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Growing in Joy
Galatians 5:22-23; Matthew 25:14-30
February 22nd, 2015, Jeff Germo

We are continuing on with our study on the fruit of the Spirit. Last week we looked at how we grow in love as disciples of Jesus. And today we are looking at how we grow in joy. Let's recite Galatians 5:22-23 together.

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Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Joy is one of the fruit of the Spirit we will grow in if we are walking in step with the Spirit. There are lots of things that can steal our joy away.

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What are some things that steal your joy?

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What are some things that give you joy?

This is one of those topics that is very easy to be trite about. It's easy to preach about the joy of the Lord and have most people leave more depressed than when they came because it's not as easy as just putting on a happy face.

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And I think as Christians we can sometimes make it more difficult because we can give people the impression that they are not allowed to struggle. We become afraid to show that there is some pain in our lives, that we are having a hard time coping. We've tried in one too many times and have finally given up because when we have dared to open up we were given pat advice such as, "Don't worry, be happy." Or, "Just trust God." That's fine advice if you have first listened and empathized, but given too early it serves only to shut the person down. If your head is "in the clouds", and you are living a delusional life you might be able to pretend that you have no problems, but the truth is that we all have trouble.

Life is hard. It really is. And for some people life is extremely emotionally difficult either because of neurological reasons or because of a history of abuse, or constant negative demoralizing messages given to them such as "you will never amount to anything", or "you are stupid", or "ugly" or "unworthy" or whatever.

For those who live with these kinds of struggles, and I have to admit that I am one, joy is something hard fought after. It's not easy or as simple as choosing joy.

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The other thing we need to keep in mind is that there are times when we all experience real grief and pretending we are joyful or not affected by it is not at all spiritual or healthy. It is actually hypocritical and damaging.

I told you a few months ago about Ruth's brother and sister in-law who tragically lost their son in a motorcycle accident. They are still experiencing deep grief. You cannot just put on your happy face in the middle of grief.

My cousin is facing the real possibility of losing his wife to cancer in the very near future. Many of you have experienced these kinds of things in your lives. We don't do anyone any favours when we give trite answers or advice when what they need in those times is just silence, a shoulder to cry on, and a listening ear.

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Here's the good news though, no matter where you are at, with Christ's help, joy is possible. You can move closer to living in his joy if you allow Jesus to meet you where you are at and transform you. Jesus doesn't tell us to smarten up and be happy. He actually joins you in your pain just like he did with Lazarus' sisters. He wept with them when Lazarus died.

As we mature in Christ our joy can become more stable. There is hope for everyone here. I kid you not. I know from experience. I am telling you this as someone who struggled with deep depression and sometimes wondered why I existed.

As we walk with the Spirit and allow him to transform our hearts and minds our joy will become less dependant on circumstances. We can get to the point in our walk with Jesus where we live in the reality that our joy does not need to leave us when we face trials. As we learn to trust God, and this is what it all comes down to, a stability of mind becomes more and more a reality where we realize that we do not have to take a nose dive when our circumstances are not as we would like them to be or when someone hurts us. We can get to the place where we can actually choose joy despite less than perfect circumstances.

The kind of joy I am talking about is a supernatural happening. The Spirit of Jesus works in the heart and mind of the Christ-follower bringing about a metamorphosis that can only happen through difficulty, pain and suffering. I wish there was another way, but there isn't. And sometimes in the middle of our pain, whether it's physical, emotional or some other kind of pain we need to look forward with eyes of faith to the joy that will be ours if we wait for the Lord.

That's what James, the half brother of Jesus wrote.

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James 1:2–4 (ESV)

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The fact is we all have trials. We cannot get away from them. Sometimes it feels like they are relentless. We just get finished dealing with one and another one comes crashing in to take its place. Here's the sobering truth, and those of you who are struggling with depression right now, please don't misunderstand this as a trite platitude, but if we wait until we don't have problems before we wrestle for joy we will never be joyful. I'm not saying it's easy. It's not. When I say we need to wrestle, I mean it can sometimes be a painful struggle getting to the joy, but that's part of how we grow in joy.

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The Greek word Paul uses in Galatians 5:22 is the word *chara*. It's a noun. It is simply the experience of gladness. It's a deep emotion most often experienced due to the presence of God, or the deliverance of God.

There are other Greek words used very often in the New Testament for our English word "rejoice." They are verbs and not simply emotions, but choices we make.

