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Title: Fruit of the Spirit Series – 3. Joy: The Choice To Rejoice

Text: Philippians 4:1-8

Today's topic is **JOY**. Depending on your translation, the word "joy" appears more than 200 times in the Old Testament and New Testament. The book of Philippians, where we find today's text, is often referred to as the Epistle of Joy. Joy is scattered throughout the pages of Scripture. God wants His people to live JOY-filled lives. And they do – when they walk in His ways. Our focus today is primarily verse 4 of chapter 4, "*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*" A rather simple verse, but when you scratch beneath the surface, it raises a pile of questions. Is it REALLY possible to rejoice ALWAYS? What does that mean? Am I to go around with a perpetual smile on my face? Is it a sin to feel sorrowful or sad? Am I to deny pain and sorrow? How can I command a feeling, anyway? Are these the words of a bubbly, incurable optimist, or what? I suppose just reading the verse might make some people depressed, because they despair of ever being able to do it! So what does "*rejoice in the Lord always*" mean? To rejoice in the Lord always does NOT mean that we are never to be sorrowful or sad. The Bible is realistic and balanced. We must look at the totality of Scripture and not just one isolated verse. I find it interesting that the shortest verse in the Greek New Testament is 1 Thessalonians 5:1 – "*Rejoice always.*" The shortest verse in the English New Testament is John 11:35 – "*Jesus wept.*" So WE are exhorted to rejoice always, yet JESUS wept! Isn't that contradictory? No. Our Savior could weep AND yet have the fullness of joy, even as He faced the cross (John 15:11). Paul, the writer of today's text, who calls us to REJOICE ALWAYS also commands us to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). The Bible tells us that godly people are marked by mourning (over sin, Matthew 5:4; James 4:9; 5:1) AND by irrepressible joy. To rejoice in the Lord always is NOT primarily a matter of feeling, but of obedience. Philippians 4:4 is a commandment, repeated twice for emphasis, so that we will not shrug it off. It is a command that we must deliberately CHOOSE to obey, ESPECIALLY when we're in difficult circumstances. The choice to rejoice often goes deliberately against how we feel. When we go through trials, when we're treated unfairly, when we're disappointed by people or circumstances, we are faced with a decision: Will we obey this command to REJOICE IN THE LORD, or will we allow ourselves to be swept along BY OUR FEELINGS? Why did he have to say "rejoice ALWAYS," and not "rejoice SOME or even MOST of the time? If he had said that, most of us would have justified ourselves by thinking, "I USUALLY DO rejoice." Then we wouldn't have to confront our grumbling and complaining when things don't seem to go our way; our lack of trust in God in the midst of trials, our anger when we're treated unfairly, our disappointment when people let us down or, to be honest, when we feel that God has let us down. We see the choice to rejoice illustrated in Paul's life when he writes, "rejoice always." He had been incarcerated for well over two years and was facing possible execution. Not only that, but on the way to Rome, Paul had experienced a shipwreck at sea. Once he arrived, many of the church leaders in Rome were distancing themselves from Paul the prisoner. Most would deem that Paul had good reason to be angry and depressed at the treatment he had received over the past few years. You would think that PAUL would have been in need of the Philippians writing to cheer him up, BUT instead PAUL from PRISON writes this short letter full of joy TO THEM. So Paul himself makes a deliberate choice; "*...in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice*" (1:18). Our LORD knew that joy as He faced the cross. The APOSTLES knew that joy when they were flogged for preaching the gospel, and they went on their way "*rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer for his name*" (Acts 5:41). PAUL & SILAS knew that joy when they were unjustly thrown in the Philippian jail, their backs torn open, their feet in the stocks, as they sang hymns of praise to God (Acts 16:25). We need to recognize that what Paul commands here is not just a cheerful disposition, which some appear to have by nature. JOY is an EXPECTATION we ALL can have. It is something that requires supernatural power – it is JOY IN THE LORD! Paul shows us that this joy in the Lord should be the aim of every believer. What's the difference between happiness and joy? The word "happiness" means "favored by circumstances." The root word "hap" means "chance" or "luck." If our "hap" is good, we're happy; if our "hap" is bad, we're unhappy. However, joy is different. Joy is NOT based on chance or luck. Our joy is NOT determined by our happenings. Joy has little to do with what happens TO us BUT HAS EVERYTHING TO DO with our attitudes TOWARD what happens to us. Happiness is determined by what happens on the outside, while joy is the result of what goes on inside us. JOY is DIVINE DELIGHT not based on circumstances but rather **it is dependent upon the Holy Spirit's work in our lives**. You can't manufacture joy on your own – it's a gift from God – BUT, as we saw in week one of this series, we must do OUR work in cultivating the Spirit's fruit. Every message in this series is really about this CULTIVATION process – the steps we need to take to experience every aspect of the Holy Spirit filled life. Today, then, we'll look at three ways you can cultivate the quality of Holy Spirit inspired JOY in your daily walk. Do you remember in week one when I talked about the importance of PRUNING? That's

