

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS JOY

1 JOY DEFINED IN SCRIPTURE

The first question in the Westminster Catechism asks what is our chief end or purpose in life. The answer is that our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. This is why we were made; this is why we live; this is our main purpose in life—to enjoy God. To this end, Galatians 5:22 says, “The fruit of the Spirit is joy.”

To understand joy we need to distinguish it from pleasure and happiness. **Pleasure** is a positive feeling related to the senses. We sometimes say, “I want this moment to last forever.” But it can’t. Pleasure is temporary, and though desirable, it is not the fruit of the Spirit. **Happiness** is more lasting than pleasure and is often confused with joy. Most people want to be happy, but this depends on circumstances. Few are happy when in pain. In contrast to pleasure and happiness, **joy** is a fruit of the Spirit and is constant. Jesus found no pleasure in the cross; Jesus was not happy on the cross; but for the joy set before him, he endured the pain.

Many things make us sad, and sometimes pain and hardship make it impossible for us to be happy. But we are not told to be happy. We are encouraged to rejoice in the Lord. Psalm 32:11 says, “Be glad in the Lord and rejoice; shout for joy, all you upright in heart.” Philippians 4:4 says, “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice!” With this in mind, we could define joy as *a positive spiritual experience that wells up inside as we reflect on God and his ways. This joy finds its expression in a life of worship.* To expand on this, we will now see...

2 JOY DISPLAYED IN JESUS

If we are made to enjoy God, and if we are to rejoice in the Lord always, it is reasonable to suggest that God himself is full of joy. In Isaiah 65:19 the Lord says, “I will rejoice and take delight in my people.” Zephaniah 3:17 says, “The Lord our God will exult over us with joy.” God is full of joy, and he wants us to experience this joy too. While he was here, *Jesus displayed a spiritual experience of joy that welled up inside as he reflected on God and his ways. This found expression in a life of worship.*

1 Timothy 1:11 highlights the joy of God in Jesus when it speaks about the glorious gospel of the blessed God. The gospel is good news about Jesus. To be blessed is to be full of joy. We can translate this verse as a celebration of the good news of Jesus from a blessed and joyful God. This joy was displayed in Luke 10:21 when Jesus rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit. The NIV says he was full of joy in the Holy Spirit. What a lovely sight this must have been... to see Jesus full of joy.

Speaking about Jesus in Isaiah 42:1 God said, “Here is my servant... my chosen one *in whom I delight.*” He said the same at his birth, at his baptism, as he entered his ministry, and on the mount of transfiguration. We too can hear the voice of God in Jesus; we can see the smile of God in Jesus; we can experience the joy of God in Jesus. In John 15:11, Jesus said, “I have spoken these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete.” For this to happen, we need to be led

by the Spirit; we need to walk in the Spirit; we need to keep in step with the Spirit; we need to sow into the life and energy of the Spirit. So having defined spiritual joy, and having seen this joy displayed in Jesus, we are now going to look at...

3 JOY DEPLOYED IN US

In our world today, there is so much instability, hopelessness, and despair. How can we be happy when so many are poor and sad? In this context, Habakkuk 3:17-18 says, "Though the fig tree does not blossom, and there are no grapes on the vine; though the olive crop fails, and the fields produce no food; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle stalls are empty, yet I will rejoice in the LORD... I will be joyful in God my Saviour." This is where, and when, and how we deploy our joy.

In Psalm 126, God's people were celebrating their deliverance from captivity. Verse 2 says, "Our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues with songs of joy." This should be our experience too as we reflect on our deliverance in Christ. When this happens we, like Jesus, can display *a positive spiritual experience of joy that wells up inside as we reflect on God and his ways.*

In a world that lives for the pleasure of the next weekend, the next night out, the next party, the next holiday, Isaiah 12:3 says with joy we draw water from the wells of salvation. Isaiah 55:1-2 then says, "Come, everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters. Why spend money on what is not food, and your money on what does not satisfy? Listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare."

DISCUSSION GUIDE
to help us reflect further on the message

1. How do you understand and apply the answer given to the first question in the Shorter Catechism that our chief end in life is to glorify God and enjoy him forever? Does it help to know and believe that joy is listed as a spiritual fruit (Galatians 5:22)?

2. How can we be full of joy when so many are poor and sad?

3. Why is it important to distinguish spiritual joy from pleasure and happiness? See Jeremiah 32:41, Psalm 16:9-11, and Philippians 4:4-7. How do you understand 1 Peter 1:8 in this context?

4. Discuss the definition of joy as a spiritual experience that wells up inside as we reflect on God and his ways. This joy finds its expression in a life of worship. Is this an optional extra for Christians?

5. According to 1 John 1:3-4, why did John write his epistle?

6. Discuss the nature of God in Isaiah 65:18-19. How does this apply to us today? How does it relate to Zephaniah 3:17?

7. How should we understand and apply Hebrews 2:12?

8. How is spiritual joy seen in Jesus? Luke 10:21 may help your discussion. How can this be seen in us?

9. How do you understand and apply John 15:11? Notice also John 16:24, 17:3, and 17:13.