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Romans 5:2–5 (ESV)

² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

What kind of crazy person rejoices in suffering? Paul says the same thing James said. The reason we can rejoice in trials is because of a future orientation. We aren't to masochistically enjoy suffering. If you enjoy pain like that you need to get help. It's not the pain or suffering we are called to enjoy. We persevere through the suffering because we know that there is a better future because of the suffering. If we persevere we will come out the other side stronger.

Here are some more verses where we are called to rejoice.

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Romans 12:12 (ESV)

¹² ***Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.***

Here we are called to choose joy because of a future hope.

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Romans 12:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ ***Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.***

So, Paul says we don't pretend to be joyful. There are times when we will be sorrowful. And there is nothing worse than someone trying to cheer someone up by being overly gleeful. That just does the opposite.

Proverbs 25:20 (ESV)

²⁰ ***Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda.***

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1 Corinthians 12:26 (ESV)

²⁶ ***If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.***

We are called to empathize and enter into each others' pain, not give trite advice and meaningless platitudes.

Even Jesus was honest with his pain. Let's take a look at one situation just before he was arrested.

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Mark 14:32–42 (ESV)

³² ***And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. ³⁴ And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." ³⁵ And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.***

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³⁶ ***And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." ³⁷ And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? ³⁸ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."***

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³⁹ ***And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. ⁴¹ And he came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."***

Here we have Jesus being very honest about where he was at emotionally. He was in deep anguish to the depths of his soul. He admitted this to his Daddy that he was deeply sorrowful and that if possible, if there is any other way than taking the sins of everyone on himself, could his Father find another way. He didn't pretend to be joyful. But, look at what the writer of Hebrews says.

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Hebrews 12:1–2 (ESV)

¹ ***Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.***

“...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross...” The only reason he could endure was because he knew the good that would be accomplished through his suffering. He knew joy was coming. He endured suffering because he could look past it to a better future for me and you.

It's the same with us. When we are going through trials, pain, suffering, or depression we need to cling to the future hope we have. We can endure knowing that through our pain, good can come of it, if we cooperate with God through it. And sometimes, if you are going through an intensely painful time the only thing you can do is cling to that future hope. You will come out the other side stronger, having learned to trust God in deeper ways.

That's what Paul said in Romans 8:28.

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Romans 8:28 (ESV)

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

This doesn't mean it's going to be easy or exactly what we want. Nor does it mean the pain we are going through is good or that God is causing it. What it does mean though is that God is big enough to make good out of a bad thing. We come out the other side looking more like Jesus.

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Like I have said a few times in the last few weeks, **God does not waste our pain.**

So, for those of you going through struggles right now, hang on and wait for his deliverance.

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We need to know that the source of joy is God. The Bible says we are made in the image of God. We are the imago dei. We carry his image. We were made with purpose and for a purpose and when we live according to that purpose, using the gifts and strengths God has uniquely instilled in each of us, we will have joy. When we live outside of those strengths and gifts and not in the reality of God's image in us, joy will be elusive.

Let's take a quick look at *The Parable of the Talents* and see how this plays out.

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Matthew 25:14–30 (ESV)

14 “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. 15 To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16 He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more.

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17 So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. 18 But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. 20 And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.'

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21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' 22 And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

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24 He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' 26 But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? 2

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⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

So, what's going on here? Notice that the two servants who had invested what their master had given them received joy from him. The one who had this false belief that their master was evil lived in that reality and, for him, joy was elusive.

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Have you ever experienced that? When you live in the reality of the image of God, using the intrinsic strengths and gifts he has placed in you, you bubble over with joy. It simply means that you use what God has given you for the glory of Jesus to love the people around you. God has uniquely gifted you and when you use those gifts for his glory you will be filled with his joy. For some of you it might be when you play music. For others it could be when you are building, painting, sculpting, or photographing something.

Maybe God has gifted you with teaching and when you teach you sense God's presence and joy in a powerful way. Maybe you get that joy by working in the garden, or cooking, or encouraging someone. God is the Creator. He has created us in his image, and one of the main ways that is played out is when we create, using the gifts and strengths he has uniquely placed in each of us.

Sometimes, like the servant who, out of fear, hid the money instead of investing it, we have false ideas of who God is, or false ideas of how God views us. We look around at everyone else and see that God has gifted them. We see them flourishing using their God-given gifts. And we think, for whatever reason, he has passed us by. That's a false idea of God. If we choose to believe that, we will live out of that false paradigm and joy will be elusive.

The truth is God does not put any of his children on the shelf. He has uniquely gifted each one of us to make something of the world around us, to love those around us. We are little creators.

