

# Spiritual Gifts

## Week 2: Joy

Philippians 4:4-13

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- June 18, 2023

Hey, we're in a Fruit of the Spirit series for the summer. We're looking at the classic passage in Galatians chapter 5 about the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians is a book written by Paul that absolutely declares that the means of a Christian having radical change and, quote, success in their life, comes not from trying harder, but rather from drawing near to the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the fruit of the Spirit are supernatural attributes. And there's a list there in Galatians chapter 5: love and joy and peace and patience. And those supernatural attributes of Christ bloom in our lives naturally when we surrender our wills to Jesus Christ; when we abide in Christ; when we draw near to God completely.

Today we're going to look at the fruit of joy. You might want to go to our lobby where we have our fruit stand (I love that fruit stand!) and get a sticker for your water bottle, or even other places. We're going to look at joy today.

You can imagine with me what it must have been like when the Bible was originally written. And in this story line, it's written by Paul, and he's sitting in a smelly, musty old prison. He is chained to a Roman guard. He has no freedom, limited food, and he is in ill health. And in that set of circumstances, this Roman soldier is going to look over his shoulder and see Paul pen these words, and think, *What did he just write?*

**Philippians 4:4**

**Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!**

He says this: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Can you imagine writing those words in that set of circumstances? I don't know, right now I'm still bugged that I had to cycle through two lights over here at the Porsche dealership getting to work. And he's in prison doing this.

## Philippians: The Book of Joy

Today we're going to look at how to rise above the circumstances we're living in so that we might enjoy joy. And if you want to know about joy, there's no better book in the Bible to read about joy than the Book of Philippians. If you'll turn there, we're going to look at Philippians chapter 4. That's the book of joy—four short chapters and some version of the word “joy” is going to be used eleven times. And that's almost more than in the entire New Testament. The book of joy ...

Joy is the supernatural fruit from the Holy Spirit of Yahweh. It's not from here. The topic of joy was the lynchpin in leading C. S. Lewis to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. And it was because he knew that joy was mysterious and was an other-world phenomena. And it was perplexing to him. He didn't know what to do with it. And when he discovered Christ, he discovered joy. And that's why his autobiography is entitled *Surprised by Joy*. His life is all about that.

## How to Experience Joy

So, today we're going to look at how to experience joy. Joy is not an inflation of our own happiness; but rather, we're going to see how we can learn how to let the sap of the Holy Spirit come through our souls, so that it produces this fruit of joy.

So, here it is—how to experience joy. We experience joy when we draw near to God completely. Let's all just say that out loud together: *We experience joy when we draw near to God completely.* Again, C. S. Lewis, subject expert in the area of joy, writes this about drawing near to God and getting joy. He says, “Good things as well as bad, you know, are caught by a kind of infection. If you want to get warm you must stand near the fire. If you want to get wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, you must get close to it, or even into, the thing that has them.”

In Psalm 16 it says to Yahweh, “In your presence is fulness of joy.” Yahweh is the source of joy. We need to draw near to Yahweh completely.

You could say this another way: joy is granted only to those people who have completely devoted their lives to the Lord over their personal happiness. That's when joy happens.

## **Philippians 4:4-5**

**Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.**

You can see that it's about drawing near to the Lord in the very next verse. Verse 4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice!" And then verse 5: "Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near." "The Lord is near"--your joy comes from being near the Lord. And "the Lord is near" is a figure of speech that means He's coming soon. It's talking about the certainty of justice. It means the Lord is near to you. "I will never leave you or forsake you." It's comfort.

Nearness to Jesus—"The Lord is near"—lets us live a life with confidence, because we're in full knowledge that the circumstances around us, most all of them, are just temporal. And we need to set our minds on things that are eternal. Joy comes when we embrace that God is near and we live that way.

Now today what I'd like to do is focus our time on how. How do we experience joy? How do we enjoy this fruit? How does joy come out of me? And what we're going to see here—I want you to know for the future of our time looking at the other fruits of the Spirit—is that there's kind of a two-step process in all of them. It's about not doing one thing and doing another. It's about being completely surrendered, step one, to the Lord. And then step two is drawing near to Him.

Step one is stop being distracted by outside temporal things. And step two is drawing near to our king. Step one is caring less about most of life and caring more about the eternal things like the promises of God and nature of God.

