

3 Joy: The Fruit of Grace

The pursuit of happiness and pleasure is common to all people. There is nothing wrong with wanting to be happy. Great sums of money are spent every year in pursuit of happiness, yet the world is filled with pain and worry. Many people resort to suicide as the only way to end their misery. They have not discovered that real and lasting joy is possible only in Jesus Christ, who through the Holy Spirit fills our beings and yields this fruit in us.

God created a world of joy and gladness with no sin, pain, or suffering. These vices came later through sin. The Christian is not exempt from troubles, sickness, and sorrow. In fact, “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Where, then, does the child of God find the source of joy? How can the fruit of spiritual joy be produced in his or her life?

In this lesson you will discover that the fruit of spiritual joy is developed in us by the Holy Spirit as we recognize our position in Christ; as we see God act in miracle-working power; and as we anticipate our glorious future with Him in eternity. There is a strong relationship between suffering and joy in the life of a believer. Joy is not simply a product of the Holy Spirit, but a part of His nature—so that to be filled with the Spirit is to be filled with joy!

lesson outline

Definition of Joy

Sources of Joy

Suffering and Joy

Hindrances to Joy

Results of Joy

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

1. State the biblical concept of spiritual joy.
2. Identify true statements related to sources of spiritual joy.
3. Discuss why Christians can experience spiritual joy even in suffering.
4. State principles that can be applied to overcome hindrances to joy and achieve the results of joy.

learning activities

1. Study the lesson content carefully, read all Scripture verses mentioned, and answer all study questions. Be sure you can fulfill the objective for each section before going on to the next section.
2. Study the meanings of key words that are new to you.
3. Take the self-test and check your answers.

key words

grace

legitimate

symbolism

hindrances

pursuit

inexpressible

radiance

injustices

source

lesson development

DEFINITION OF JOY

Biblical Definition

Objective 1. *State the biblical concept of spiritual joy.*

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy” (Galatians 5:22). The word “joy” in this Scripture verse is translated from the Greek word *chara*. One Bible scholar defines it as joy that has basis in religion—joy whose foundation is God. *Chara* is joy that is based on a relationship with God.

Another scholar defines joy (*chara*) as a state of cheerfulness, calm delight, and great gladness—as a characteristic of the Christian nature. It has far more meaning than momentary happiness. Joy as the fruit of the Spirit is cheerfulness, delight, and gladness that is not determined by circumstances, but is a constant quality in every situation, because its foundation is God.

The apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians when he was in prison. This letter is often called “The Joy Letter.” Twice in the fourth chapter Paul stated that he learned to be content whatever the circumstances. Paul was at that time in prison waiting for judgment. What was the source of his contentment? The Holy Spirit is the answer—He produced the fruit of joy in Paul.

Application

- 1 From the following Scriptures state reasons for Paul’s joy.
 - a) Philippians 1:3:
 - b) 1:18:
 - c) 1:25:
 - d) 2:2:

- 2** Which statements illustrate the biblical concept of joy?
- a)** That which is pleasurable to the senses
 - b)** Great gladness based upon a relationship with God
 - c)** A divine grace
 - d)** Related to position in Christ rather than circumstances
 - e)** Feeling of personal contentment when things are going well
 - f)** A feeling of happiness that comes and goes
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More Than Happiness

Paul's joy was related to his position in Christ, rather than to his circumstances or physical well-being. The Greek word *chara* also implies divine grace. So the fountainhead of Paul's joy is not found anywhere in this world, but only in God.

Joy as the fruit of the Spirit endures even in hardships, because it is developed from within by the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul recognized this when he wrote to the Thessalonians: "In spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

It is not easy to describe this joy, which the apostle Peter referred to as "inexpressible and glorious" (1 Peter 1:8). It is far more than the happiness that the world can give. Certainly there are legitimate pleasures in the world that can be enjoyed when one has the joy of the Spirit. But the joy of the Spirit is set apart from all the levels of purely human joy. It is the result of faith in God. Paul writes, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

Jesus' followers should be joyful people. No one will be the same as before, after committing his whole being to Jesus and knowing Him as personal Savior and Master. Luke 10:21 tells us that Jesus was full of joy through the Holy Spirit. There is a prophecy about Christ's joy in Psalm 45:7: "Therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."