One of the best ways to combat depression and receive joy is to create, using the gifts God has given you. Make something of the world around you. That is what God has placed us here for. When we live out of the strengths God has given to us joy will come rushing in and give us meaning and purpose. That is when life gets really exciting.

I am going to call Trevor Wickens up right now. Trevor is someone who has experienced a tremendous amount of pain in his life. So, Trevor and I are going to have a conversation about how Jesus has met him on his journey.

Trever's Story

I was asked by Pastor Jeff if I would share about my life. Specifically about the hardships and how a place of joy is reached when walking through difficult times.

It is a hard thing to share ones difficulties with others. We all want to be seen as strong and capable in this life. I was raised in a Christian home my father being a Baptist pastor. I have always been seeking God to use me, especially in music and the arts. At an early age I was heavy into sports and especially loved down hill skiing.

By the time I was 20 years old I started to have increased pain in my body. I remember going skiing on Mount Washington. After my first run down the mountain I got to the bottom and took off my ski's and said I think that was the last time I will ever ski. I was 20 years old. I would go to the Dr and complain about my hips and back and even my legs, but the Dr or Dr's always said you are tall and tall people have more issues with their backs.

I met my wife here in Campbell River and we went to Bible school together. Tanya continued on with getting her Early Childhood Education schooling done and I went to Mexico with Baptist Missions society of Latin America. We got married and moved to Vancouver where I went to Columbia Academy

of Radio, television and recording arts. Tanya worked at a centre in Kitsalano while I was at school. I was unable to get work in the recording industry and so was working in construction, security jobs, basically anything that would help pay the bills.

My desire to be a great lead guitar player and worship leader were slowed down by cutting my fingers off on my left hand. This mean't I was not playing music anymore and I sold all my guitars out of bitterness that God took my ability to play away. After a year or so of healing and not being able to work I played a game of tennis where I ended up playing a little to hard and ruptured a lower disk in my back. This lead to 8 months of laying on my back in the living room. When they finally took me into the hospital it was a 20 minute surgery and I was good to go, with the warning to take care of my back as they would have to fuse disks if I was to hurt them more.

At this point Tanya was caring for kids in our apartment and we also had to be on social assistance. I had many different jobs over the years most lost because of pain in my body. Worship and playing music continued to be the one thing that Tanya and I are always drawn to, I took to playing piano and drums and was given a new guitar by my close friends. I figured out how to play with my gimped fingers on guitar.

I was approached and hired to be worship pastor in a church in Abbotsford. January 1st 2000. No one there even knew I was coming, the senior pastor had not told anyone. I found myself in a weird position of announcing myself as there new worship pastor. This church fell apart with in the next year and we found ourselves moving to Alberta for a job building oil rig power distribution box's. This job was a long way from where we were living and they did not pay me what was agreed on when we moved out there. I ended up getting my class 1 drivers licence and doing long hauls to Texas. I worked 3 months for a company as a greenhorn driver and made a whole whopping 900 dollars and that was the end of that. We ended up moving back to Campbell River. At this point I just looked like a guy who could not hold a job and could not take care of his family.

After years of this stuff the Dr's finally looked at my hips and found that I did not have any hip sockets. The thought was that I grew to fast in Grade 11 and the bones just did not form properly. My weight was being held only by the muscles surrounding my hips. They did a hip replacement on my left hip and the following year did my right hip. We were feeling like yay I will be a new man after this and I should be able to do anything I want for work. This was not the case. I was in more pain than before even though my hips were better. I was then given a CT scan of my back this showed what they are calling Mass degenerative bone disease. Little bone spurs that are growing inward on my spinal column. The specialist said that there is nothing we can do for you. If they were to operate there was a 50/50 chance I would end up in a wheel chair. So I am to learn how to deal with the pain.

So now I live on pain killers, pinched nerves that take away feeling on the outside of my legs down to my toes and sleep aids till they come up with a new procedure to fix me or God miraculously heals me. I have been trying to get on a disability but declined because I volunteer with Spirit FM and sing at church. We have gotten letters from Dr's and Spirit FM that speak into this situation and a lawyer is appealing the discision. So right now we are praying it goes through.

Its so easy to fall into despair when you're in pain every day, when you can't work a normal job, when you have a beautiful wife that is working so hard to provide money for bills, When christians look down their noses at you and call you worse than an infidel for not providing for your family, when you can not afford to pay for the simplest things for your kids. The list goes on and on.