Sometimes step one is to stop loving sin; start loving holiness. There's an old hymn that summarizes it quite nicely: "I Surrender Some." Wait, that's not it. Yeah, "I Surrender All." Right. I surrender all. And then joy comes.

**We experience joy when we draw near to God ... completely.**

So, let's look at the two steps. Joy comes when we completely draw near to God. Step one: we experience joy when we draw near to God. We're going to focus on the word "completely."

Why is it that we don't experience joy when we're drawing near to God? Because we're not drawing near to God completely. We're often distracted by things of the world. Sometimes we're disobedient. Sometimes it's a value that we think we can get away with—Jesus being second in our life. Something else is first. And joy doesn't come with Jesus playing second fiddle. He doesn't know how. It's not His place.

### **Philippians 4:6-7**

**Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

And so, if you look at the next two verses, verses 6 and 7, it's the same subject—"Rejoice in the Lord always. Let me say it again: rejoice." Experience joy. And then he's going to say that we need to care less about many of the things in our lives. And he's going to tell us how to care less about those things. Verses 6 and 7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

"The peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." There's a word for that. Do you know what that word is, everyone? Joy. The word is joy. And we get that when we obey this command that indicates that we are over-caring of a lot of things in our lives. We might be over-worrying. And that's causing us to focus our thought lives, sometimes compulsively, sometimes, on the wrong subject.

And when your thought life is focused and narrowed on something other than drawing near to the Lord completely, there's no joy there. And so, how do we give over those things? What does He say? He says, "Do not worry or be anxious about anything"--but we give everything over to God so we can have this peace and end up rejoicing. We give our lives over to Him completely and totally when we start to grasp this idea that God is near. And "God is near" means that justice is coming and that God is sovereign. He's with us now and He's in control of the universe.

## Application

And here's a way of doing that. Here's how to be anxious about nothing, but rather, with everything, use prayer and petition with thanksgiving. Just make a list. Just get a journal. Get a scratch sheet of paper and just write down the things that are overly important to you, or just important to you. Your finances—empty your pockets. Give Him all of your finances. Give Him the watch on your wrist. That's control, that's that schedule that you love. It's your family, the people who are your friends and loved ones. Sure, like your photo album in your mind—just be writing down the names of the people who you might find yourself anxious about. And write all of their names down and turn them over. You're delegating anxiety and control to the Lord because He's sovereign. Turn over your old diaries that keep you locked up in your past, thinking that it's about your past and not your present and your future.

If you're wondering which topic you're over-concerned about, that you're over-worried about, that you're anxious about, the answer is pretty simple. What is captivating your thoughts? What causes you to fear? And why are you afraid?

That's what it means to be giving that over completely—completely surrendering everything and saying, *God, You're in charge of my life. You already are, but now I'm releasing that to You.* And what happens is that the peace of the Lord will guard your heart. And that is what brings us joy.

The power of joy is that it's fearless. The power of joy is that it's fearless, and that's because a person who's doing this first step has nothing to lose. They've turned over every single thing. They're anxious about nothing, but with prayer and supplication and thanksgiving, they've turned everything over. And now they don't have anything to lose, to worry about.

Have you ever noticed this phenomenon in your life, maybe, or in someone else's? A person talks about joy in the context of being in the hospital, or maybe even going to jail. And do you know why that is? Because when you check into a hospital or a jail, it's just a few hours. You're wearing borrowed clothes. They're not even yours. And you're not in charge of anything. You're just going to be doing what you're told. And when that happens, when a person finally settles with that, they can experience joy. They've turned everything over ... completely.

**We experience joy when we draw near to God ... completely.**

That's the first step. The second one is that we experience joy when we draw near to God completely. Paul is now going to say, *Okay, now that you've released that, let's turn our lives over to God. Let's pursue those things.*

**Philippians 4:8**

**Finally, brothers, 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.**

And look what he says in the next few verses: “Finally, brothers, 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 on such things.”

Paul's trying to change the way we think. We're a product of our thoughts. And now that we're not going to be thinking and consumed with the temporal—we've turned that over in step one—we're focusing on the unchanging truth of the Lord. We're focusing on the unchanging promises of God. He's saying to guard your heart, guard your soul. It's the wellspring of your life. You are what you think. It's what you meditate upon. It's what captivates you.