Christ's joy is seen in Luke 10:21, when He praised His Father for the divine method of revelation. He is seen rejoicing that the one lost sheep had been found (Luke 15:5). He spoke of joy in John 15:11 and 17:13, in which He bestowed His joy upon believers. His great joy sustained Him at the Cross. Therefore, "let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2).

Application

3 Christ's joy supports the idea that a Christian's joy has its foundation in

- a) the good things of life.
- b) a personal relationship with God.

4 Which statements express best what spiritual joy is related to?

- a) Outward circumstances
- b) Indwelling Holy Spirit
- c) Our position in Christ
- d) Being with friends
- e) Happy occasions
- f) Faith in God



SOURCES OF JOY

Objective 2. *Identify true statements related to sources of spiritual joy.*

All human joy flows from human love: love for life, for people, for work. The same is true when the heavenly love of the Spirit flows in our soul. The result is joy from above. No love means no joy. Anything that breaks down love destroys joy. Human joy is passing, superficial, and limited because in the human realm everything changes. But the heavenly realm is not subject to change. When God is the fountainhead of our joy, nothing can diminish its flow.

There are several sources of spiritual joy that we will consider. As you think about each one, relate it to your own experience. Have you discovered these sources of real joy?

Salvation

A. B. Simpson suggests that the joy of the Lord is found in the assurance of salvation and the flowing of the Spirit. When a person receives pardon for all his sin, it is as though the weight of the world is lifted from his shoulders. When Jesus comes into a life, He brings inexpressible joy. That is why there was great joy when Jesus, our Savior, was born (Luke 2:1–11). That is why Mary rejoiced that she was God’s chosen instrument to bring Christ into the world (Luke 1:46–49). In many of his psalms, David expressed joy for his salvation: “I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation” (Psalm 13:5; see also 31:7, 32:11, 35:9). The context of these verses indicates that some of them were written in times of great stress and discouragement in David’s life—yet he could rejoice in the salvation of the Lord.

Joy for salvation is also expressed in Isaiah 61:10: “I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness.”

The Powerful Acts of God

The Bible is the revelation of God acting to restore humans to fellowship with Him. Throughout the Old Testament God is active in people who loved and served Him.

God acted in our behalf when He preserved the nation of Israel, out of whom the Messiah would come. He acted in our behalf when He gave His only Son as a ransom for our sins. He acted in the early church through the power of the Holy Spirit, convicting of sin, bringing many to repentance, honoring the preaching of His Word, and baptizing in the Spirit. Luke’s record of these events is commonly called “The Acts of the Apostles,” but it is really a record of the mighty acts of God in the lives of Spirit-filled people who were used of Him.

God also works today in those we have won to Him, and in our own lives—forgiving sin, healing sick bodies, delivering from evil habits, and providing for all our needs. These are all causes for great gladness in our hearts.

Application

5 Read Acts 8:5–8. Why was there great joy in Samaria?

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The Holy Spirit

Joy was a daily characteristic of the early church believers. because they were filled with the Spirit. Joy is a product of the Holy Spirit, who dwells within the believer. Joy is part of His nature. The history of the early church reveals that believers experienced great joy in the Holy Spirit. This does not mean they never felt discouraged, afraid, or lonely. They learned that in all situations the joy associated with the indwelling Spirit became a source of strength which helped them rise above discouraging circumstances. Joy is part of a believer's experience as he or she lives with the awareness of the abiding Spirit.

Application

6 Read Acts 2:46; 13:52, and Romans 14:17. Which of the following is best reflected in these verses of Scripture?

- a)** Joy is a normal experience of one who is filled with the Spirit.
- b)** The joy of the Lord is difficult to maintain even for a Spirit-filled believer.



God's Presence

God himself is the source of all joy. “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1:47). “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4). The Lord’s presence brings joy (Psalm 16:11). In John 20:20 we read that the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. To be in the house of the Lord brings joy to the worshipper: “I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’” (Psalm 122:1).

