant to be practiced and experienced in community.

This puts a new wrinkle on this list of attributes, doesn't it? It's not just about you and the Spirit; it's about you and me and the Spirit! This means, if we allow Holy Spirit to produce these qualities within us, we will not only become more Christ-like individuals, we will become a more Christ-like church.

The second virtue or "fruit" on Paul's list is:

JOY

Galatians 5:22-23 The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace...

A. What is Joy?

Joy, as with some other characteristics, is difficult to define, but we know it when we see

it. So let's attempt to clarify what we mean. Not just joy in general, but Christian joy. Joy, as Paul uses it in his letters. Or as it is understood in other parts of scripture. One author writes:

Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as Holy Spirit causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the word and in the world. (Piper)

A good feeling – an emotion. As an emotion, it is not something you fully control. You may be able to control how you respond or react to an emotion. But you cannot really arbitrarily snap your fingers and have joy. You can do things that encourage or inhibit joy, but you don't really produce it.

For example, using a different but familiar emotion – fear. Say you are going camping. You wake up, and there is this gigantic silhouette of a bear outside your tent, a grizzly bear. He seems hungry. You don't say, "Now, let me think about this. There is a bear. Bears are big. Bears are dangerous. Conclusion: I should feel fear here, so I will now decide to be afraid." Emotions don't work like that. Thinking works like that, but feelings don't. Feelings just happen to you.

So we do not have full control over our joy.

However, quite interestingly, the Bible is filled with commands that we do things that are outside our control to do. In the bible we have commands to rejoice, to fear, to be grateful, to be tender-hearted. Notice Joy is one of those. Paul tells us to rejoice always. How can that be? The assumption is, joy is something we are given, or is produced in us. So, joy is a good feeling produced in us.

Some more to help us clarify what we are talking about. One dictionary defines it as **"the emotion produced by well-being, success, or by the prospect of possessing what one desires."** **"a feeling of great pleasure and happiness."**

In other words, part of Joy is what you feel when life is good.

"Joy is a settled state in your soul, of contentment, confidence and hope."

It includes being in a good mood - that settled state of contentment, confidence and

hope.

Most languages have lots of words to describe the experience of joy. Words like happy, cheerful, joyful, and so on. In the bible, in both Hebrew and Greek, there are many words that we translate as “Joy.” They all basically refer to the feeling of goodness and happiness. So:

B. Where does Joy come from?

1. Some Joy comes from our Circumstances

On page one of the Bible, as God creates the world, God says that this world is “very good.” Implying that, naturally people will find joy in beautiful and good things of life - their circumstances. The psalmist picks up on this.

Psalm 65:11-12

**You crown the year with a bountiful harvest;
even the hard pathways overflow with abundance.**

**¹² The grasslands of the wilderness become a lush pasture,
and the hillsides blossom with joy.**

A sense of goodness around us produces joy.

Or think about the last wedding you attended. People often find joy at a wedding. The prophet Jeremiah, speaking about what it would be like when the Jews returned from exile in a foreign land, writes:

Jeremiah 33:11 There will be heard once more the sounds of joy and laughter.

The joyful voices of bridegrooms and brides will be heard again, along with the joyous songs of people bringing thanksgiving offerings to the Lord.

Many times, our circumstances produce joy in us.

But, have you ever done any babysitting? If you have, you probably learned very quickly, that most babies only seem to have joy, when their circumstances are the way they want them. Their bellies are full, their diaper is dry, and they are snuggled up in the blanket being rocked.

This should give us a clue when we consider ‘some joy, more joy or much joy.’ If you can only find joy in your life when all of the circumstances are going your way, when you are getting what you want, it is not only the experience of infants, but also the experience of those

who Paul describes as “infants in Christ.”

Evidence that your joy is still in the infant stage, is when you find yourself doing a lot of complaining and griping about your circumstances – when things aren’t going your way.

Where does joy come from? Some joy comes from our circumstances.

Joy is influenced by our circumstances, but not completely, as the bible shows.

There is another source of joy.

2. More Joy comes from relationships with people

People often find joy in their relationship with their children.

Proverbs 23:24-25

The father of godly children has cause for joy.

What a pleasure to have children who are wise.

²⁵ So give your father and mother joy!

May she who gave you birth be happy.