My Dad gave me a book years ago called Prison to Praise. Scripture says "in everything give thanks. So my Dad would say Praise the Lord to every circumstance. I have learned over the years that God does not need me. He wants me. I've learned that God uses us in our weakness and we just need to be willing to surrender to Him. Finding Joy is a choice even in pain. I find that when I sing and play music it can give me joy that I could never muster up myself.

I have held on to Psalm 100 over the years. I live with such a deep Hope that God will do amazing things with my life. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you say's the Lord is a verse that can confuse me, as I sure do not feel prosperous and physically I am feeling very harmed. God meets me in this place by showing me how much my kids love me, how much my wife loves me. He shows me how our lives have impacted our kids and their desire for God. I am not sure how I am able to have

joy, but by God's grace, He instills a joy that I can not comprehend and a hope for better days for my family. I believe that if you choose to use your gifting what ever that may be for you, that God gives you the strength to accomplish awesome things. Big or small joy fills me when I let God use me.

Sometimes I have to fight through my pain to step out in obedience and sing or play. We all spend so much time working on wearing masks in front of each other. We want people to see us as successful. We want to be perceived as holy and wise in our religiousness, that we have it all together. We are more helpful to each other being real than the masks we put on. Its humbling to take your mask off and to be transparent to those around you.

There will always be those that will judge your every move and if you understand that those people are also wearing a mask. A mask that they don't even believe they wear because they have been wearing it for so long. Religiousity, judgement, gossip, are all products of wearing a mask and none of them bring Joy — but death. I believe what God has been teaching me in the creation of this testimony is that so much joy comes from places of suffering and that to the depth of ones suffering comes an equal and opposite joy. So I lay down fear of man and the mask it represents and trust that God is Good All the time and that He will never put you through anything you can not handle. I believe we can all handle so much more when we are loving each other and being loved.



Galatians: Learning to Live in the Freedom of Christ

Growing in Joy

Galatians 5:22-23; Matthew 25:14-30

Week of February 22nd, 2015

Objective of this study: to grow in our understanding of the SOURCE of joy and the REASONS for joy.

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Spend five minutes in silent prayer asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
2. After the five minutes of silence have someone interrupt the silence and read Psalm 147:1-11 meditatively to the group. Then pause for about a minute and let it sink in.
3. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Welcome (5 – 10 minutes)

Share some stories from this past week as the Spirit showed you ways you could grow in love and wisdom in your responses to people.

Word (20 - 30 minutes)

1. **What stood out from the sermon?**
2. Read (or recite! :) Galatians 5:22-23.
3. What are some things that give you joy? What are some things that steal your joy?
4. Read Psalm 147:1-11. What do you see here that relates to joy? (eg. reasons for joy, etc.) For help understanding verse 6, see 1 Peter 5:5-7.
5. Read Proverbs 25:20. What's happening here?
6. Sermon quote: Sometimes **"we can give people the impression that they are not allowed to struggle."** Why do you think this happens? What's a better response? See Proverbs 12:25. Have you experienced either of these responses when you've been struggling? What about when someone told you about their struggle?

Work (30 - 40 minutes)

Sermon quote: **"We need to know that the source of joy is God."**

1. Relationship with God: Read Matthew 5:4 and 2 Corinthians 1:3. What's going on in these passages?
2. Relationship with others: Read Romans 12:15; 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4 and Proverbs 12:25 (again). Sermon quote: **We are called to empathize and enter into each other's pain.** Tell of a time someone did this with you, or you did with someone else. What were the results?
3. Honesty: Read Mark 14:32-35. Here Jesus was being very honest. **"He was in deep anguish to the depths of his soul"** and he expressed it honestly to his Father. Are you able to be honest with God? The Psalms can help you express your feelings. Read Psalm 142:1-2; Psalm 61:1-2; Psalm 62:8.
4. Hope, based on a future focus: What do the following verses tell us about a 'future focus' and reason(s) for hope? Hebrews 12:1-2; Romans 12:12; Romans 8:28-29; Romans 5:2-5; James 1:2-4.
5. Purpose: Read Matthew 25:21.
Sermon quote: **"One of the best ways to combat depression and receive joy is to create, using the gifts God has given you. Make something of the world around you. That is what God has placed us here for. When we live out of the strengths God has given to us, joy will come rushing in and give us meaning and purpose. That is when life gets really exciting."** Share ways you have experienced this.

6. What choices do you want to make this week, relating to joy? Come back next week with stories to share!

PRAYER TIME/HOMEWORK

Try journaling, telling God honestly about your feelings, and let Him comfort you.
To help you with this, read Psalm 42.
For further study, read Matthew 5:1-12.