The Word of God read, heard, meditated upon, lived, obeyed, and loved also brings joy. “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty” (Jeremiah 15:16). Many Scriptures link joy and prayer (see Ephesians 5:19–20; Colossians 1:11–12; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18; John 16:24; 1 Chronicles 16:10; Isaiah 56:7; Psalm 40:16; 105:3). Praise and worship of the Lord cause joy to spring up within us, as we acknowledge His worthiness.

God's Blessing

God’s blessing upon us is another source of joy. “The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy” (Psalm 126:3). Our trust in God makes us joyful when we realize His sufficiency to supply our every need (Romans 15:13). He also blesses us through others: “How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?” (1 Thessalonians 3:9).

Our Blessed Hope

Romans 12:12 exhorts us to “be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” What is this hope? These Scriptures give us the answer:

1. Acts 24:15—“And have hope toward God . . . that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust” (KJV).
2. Titus 2:13—“While we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

3. Hebrews 6:19–20—“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.”

4. Romans 5:2–5—“And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God . . . we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

Our hope of future glory with Jesus Christ is based on His resurrection from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). We can rejoice in any circumstance because of our hope that we will go from this imperfect life to eternal life in the presence of God. One Bible scholar in commenting on Romans 5:2–5 states, “Hope is an important element in Christian joy—hope enables believers to rejoice even in sufferings, and endurance strengthens hope.”

Joy in Giving

We find joy in giving. “God loves a cheerful giver.” He “will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness” (2 Corinthians 9:7, 10). “Remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35). Have you found this to be true? Jesus said, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap” (Luke 6:38). So not only do we receive a blessing from the act of giving, but God also blesses us as a result of our giving.

Angels

Angels enhance the Christian’s joy. They minister to saints everywhere as God directs them. Psalm 34:7 tells us that the angel of the Lord delivers those who fear the Lord. In Acts 12:11 the apostle Peter acknowledged that the Lord sent His angel to rescue Peter from prison. The wicked king Nebuchadnezzar recognized that God sent his angel to rescue the three Hebrew men in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:28). In

Psalm 91:9–11 is this promise: “If you make the Most High your dwelling . . . then no harm will befall you . . . for he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.” Angels rejoice when sinners repent (Luke 15:10). They praise and worship God continually. This is a joyful act (Psalm 148:2; Revelation 5:11).

Application

- 7** Identify true statements related to sources of spiritual joy.
- a)** Spiritual joy, unlike human joy, is subject to change.
 - b)** Both human joy and spiritual joy flow from love.
 - c)** The foundation of spiritual joy is God.
 - d)** Mary’s joy was related to her desire to be honored.
 - e)** Great joy follows the realization that God is acting in our behalf.
 - f)** Joy in giving is primarily related to what we receive in return.
 - g)** Joy should be the normal experience of the Spirit-filled believer.
 - h)** Every aspect of life in the Spirit should be a source of joy to the believer.
 - i)** The Christian’s joy is based on his hope that once he has accepted Christ his daily life will be free of problems.
- 8** For personal enrichment, list each source of joy in your notebook. Look up the Scripture verses given for each one, and choose the one verse for each that is most meaningful to you. Write it out next to the source listed. Then share your findings with another person as a testimony of the joy you experienced in Christ.



SUFFERING AND JOY

Objective 3. *Discuss why Christians can experience spiritual joy even in suffering.*

There is a strong bond between suffering and joy in the life of a Christian. The message of Jesus in the Beatitudes was that God will one day reward those who for His sake endure all the injustices of the world (Matthew 5:3–11). Many Scriptures link suffering with joy. Consider these, for example:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance (James 1:2–3).

In spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions (Hebrews 10:34).

As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered (James 5:11).

But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:13).

Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you (Revelation 12:11).

While we are still in the world we can rejoice that “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). In these Scriptures joy is related to the hope of the Christian that is based on his future

glory in heaven, after having overcome the trials and testings of this life.


