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Presentation Transcript
Fruit of the Spirit – Part 3 – Joy
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When I was a senior in high school, I knew no one who believed like I did about the Bible. I'd been reading it and I knew that the church I attended with my parents all my young life was not aligned with some of the plain and simple scriptures. The only I seemed to find that seemed to fit with the Bible were from the *World Tomorrow* radio program. So, as a result, I applied to Ambassador College, which was the college aligned with that program, and I then waited in the state of highly charged anticipation to find out if I would be accepted. One day – I think it was August – rather late really – a letter arrived from the college, and it contained an acceptance letter addressed to another student. The envelope was addressed to me, but the inside address was to someone else. Well, I was thrown into a state of confusion. I remember being anxious. I thought it might mean that I was accepted, because the envelope was addressed to me, but I couldn't be sure. And after several hours of wondering what to do, a man came to our front door with a telegram for me from the registrar of the college. And he acknowledged there had been an error and confirmed that I'd been accepted to the Pasadena campus with the letter to follow. And at that moment, I experienced the sense of joy I had not known before. I could hardly contain it. I recall wishing that there was someone to share it with, but my parents and my brother weren't interested, so it didn't mean the same thing to them.

Later that December, I was baptized, and I was again filled with that same kind of joy. I was a new creation.

The next one was finally talking Elaine into marrying me. That took some doing, but it's been worth it – at least, for me!

So, my life to date has been a relatively easy life. But we can look into the pages of the New Testament and see that it wasn't that way for the Christians in the church after Christ died. They were under intense persecution, and some of them even died for their beliefs. We know a good number of the apostles did. And yet, we see the Bible writers urging the members of the church back then, while under all this anxiety and dread, to be joyful in spite of all their trials. And we ask, "How could they be? Would they not be filled with anxiety and fear? And, is it even possible

to be joyful in the face of death? What would be the point even?” Well, that’s what we’re going to cover today – the story of how we can experience joy as one of the fruits – the byproducts – of the Holy Spirit in spite of the cares of life and the trials we might experience.

By the way, this is the third in a series based on Galatians 5 about the *Fruits of the Spirit*. The first point I would like to make is, that the kind of joy we’re talking about here isn’t something that we work up. Let’s look in Romans, the 15th chapter, and verse 13, where Paul says:

Romans 15:13 – *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.* So there are some connections there – hope, peace, joy, believing.

So, God fills us with joy and peace in believing. So, it’s not our own doing. It’s something He does. And He fills us with peace and joy, so that we might be strong in hope. But how does that work? Well, let’s start with this: When God talks to us in the Bible about joy, it’s not about how we feel when we win the lottery, or how good our facelift came out, or the new Tesla we just got. It’s about something else. Let’s take a look at that. Then we’ll tackle that nagging thought in the back of all of our minds, which is “Why don’t I have that kind of joy?” Joy about what? Peace because of what? Hope for what? Believing in what? Just what in general? What is our hope?

Well, eternal life with God is the hope that God sets before us. Why do we have that? Is it because we ate too many enchiladas too late at night and we had a dream about it? No! It’s because God is the God of all hope. We hope for it because God said we could have it, and that’s why He’s the God of hope. It’s something that He gives us.

Why can we have hope? We broke all the laws and have disqualified ourselves, because the penalty for breaking God’s law is death. So, no hope there. But then, because Jesus Christ came and died to pay for our sins, we find that we *can* have hope. God has our backs. We’re free! In my case, free at last! So, that provides a reduction in anxiety about our fate and give us peace. It’s not because we take a Zoloft. It’s not because we just avoided Covid, but because we’re free of our sins. It’s not about physical stuff. It’s about the plan of God and what He offers us. That’s what we can have joy about, in spite of all the stuff that’s going on around us in our lives. That gives us hope that, though we don’t deserve a thing, our future is suddenly secure and looking bright in God.

Since there is a logical reason that our sins are removed – namely that Christ paid them for us – we can more easily believe, because it makes sense. It even made sense to people like Thomas – you know, the one who had to have answers for everything. So it makes sense to have faith in God – that God will do what He has promised to do and that He has loved us, because He gave His only Son, and because Christ loved us, because He suffered physically and died for us – an incredible death – to pay for the sins that we’ve all committed. And that is a joyful thing to consider.