the first step to experiencing joy.

1. Eliminate the Joy-Breakers. I'm talking about the Joy-Killers. There are many out there; today I'll quickly point out a few of them. The first joy-breaker to watch out for is the habit of **COMPLAINING**. A close companion to complaining is **CRITICISM**; it's hard to engage one without the other, and they both tend to be equally counterproductive. This is why Paul said, *"Do everything without complaining or arguing"* (Philippians 2:14). Anytime you begin to complain, bicker, grumble, gripe, criticize, or demean others, you relinquish your joy. To be clear, I'm not talking about resolving conflict in a spiritually mature, respectful manner. I'm talking about choosing to be disgruntled, I guess for the sake of being disgruntled. It serves no purpose but to rob you of your joy. A second joy-breaker to watch out for is **BITTERNESS** (Resentment, Anger). When you allow some offense or conflict from the past to dominate your thoughts and take control of your emotions, you surrender your joy. If there is something from the past that needs to be resolved and can be resolved, **RESOLVE IT**. If forgiveness needs to be extended, **EXTEND FORGIVENESS**. Otherwise, **LET IT GO!** Bitterness is never worth the price you pay to indulge it. Don't let the past live in your head rent free! That's why Paul said, *"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave YOU"* (Ephesians 4:31-32). A third joy-breaker to watch out for is **THE CURRENT SITUATION** – whatever it may be. If we're not careful, we can slip into the habit of allowing every less-than-pleasant event to take away our joy. Sometimes it's an unexpected complication, or momentary inconvenience, or even a serious problem, **BUT**, if all you're looking at is **THIS PRESENT MOMENT**, your joy will come and go. I took a little time this week to list some everyday situations that come along and try to rob me of my joy – traffic, interruptions, someone complaining, power going off, computer issues, internet going out, warning light on the car – I suppose there are hundreds of things that could rob us of our joy. Of course, there are also items much more serious than these – but **NONE OF THEM** are worth sacrificing the good feeling that comes with knowing that **GOD** is in control of **THIS** situation, just as He is in control of **EVERY** situation. If you let them, the daily stresses of life will rob you of your joy, but it's just not worth it. I could spend all day listing the many joy-breakers we encounter, but I think you understand the idea. You need to be on the lookout always for **ANYTHING** that threatens to get between you and your ability to enjoy the Holy Spirit's presence in your life. This is why Paul said, *"Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances..."* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). In addition to eliminating the joy breakers...

2. Focus on the Joy Builders. There are things you can do each day to build on – or to maximize, you might say – the joy that the Holy Spirit wants to bring into your life. There are beautiful things in this life that, if we will give them proper attention, will increase our joy. These things include: **SPENDING TIME WITH PEOPLE YOU LOVE THE MOST** – your spouse, your children, your family, your friends, your church family – and not just spending time passively, but spending time intentionally, focused on what this person or relationship means to you, thanking God for the beauty of these relationships. **LISTENING TO UPLIFTING MUSIC or SINGING AND MAKING MELODY IN YOUR HEART.** I'm not talking about merely hearing music in the background of whatever else you're doing, but listening with the intention of hearing the beauty of the words and the melody. In the Old Testament, King Saul, who had more than his share of problems as a king, was sometimes troubled by an evil spirit. When he was troubled, he would call for a teenage musician named David to come and play his harp. The Bible indicates that David's music would make Saul feel better. That's the power of music. When you take time to appreciate its beauty, God can use it to bring joy into your life. **SPENDING TIME IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD, THE WORD, AND IN PRAYER.** Like being in the presence of a friend, being in the presence of God is a joy building moment. Those are just three examples. Each one of us needs to learn to recognize the joy-builders that God has placed in our lives, and give them our time and attention. Paul said, *"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"* (Philippians 4:8). The more we learn to acknowledge and appreciate the beauty of Christ in the Word and in the world, the more we experience the joy of the Holy Spirit.