Because of their obedience to God in proclaiming the gospel, the early Christians faced much persecution. But this could not take their joy from them! In Acts 13 the disciples had just been persecuted and forced to leave the city in which they were preaching the gospel. Yet “the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (v. 52). Again in Acts 5:41, we read that “the apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.” In Acts 16:25 is reported that after being beaten and imprisoned, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. Paul’s life gives evidence of the constant joy of the Holy Spirit in him. He endured many hardships gladly, that he might share the good news of Christ with others. From his prison in Rome he proclaimed, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4).

Jesus was facing the shadow of Gethsemane and Calvary, which meant suffering, shame, and death. Yet He sang with His disciples after the last Passover before He faced His accusers (Matthew 26:30). He could sing in this situation because He was full of the Holy Spirit. Whenever I feel discouraged, I only need to remind myself that Jesus “for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:2–3).

When a woman gives birth, very often she experiences considerable pain and suffering. Yet through it all there is joy in her heart, because of her knowledge that the pain will cease, and her labor will be rewarded as she finds pleasure in her new son or daughter. This human joy is a limited example of the joy we shall experience when our Lord’s glory is revealed, if we persevere in spite of suffering.

Application

9 Based on the Scriptures given in this section, give reasons why Christians can experience constant joy of the Holy Spirit even in times of suffering. Write your answer in your notebook.



HINDRANCES TO JOY

Objective 4. *State principles which can be applied to overcome hindrances to joy and achieve the results of joy.*

Discouraged and joyless people lose enthusiasm for life. An illustration of this is in Psalm 137. The Israelites were exiled in Babylon. They were so discouraged that they did not even have the heart to sing—they just sat and wept. When they were in their own land, they had been very industrious, but now under depression they became totally inactive. All they could see was their present situation—they had forgotten the times when God had delivered them.

Discouragement and doubt hinder spiritual joy. Luke 24:17 tells us about two disciples of Jesus who were without joy. When Jesus approached them, they were so filled with sadness that they did not even recognize Him (v. 16). Sorrow and despair also fell over Mary Magdalene on resurrection morning. She was crying when Jesus approached and spoke to her (John 20:15). She did not recognize her Lord.

Earlier we mentioned that spiritual joy has its foundation in God. Anything that hinders our relationship with God will rob us of joy. Bitterness, resentment, lack of love, wrong desires, or other such attitudes or behaviors of the flesh will take from us the joy of the Lord. But if we maintain a right relationship with the Lord, His Spirit within us will be a constant source of joy.

Application

10 Which source of joy could have protected the Israelites from discouragement when they were exiled in Babylon?

- a) Hope of future glory
- b) Remembering the mighty acts of God
- c) Deliverance by angels

11 What source of joy was available to the disciples and Mary Magdalene at the time that they failed to recognize Jesus?

- a) Being in the presence of the Lord
- b) Being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit
- c) Their human love for one another

12 State a principle which, if applied in your life, will protect you from attitudes that hinder you from experiencing the joy of the Lord.

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RESULTS OF JOY

When the Holy Spirit works in us to produce spiritual joy, we can expect positive results. The changes produced in our character by the Holy Spirit are clearly seen in our reactions to circumstances and our interactions with other people. Here are a few examples of results from the fruit of joy in the believer's nature.

First, we have a happy face. Have you met Christians whose faces seem to glow with the joy of the Lord? Proverbs 15:13 says, "A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit." A joyful person will have a happy heart. A person's inner feelings are very often expressed in his face or by his attitudes or behavior. A Christian filled with the joy of the Lord will very likely display and communicate that joy outwardly.

When a girl is in love, she has a special radiance because she is thinking about the one she loves. If we love Christ, His beauty is reflected in us, and we have a radiant appearance, for we are “being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Second, we have a joyful song. A thankful, joyful heart is often expressed in song and praise unto the Lord. Psalm 149 is an example of this: “Sing to the Lord a new song . . . For the Lord takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy” (vv. 1, 4–5). Another example is Paul’s encouragement to the early church to “be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:18–20). James 5:13 probes, “Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.” Praise in song is one of the riches of the Christian life and is a natural response of a joyful heart.