None of us knows how we will die. For example, we could go to bed at night, planning to have eggs and hotcakes for breakfast, but we die in our sleep. And some have died of the Spanish flu, or more recently, the Chinese flu, and have died struggling to breathe – not a pleasant thing to think about. Others have been instantly struck dead by lightning or an auto accident. But for those who have hope, belief, peace, faith and joy in Jesus Christ, no matter how they died, instantly after losing consciousness, everybody who has died will see God and be beyond pain, and anxiety, illness, confusion and suffering. But they will *not* be beyond joy. Joy forever will be theirs – and ours too. I just think I was joyful when I found out about being accepted to college. The kind of joy that God is talking about is going to go way beyond anything that we have experienced as joy physically in this life. So, that's why we can be joyful. It's because of what God has done for us and the promises He's made to us about our future.

Now, these are all spiritual things. And we have *not* received them yet. But just the thought of it – if we hold it in our minds – will cause us to be joyful. So, I made up a short list here of things to be joyful about – besides being joyful about the things we've already covered – the hope of eternal life, Christ's sacrifice, Christ's resurrection from the dead – which is a forerunner of what's going to happen to us – the forgiveness of our sins, God and Christ promising to live in us by the Holy Spirit – what an amazing promise! – and the promise of peace of God that passes all understanding, because it's not about the physical understanding of this world or any of our physical difficulties. It's about what God offers us from the eternal realm. So, what else can we be joyful about? Well, everything.

There were some people we know, who lived on the west slope of the Sierra Nevada range, and they recently had to evacuate during a fire. The West is on fire every summer these days, it seems like. After they evacuated, they learned that their house was saved, and eventually, after all the hotspots were quelled, they were able to return. And when they got there, as I understand the story, they met someone from the bureau that manages the fire teams, and he told them that he had been monitoring the fire by satellite to help deploy the firefighters, and that he had seen that many of the homes in the area had been burned over. But what he saw related to their home was an unexplainably large semi-circle of unburned area right around their house. I think many of us have had experiences like that.

I remember one time, I was taking a group of YOU kids on a camping trip – well, we were actually going to the Grand Tetons from Pennsylvania – and we were spending a night in I think it was South Dakota – out on the plains there – in tents, and there was this huge thunderhead coming our way. We could just see it. They all came from the South, so they knew what thunderstorms were like. I started praying about that, because I knew those tents probably just weren't going to handle the amount of downpour. But, as I watched, it seemed that that thunder cloud appeared to get thinner in the middle, and it opened up and it went around us on both sides, as I recall. And I don't think we got any rain from it.

So, in Psalms 5:11, it talks about things like that.

Psalms 5:11-12 – *But let all who take refuge in You rejoice. Let them ever sing for joy and spread Your protection over them, that those who love Your name may exalt in You. For You bless the righteous, O LORD. You cover him with favor as with a shield.*

Notice it says, "...sing for joy." I was listening last weekend to Jim O'Brien, from Cincinnati, talk about how, when people are old, they can hear a song and they'll be able to sing the words and remember the feelings they had singing the song. They'll become like young people again in their minds because of that – because there's the part of the brain that does song.

We had a friend in Durango, Colorado, that had a traumatic brain injury, and he couldn't talk, but he could sing. He could sing just fine. He could sing all the hymns from church. So, a different part of the brain does that. And I think part of that human brain is for joy. So, "sing for joy and spread Your protection over them, that those who love Your name may exalt in You. For You bless the righteous, O LORD. You cover him with favor as with a shield." So, those are things that we can rejoice about.

When we are sick, or we lose a loved one, or we face financial setbacks, we can remember what James said in James 1:2.

James 1:2 – *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.*

Now, things like that, we're told in the Bible, are all part of our training plan. When we hear hard things, or experience hard things, we can be joyful, because we know God is working on us, and these things are all necessary to ready us to be in something much, much greater – God's Kingdom.

When we watch the news, and we learn that one of the new bureaucrats selected to help manage Medicare think that 75 is a good age to die, we can be joyful that God has a plan, has always had a plan, will fulfill His plan. No one can stop His plan. And it does *not* include all of us dying at 75. God is great. Men are foolish. When we think about our own death, instead of thinking, once we lose consciousness, "That's it for us," but instead we can anticipate suddenly waking up in a completely new body and with a connection to God and other loved ones, then that's a reason to be joyful – to realize that this isn't the end for us. Something great is promised to us. And we can know that that's going to feel instantaneous – you know, eyes go dim, heart rate stops, breathing stops, and instantaneously, we lose consciousness, and then no matter how long we might have been in the grave, we're going to be back alive again. It won't be anytime at all to us. And when we think about all the mistakes we've made in our lives, and the trouble we've caused, we can rejoice knowing that that will be overshadowed so much that no one will even care anymore. All will be forgiven and we'll be free to move forward in healthy relationships with other people. So, those are all really great things. But the main thing is what God promises us for eternity.