At home, on our computer screen saver, we have it set up so literally thousands of pictures, of our children and grandchildren, just scroll through. I often catch myself just standing in the hallway with a smile on my face watching the pictures. And my heart feels full.

Life wasn’t always that way in our home. We have had our share of quarrels, disagreements, even a few shouting matches. But there have also been many times of good relationships. The relationships with my children are a source of joy.

There’s a Hebrew proverb that compares the joy that perfume brings to your nose, with the joy a **good friend** brings to your heart.

**Proverbs 27:9 The heartfelt counsel of a friend
is as sweet as perfume and incense.**

Think for a moment. Who is your best friend? Does this proverb ring true for you? Does

your relationship with that person bring you joy – a feeling of great pleasure and happiness?

Now think again about the moment or event in your life that I asked you to remember. A time when you experienced real joy. Bring it back to your imagination, and recreate the moment.

My guess is that no matter where you are or what you're doing, there are other people there. If someone's not there, my guess is as soon as you had the chance, you told someone about that experience.

Interestingly, experiences of joy almost never happen alone; they almost always involve another person, directly or indirectly, and it's the connection between you that allows joy to flow and grow.

Paul wrote at a time when there were clearly some relational fractures in the church in Galatia. Relationships had been damaged and joy had all but disappeared.

Parents, you understand this dynamic. It's difficult to be joyful when one of your children is struggling or suffering, isn't it? Sure, you can laugh at jokes and go to parties and watch a funny movie, but deep joy eludes you, because someone you love deeply is hurting or distant.

Husbands and wives understand this connection. If spouses are at odds with each other over something, it's hard for either of them to enjoy anything; it just doesn't feel right.

It's true **professionally**. Whether or not you enjoy your job depends in large part on whether or not you enjoy the people you work with.

And what's true at home and in the workplace is most certainly true in the **church**. When we are connected well to God and each other by the Holy Spirit, joy flows into and out of our lives. And the stronger the connections, the more easily it flows. And the more connections we have, the greater our experiences of joy.

We want to be one of those churches where people say, "There is a lot of laughter and joy in our church." This is part of why we encourage you to participate in events like, movie

night, baseball games, train rides.

Someone once raised the intriguing question:

What made Jesus smile? A smile is often an indicator of joy in the heart.

The gospels never tell us specifically that Jesus smiled; we have to infer it from the texts with our imaginations. But there is one time in the gospels when we're told that Jesus was "filled with joy." It's found in **Luke 10:1 "The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go"** They were authorized to: **"Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'"**

Then look what happens in verse 17: **"the seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'"** They're so excited! And no wonder—when they prayed, people were healed; when they preached, people came to faith; when they faced off with demons, people were delivered. But it gets better.

Look at verse 21: **"At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.'"** That expression, **"full of joy,"** describes an outburst of happiness; this is a put-your-head back, laugh-out-loud kind of joy.

Now, we're told specifically it was the Holy Spirit who produced that explosion of joy in Jesus. This kind of joy flows from God, but notice what, or who, caused that joy.

It was these followers, returning from their first ministry tour. This is what filled Jesus with joy. It was the sheer delight of seeing them grow, right before his eyes. They weren't just hearing about the kingdom, they were experiencing it! They were becoming the men and women they were created to be, discovering and fulfilling God's good purpose for their lives.

And on this day, as he listened to their stories, as he saw the look of wonder on their faces, as he sensed them awakening to their identity as servants of the Most High God, he put

his head back and laughed out loud for the sheer joy of it. I believe He shot his arms in the air and shouted praises to his Heavenly Father. Seeing his followers grow, seeing them "get it." That filled Jesus with joy.

You know what made Jesus smile? **People made Jesus smile.**

On his final night with his disciples, Jesus looked at them across the dinner table and said, **"I want my joy to be in you, and your joy to be complete, so I give you this command: love one another."**

There it is. The connection between joy and our relationships with each other.

If we can find **some** joy in our circumstances, we will find **more** joy when our relationships with each other are right. The amount of joy we experience and then spread, has a lot to do with the quality of our relationships.

What is the quality of your relationships with other people? That will give you a good handle on whether you will experience some joy, or more joy.

Allow me to mention one more source of joy. We could say, it is the source of "much joy."