Third, we have divine strength. “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). This was made clear to Nehemiah when there was a terrible misunderstanding concerning the rebuilding of Jerusalem; it was the joy of the Lord that gave him courage to go ahead with the plans. Today the Christian need not lack spiritual energy. The joy of the Holy Spirit can move God’s people forward here and in eternity. Spiritual joy results in divine strength.

Application

13 Explain how joy affects our appearance.

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14 How does Scripture tell us to express our joy?

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15 Explain in your own words what Nehemiah meant when he said, “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

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Have you experienced the results of joy? You can have the fullness of joy that we described in this lesson through the Holy Spirit abiding in you. You can have His fruit of grace in abundance and can face every situation with overflowing joy! Cultivate this fruit, and share your joy with others.

self-test

1 MATCHING. Match the descriptions (left) to the kind of joy each describes (right). Write the number of your choice in each blank space.

- | | | |
|--------------|--|---------------------------------|
| ... a | Subject to change depending on the circumstances | 1) Human joy |
| ... b | Has its foundation in a relationship with God | 2) Spiritual joy |
| ... c | A divine grace | 3) Both human and spiritual joy |
| ... d | Depends on that which makes one feel pleasure | |
| ... e | Characterized by calm delight and great gladness as part of the Christian nature | |
| ... f | Strengthened by suffering or trials | |
| ... g | Flows from love | |

TRUE-FALSE. If the statement is TRUE, write T on the dotted lines. If it is FALSE, write F instead.

- ... **2** Human joy is a constant experience of most people.
- ... **3** Spiritual joy is possible in times of suffering because it is based on the powerful acts of God in our behalf and on our hope of future glory with Him.
- ... **4** A Christian can be filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit even when he is absolutely miserable and discontented.
- ... **5** The Scriptures reveal Jesus as One who knew the fullness of joy.
- ... **6** The Word of God, God's blessing upon us and others, and giving to God and to His work are all sources of spiritual joy.

- ... **7** The principle of divine strength and joy is that those who are strong will have joy in proportion to their strength.
- ... **8** A glowing face is one of the positive results of joy.
- ... **9** The cure for hindrances to joy is a right relationship with God.
- ... **10** A Christian realizes joy from sharing the gospel with others.
- ... **11** The example of the Israelites exiled in Babylon emphasizes the principle that spiritual joy depends on recognizing the power of God to work on our behalf.
- ... **12** Since spiritual joy is produced in us by the Holy Spirit. There is nothing we can do to cultivate joy—He measures it out to us as He chooses.
- ... **13** Bitterness can be a hindrance to spiritual joy.

answers to study questions

- 8** Your answer
- 1** **a)** Because of his partners in the gospel
b) Because Christ was preached
c) Joy in the faith
d) Joy because of unity in love, spirit, and purpose
- 9** Any of these: Because we are counted worthy to suffer for His sake (when we are persecuted); because suffering teaches us perseverance (to remain firm, steadfast); because God has promised to reward those who suffer for Him; because of the knowledge that our suffering will come to an end, and we will share future glory with Jesus. This is our blessed hope.
- 2** **b)** Great gladness based upon a relationship with God
c) A divine grace
d) Related to position in Christ rather than circumstances
- 10** **b)** Remembering the mighty acts of God. (Forgetting these acts is what robbed them of joy.)
- 3** **b)** a personal relationship with God.
- 11** **a)** Being in the presence of the Lord
- 4** **b)** Indwelling Holy Spirit
c) Our position in Christ
f) Faith in God
- 12** Your answer should include the concept that if one maintains a right relationship with the Lord, recognizing that God is the foundation for spiritual joy, he will be enabled to avoid attitudes that hinder joy.
- 5** Because of the miraculous works of God when Philip proclaimed Christ in the city
- 13** A joyful person will have a glowing face, a radiant appearance.

6 a) Joy is a normal experience of one who is filled with the Spirit.

14 By singing and praising the Lord.

7 a) False

b) True

c) True

d) False

e) True

f) False

g) True

h) True

i) False

15 Your answer. Since joy has its foundation in God, perhaps Nehemiah was reminding the Israelites that as they drew near to God and put their trust in Him, He would fill their hearts with joy, which would give them strength in their trials