**Colossians 3:2**

**Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.**

And so, part one was to get rid of those worries that were captivating you. Now let your heart and soul be captivated by things that are true and pure and lovely. He's saying, *Not this, but that*. Sometimes he says, *This, not that*. Look what he says in Colossians. “Set your mind”—focus—“on things above”—the Lord is near—“not on earthly things.”

## Application: Devotional Guides

So, here's what I'd like to do. The focus of our time this summer is how to find the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. And particularly this week, the focus is on joy. We're going to have a summer of homework together. I could probably use a better word than "homework"—a summer of devotion together. We've put together a devotional guide. It looks like this. They're out in the lobby today. You can actually download one from the internet if you'd like. It's a study guide that's going along with each of the sermons. There's a place to put the stickers if you want. And each week we're going to look at various passages, and they're going to complement the sermons. And each of the study guides and the passages and the little stickers all have passages that are going to bring all those things together.

What we're hoping to do is that all of us will learn how to draw near to God completely. Step one—here's what we're asking everyone to do every day: morning devotions, or whenever it works for you. Part one—completely. Is there something that God is telling you to do and you're not doing it? Jesus is King. And so, He rules. And in the context of what we've read already, are we over-worrying? Are we over-anxious? Are we trying to be in control of things that we shouldn't be? Are we making something temporal way more important that we should be? Write those down. Delegate those to the sovereign God of the universe. Are there issues of disobedience? He tells us to forgive our enemies. He tells us not to be covetous. Sometimes it's an addiction. Sometimes it's a right.

Part one, every day, what we'd like to see people do at Grace is to work our way through the devotional. And part one is "completely." There's a word for most of part one. It's the word "repent." It's to repent in doing wrong or just not doing right. Take a simple inventory of your life values and find if there's something in there that you're saying to God, *This is mine. In this area of my life I do what I want.* It could be in your finances, it could be in your entertainment choices, it could be the use of alcohol, it could be a love for your reputation. Is there something in your life where you can hear God's calling and you rebuff Him? *Leave that alone.* Each day we want people at Grace to stop and think, *I need to repent of that. I need to repent of trying to be sovereign in one aspect of my life.*

Step two: do that evaluation, and then every morning, if that's the case, draw near to God. If you want to draw near to God, you're going to want to receive and memorize and meditate on the Word of God. That's how He communicates to us primarily, and certainly, most clearly. We

look at a passage, and the reason we've done this work is so that we'll all be going through and looking at the passages from the study guide, the passages from whatever's being taught from the pulpit that week, or the passage on the little sticker that you're going to get. These are all central themes of that fruit of the week.

And what we want you to do is to take that passage and then memorize it. For me, I like to put it on a post-it note. I've got some of my father's old business cards. Everybody of a certain age has old business cards and they're good for nothing, but now they're good for something. And you write that Bible verse on the back of that and you carry it around. That's the fruit of the week. You're meditating on that.

And then I would say that this next step is very important. You turn that principle, that passage, into a prayer. And you're praying and looking, like a kid hunting Easter eggs. And you're looking for God to answer the theme of the week. Like last week I even mentioned it. I was praying, "Father, show me how You first loved me so that love for me can overflow, so that I can first love someone else and they can experience the love of God that's initiated from the outside." And God revealed that to me.

This week we would start praying, "Lord, how am I worrying or over-worrying or being over-anxious about certain aspects of the life around me because I've been consumed by the temporal?" And you can just turn this into a simple prayer: "Lord, show me joy. Show me joy regardless of circumstances." All week, each and every day, think about what would happen. Each day all of us at Grace, going through the same study guide, looking at similar passages, putting them on post-its or business cards (or I imagine your phone probably has the ability to do a lot of this). We're all working through the fruit of the week.

I mean, at the end of the summer, Grace Covenant Church has love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness. Let's do that together. We're not going to spend our time—we're going to stop in the middle of marinating our thoughts on things that are other than—the greatness of Yahweh and the promises that He's made—and we're going to live our lives around that. That's the plan.

So, we want everyone to pick up one of these study guides. They're right over there by the fruit stand. Pick those up with your sticker on the way out, download it. Let's do this together. Okay? First application—okay? All right, amen, great.



So, if you want to get warm, you've got to get near a fire. If you want joy, you need to draw near to God completely.

### **Practice ... Learn ... Grow in Contentment**

The last little expression of wisdom that Paul talks about in this section on joy I find very consoling. And that is that joy comes independent of circumstances, but it takes practice. You have to learn to be content. You have to lose and then learn from the losing and then grow in your contentment if you're going to rise above circumstances and experience the joy of the Lord.