3. Much Joy comes from Trusting God's Faithfulness

The biblical story shows how we live in a world that's been corrupted by our own selfishness and rebellion against God. It's marked by death and loss and conflict. Circumstances are not always good. The car breaks down. The basement floods. The Dr. diagnoses cancer. Circumstances are not always good. Can we still have joy?

Or, you have quarrel with a family member. A coworker stabs you in the back. Your relationship becomes strained or fractured. Try as you will, you can't seem to reconcile with the other person. Can you still find joy?

This is where the biblical perspective offers a unique perspective on joy.

God's people can experience joy not because of happy circumstances but because of their hope in God's love and promise.

When the Israelites were suffering from slavery in Egypt, God raised up Moses to lead them into freedom, and the first thing the Israelites did was sing for joy. Even though they were in the middle of a desert. They were vulnerable; the promised land was still far away. They rejoiced anyway.

Later biblical poets looked back on this story and they remembered how the Lord **“caused his people to leave with joy, his chosen ones with shouts of joy.” [Psalm 105:43](#)**

This joy in the wilderness was a defining moment. It was a way of saying that the joy of God's people is not determined by their current struggles but by their future destiny. But for this to happen, it means always maintaining an eye on the future as God sees it, and trusting that God is able to carry out his plan.

Rick Warren sums it up nicely for us. Here is his take on what biblical joy is and where it comes from:

(slowly)

“Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life. [It is] the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be alright, and [it is] the determined choice to praise God in every situation.” (Warren)

James, the brother of Jesus understood this and writes to struggling Christians about it, this way:

[James 1:2-4](#)

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³ For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴ So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

Notice James' references to “growing” and “developing.” This is our theme of maturing in Christ.

When we consider these different components of biblical joy, it helps us understand that

joy flows from the inside out. Something inside you bubbles up and it flows or erupts out of your heart. One writer called it: **an internal reservoir or well that bubbles up inside you eventually expressing itself in shouts of song, praise, and great delight.**

It sounds too good to be true doesn't it. On some rough days it even sounds impossible. This is why trusting God's faithfulness is so crucial. Biblical joy is not something we muster up ourselves. It is fruit of Holy Spirit produced in us as we cling to the Jesus. Sometimes only just being able to barely hang on it seems. Trust in God's goodness and faithfulness is the source of much joy.

All these thoughts about joy and where it comes from make me pause. They cause me to:

C. Evaluate Joy in Our Lives

They make me ask questions like: **"How am I doing living in joy? Do I/we have the confident assurance of a present and a future, abiding in Jesus?"**

When I think of living in biblical joy, I think of Joseph and his response to his brothers after they sold him as a slave. When they came to him, quivering with fear because they thought he would get his revenge, he said:

Genesis 50:19-21 "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. ²¹ No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children." So, he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.

Joseph trusted that God had used his circumstances to bring about God's plan for saving people's lives. We don't know when he found that faith, but it resulted in confident assurance in God that allowed him to respond to his brothers kindly.

How do you think about the circumstances you are in? Are you trusting that God will even use very tough circumstances for your good and for his purposes?

Another question to evaluate my joy.

“Where am I attempting to find joy?”

Is it primarily in my circumstances? Do I only express joy when things are going my way? Or am I in the habit of griping and complaining when things don't go well? If so, I will be disappointed often. And I will have very little joy.

How about this question?

“Am I one who increases the joy among us, or am I one who hinders joy among us?”

Paul mentions some types of behavior that were plaguing the Galatian churches and stealing their joy – behavior that can plague any church including ours.

“hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy...”

How do you think about other people here at church? How do you talk about other people here at church?

What is the pervading quality of our relationships with each other here at Five Forks?
Am I, are we, as a church, maturing in the virtue or fruit of joy?

Jesus wants his joy to be in us — the joy of being rightly related to God and to one another; the delight of watching God's work unfold in one another's lives; the satisfaction of helping each other become the Christ-like men and women we were created to be.

Joy comes from Holy Spirit, in the context of being in right relationships with each other.

If you are going through a rough time in your life, I am not going to pretend that I have a satisfactory explanation for you. I **will** invite you to run to God with your questions. I invite you to investigate the record of God's goodness and faithfulness. I invite you to ask God to help you trust him with your situation. I invite you to do something about the strained relationships in your life. I believe God can, and will fill each and every one of us with his joy – if we will stay connected to Him and each other and allow Holy Spirit to work in us.

PRAY