Now, there's a part that we have in being joyful people too. One, I think, is to thank God for the gifts He gives us. And it may not be the most important part, but it's still helpful. And that's where we come to the nagging part about, "Why am I not joyful like He tells us?" Well, here are two thoughts and two solutions:

Sometimes, God gives us gifts and we don't recognize or think about them as such. I really enjoy breathing, but I didn't realize I liked it until I talked to some Covid victims. When you talk to somebody that's been on a ventilator, you have a whole different view of what it's like to be able to breathe freely. And I enjoy being able to live in a house that keeps me warm in the winter and cold in the summer – or cool in the summer – but I'm so used to it, I don't often think about it. But when I do, it makes me feel good. I can appreciate being one of God's children. I like it that God – since He's outside of time and the physical – has no trouble being near me wherever I am all the time. It's not like He's too busy because He has more than all the time in the world. So, it's harder to feel joyful when we are not aware of the blessings that we have been given. We know that the whole universe is made up of particles that are mostly electricity. If you have a nucleus the size of a softball, it's circled by an electron – or electrons – that go around it, and in scale, that would probably be like two miles away. So, there's mostly nothing in all the solid stuff that we experience as solid. I'm tapping on a table right now, but mostly it's very little matter with little electrons circling around it. It's mostly energy – is what it is. The Bible tells us that God sustains all of that. Without His power and His involvement, that stuff would all just go phtttt, and we would be gone with it. So, God is our Sustainer. He sustains the universe. The whole universe is just a part of His plan. And that plan is all about us. I could just go on and on and so could you about things that we need to be thankful for, but don't have time to spend thinking about it. But these things, while helpful, are not as important as the great promise of salvation.

Look in Colossians 3:1. Paul said:

Colossians 3:1-4 – *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things* – and he's talking about...you know, he always talked about "raised from the dead," and now we're raised to "newness of life" when we're baptized – *seek the things that are above* – not the stuff on the earth, not the guy that thinks 75 is a good age to die, or that our country suddenly doesn't know how to get along in the world anymore – *seek the things which are above,, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. You're safe! You've got it made – made in the shade. We're just protected and we're waiting. And when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.* So that's our future in a nutshell. And that's what we're admonished to do.

We said at the beginning of this series that the first spiritual fruit is love, and that everything else is a factor – a part – of what love is. So, joy is a part of that. God is a joyful God, and He gives that to us when He lives within us by His Spirit.

Here's the second thing. Believe God, not the devil. Joy is also a matter of belief. We read that already in scripture, didn't we? It was right there at the beginning.

So, what does it mean when we lose loved ones or some other such trial, and then we find ourselves doubting God's love, or perhaps even giving up on our hope of resurrection? Well, if you go to our Website, liferesource.org, and you do a search on *Waging Spiritual Warfare*, you'll find our series by that name. In that series, we explain that the truth of God sets us free from sin and the lies of Satan that has us enslaved to him. So, the devil does not want us rejoicing in our salvation, because that means we have faith in it, and we believe in it. And, if we do that, then that means we're believing God and being free of the devil, rather than believing his discouraging lies.

So, when we lose a loved one, it's likely that we will miss the loved one, and it's also likely that our life will change, sometimes in difficult ways, and that's going to require that we adapt to difficulty. But it isn't true that God has abandoned us or is punishing us. It's all just part of the program, and we have to learn how to work our way through it, much like Christ had work His way through being crucified for us. When we face these trials of losses, it's only an opportunity to focus on the truth God has taught us about His love for us and the plans He has for us – to include us with the lost loved ones in His plan for all eternity. So, that's what we should do. And, if we do that, then faith, hope, peace and joy will be ours. They are all fruits of God's love in us. They're proof of Jesus Christ and God the Father living in us and helping us to think the way They think about things.

So, don't forget to check out our Website, liferesource.org. Remember to be looking for the next one in this series, which is about peace. Would you like to have more of that? Well, don't miss it.

So, thanks to everybody that's been donating and helping us do our work here. It's a wonderful thing that so many people.... Time out here for a minute – speaking to the people who have donated. On a regular basis, we get some very thankful note and phone calls and text messages and emails from people who have benefited from the things on our Website. And they're very appreciated by us and are expressing appreciation to us. But I think we all know that all our efforts and all the efforts of the other people that are talking about God's law and God's will the same way we are, God's behind that. Now we don't take credit for it. We give Him the credit. But we want those of you who are contributing to know that your contributions are making a difference in the lives of other people.

So, until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.