#### **Philippians 4:11-13**

**... I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need. 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. <sup>13</sup> I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength.**

Look what He says in verses 11 through 13: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need. 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." Here it is. "I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength."

I am personally greatly encouraged—I hope you are too—that Paul the Apostle had to learn this contentment. It didn't just happen. It was over a process of time. And he found out that trying to just be happy and turning that to joy doesn't work. Happiness happens when all is going well. And joy happens when you learn that circumstances do not determine if God is near. You can be happy if you get that promotion, if you marry that girl, if there are not waves. Joy has the power, because it's independent of circumstances. But that contentment must be learned.

Paul says, *I've learned that I can write the epistle of joy from the corner office overlooking the city skyline, or from a musty prison cell, tied to a guard. It doesn't matter.* The power of joy is that it's disconnected from circumstances.

John Ortberg has a series of quotes with this. He writes this: "[Often the people closest to suffering are the ones who experience the most powerful joy.](#)" He writes that Mother Teresa,

instead of being overwhelmed by the suffering that was around her, would glow with joy as she did her ministry of mercy. He quotes a prison mate of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who says this about Bonhoeffer: “Bonhoeffer always seemed to me to spread an atmosphere of happiness and joy over the least incident and profound gratitude for the mere fact that he was alive.”

True joy comes from this: that we’re anxious for nothing. We’re not anxious in our circumstances, and why? How did that happen? Because with prayer and petition and with a great deal of thanksgiving, we gave that over to the Lord. Boom, step one. And step two was that we focused on the immutable, immovable promises of God and the nature of God. Paul learned how to be content. He learned how to experience joy, because he knew that we are a product of the way we think. I won’t focus on these things; I will focus on the Lord almighty.

Joy is absolutely independent of whether you win or you lose. And it’s because God is near. God is near means that He is returning soon. That’s justice. And that He is with us this very moment. And that’s where we get comfort.

I want you to see how this looks in real life. University of Oklahoma softball—fifty-three wins in a row and counting—the longest in NCAA history. Three national championships in a row. And we’re going to play a video of these ladies testifying to why they have had so much confidence. And I want you to listen to how often the word “joy” is used. And I want you to also listen to what today’s lesson is: joy comes from pursuing the Lord, getting near to the Lord completely and leaving everything else to Him. Amazing story. Let’s watch the video. Many of you have seen this already.

**Video of interview with OU softball champions**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVRGIfMEDIU>

**Reporter:** ... how you keep the joy in the game. But I’m curious ... it’s a long season, right? You’ve had a target on your back the entire time, the winning streak, being number one. How do you handle the unique pressure that comes with that? How do you keep the joy so long? It seems like anxiety would be a thing that could easily set in.

**Grace Lyons:** The only way you can have a joy that doesn’t fade away is from the Lord. And any other type of happiness that comes from circumstances and outcomes ...

and I think I've said this before ... but joy from the Lord is really the only thing that can keep you motivated and in a good mindset no matter the outcome. Thankfully, we've had a lot of success this year. But if it was the other way around, joy from the Lord is the only thing that can keep you embracing those memories, moments, and friendships and all of that. So, that's really the only answer to that, because there's no other way. Softball can't bring you that because of how much failure comes in it, how much of a roller coaster the game can be.

**Jayda Coleman:** I one thousand percent agree with Grace Lyons. I went through that my freshman year. I've talked about this before, but I'm so happy that we won the College World Series, but I didn't feel joy. I didn't know what to do the next day. I didn't know what to do that whole long week. I didn't feel fulfilled. And I had to find Christ in that. And I think that's what makes our team so strong—we're not afraid to lose, because it's not the end of the world if we do lose. Yes, obviously we worked our butts off to be here and we want to win, but it's not the end of the world, because our life is in Christ and that's all that matters.

**Alyssa Brito:** Yeah, I think a huge thing that we've really just latched onto is "eyes up." And you guys see us doing this [*points up with both index fingers*] and pointing up, but what we're really doing is fixing our eyes on Christ. And that's something where .... Like we were saying, you can't find fulfillment in outcome, whether it's good or bad. And I think that's why we're so steady in what we do, in our love for each other and our love for the game, because we know this game is giving us the opportunity to glorify God, and I just think once we figured that out and that was our purpose and everyone was all in with that, it's really changed so much for us. I mean, I know I've seen so much of a growth in myself. Once I turned to Jesus and I realized how much He had changed my outlook on life, not just softball, but understanding how much I have to live for, and that is living to exemplify the kingdom. And that brings so much freedom. And I'm sure everyone's story is similar, but we all have those great testimonies that show how awesome it is to play for something bigger. And that's what brings us joy. And no matter the outcome, whether we get a trophy or not, this isn't our home, and I think I think that's what is amazing about it. We have an eternity of joy with our Father and I'm so excited about that.

And yes, I live in the moment, but I know this isn't my home. And no matter what, my sisters in Christ will be there with me in the end when we're with our King.

I know we will be with Him and with our King. That's a great way to end. The Lord is near. It is 10/12 and OU is awesome. *[Laughs.]* Some of you get that.

One more final truth about joy, and that is where it all starts. You have to close to a fire if you want to be warm. You need to get near to God completely. It all starts with salvation. How does joy start? It starts when you trust Jesus Christ as your Savior. It means you're trusting Him for the payment of your sin and the crimes you have against the holiness of God. You can read through another book about joy. It's called the Book of Acts. And it's the story of the Gospel making its way to Europe and Africa.

In Acts chapter 8 a Christian leader there named Philip goes to Samaria and goes to preach the Gospel there. And in that city a revival breaks out. And it's described this way: "There was great joy in the city."

In the same chapter Philip is talking to a man from Africa, an Ethiopian. He's on a chariot reading the Bible and he has a question about a prophecy and what it means and asks Philip. Philip explains that the prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And so, the Ethiopian becomes a follower of Christ and trusts Him as his Savior and gets baptized. And it says, "He went on his way rejoicing."

In Acts chapter 16 Paul and Silas are in prison and God provides a miraculous prison break. An earthquake takes place and the cell doors are opened up and the guard in charge is going to be killed because of losing prisoners. And he's going to panic and he's going to try and take his own life. And Paul and Silas say, "No, no, we haven't left yet! It's all good. Relax. You're okay."

And so, the prison guard says, "What must I do to be saved?"

And they say, "You need to believe in the Lord Jesus."

And so, he does. And he brings that home to his family, and that ends with "he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God and in Jesus Christ—he and his whole household."

You see the pattern? Yeah. It starts here. Drawing near to God completely starts with trusting in the gift all by itself; that Jesus Christ and only Jesus Christ can save, and putting your faith in that. He died and was raised again for the penalty of sin. Start there.

If that is where you are, before and after, how about today? You pray today that joy starts today by putting the hope of your future in your present relationship with God and drawing near to Him because of Jesus Christ. That's where joy starts.

Let's have a time of prayer so that we might experience joy. Shall we? Let's pray.

*Lord, first of all, I'd like to pray for people who have never had joy because they can't know You. They've been trying to know You through other means of doing good or being better than the next guy or thinking they can earn their way out of debt. And Lord, today they find that joy comes by drawing near to You because of the gift of salvation that comes in Christ and Christ alone.*

*So, I'd pray with them that they are turning over their hope in their present and in their future to You, the sovereign God of the universe who so loved us that You sent Your only Son.*

*For us, Lord, that the desire for joy ... as Lewis Smedes says, "If we miss out on joy, we miss the reason for our existence." And C. S. Lewis says, "Joy is the serious business of heaven." What we read here by the Apostle Paul: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I'll say it: rejoice!"*

*Lord, I'd ask that You would help us learn how to cast our troubles upon You; that we'd be anxious for nothing because we're praying about everything. We're turning over the temporal things of our lives, even those most valuable things, over to Your sovereign care.*

*And some of us need to repent of an idol in our lives. Sometimes it's a drug and sometimes it's a child. But we put You second, and that's no place for a king.*

*So, Lord, I'd ask that You would help us draw near to You completely. Finally, I ask that we would draw near to You, our King; that we would draw near to Your throne by meditating and believing in the promises that You've left us in Your Holy Writ.*

*Lord, would You help our church collectively work our way through this outline of each one of these fruits, that Grace would be known as a church of the fruit of the supernatural gifts of God, the supernatural fruit of the Spirit—love and joy and peace and patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? Give us joy. Give us a taste of that joy this week. We pray this in Jesus' holy name. Amen.*