3. Strive to BE a Joy-Bringer. A few minutes ago when I was talking about the things that break our joy – the situations and circumstances – some of you probably thought of a person. Most of us know someone who has the capacity to drain the joy out of any room they enter. Let's all agree **NEVER** to be that person. Let's do our best, instead, to **BRING JOY** wherever we go. In today's text, Paul asked a couple of church members to settle their differences and find a way to agree with one another. Earlier, in chapter 2, he said, *"Make my joy complete by being like-minded..."* (Philippians 2:2). He's saying to the people of the Philippian church: "Be aware of how your attitudes and actions affect others – even on an emotional level. One of the ways you can be a joy-bringer is to make it a habit to leave the griping, complaining, and bickering with others behind. We should each strive to be a **DAY-MAKER**: Try to make at least one person's day, every day. Often just a word or two – a simple gesture here and there – will do it. I'll also point out that when you make it your

objective to bring joy into the lives of others, it inevitably comes back your way. Paul said in Galatians 6:7, “...you reap what you sow.” “He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed” (Proverbs 11:25). The bottom line is that it feels good to help others feel good. It feels good to spread joy around.

Conclusion: How can we rejoice in the Lord? Walk in submission to the sovereign Spirit of God. In Galatians 5:16 Paul says, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” The words “walk” and “fruit” imply a process, not something instantaneous. **View your trials through the lens of Scripture.** Paul was going through some rather intense trials and could easily have become depressed. Instead, he had abundant joy because he viewed his trials in light of God’s Word. Satan will often come to you in a moment of disappointment and tempt you to doubt God’s loving care. Follow Paul’s example: Stand on the Word and NEVER let the enemy rob you of your joy. **Deal properly and promptly with relational conflicts.** The verses before AND after verse 4 deal with relationships. If you have wronged others and have not done all to make it right, you WON’T have joy in the Lord. If we humble ourselves and go to our brother or sister and ask their forgiveness, we will be flooded with God’s joy. It’s no accident that love precedes joy in the list of the fruit of the Spirit. If there’s NO love – there’s NO JOY! **Sing praise to God.** One of the most frequent commands in the Bible is to “SING.” You may be thinking, “Singing is the last thing I feel like doing when I’m depressed.” Well, where did you get the idea that the Christian life is living by our feelings? It’s no accident that the longest book in the Bible is a hymn book. When you’re feeling down, turn to the Psalms and create your own melody. Put on some praise music or get out a hymnal and sing to the Lord. Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn as they went out to Gethsemane (Matthew 26:30). Paul & Silas sang in the Philippian jail (Acts 16:25). **Serve the Lord with gladness** (Psalm 100:2). Often people who lack joy are NOT involved in serving Christ or others. If you want joy, get your eyes off yourself and on to how God wants you to serve Him. **Focus your mind daily on the Lord and the things He has promised us in Christ.** Daily meditate on the cross of Christ and all the riches that are ours through His death. Think on the fact that you are risen in Him, seated in heavenly places, with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Revel in His abundant GRACE that is GREATER than all our sins! The Philippian jailer went from being suicidal to rejoicing greatly because of his salvation (Acts 16:27, 34). How can you be depressed if you are focusing daily on the marvelous grace shown to you in Christ? **Live by faith, not by feelings.** The Christian life is a walk of faith, of trusting in things not seen, not of “getting in touch with your feelings.” Peter wrote to Christians going through intense trials, “...though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:18). One more – YOU WANT JOY – **MAKE SURE you are in a right relationship with God through saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.** In chapter 3 of Philippians where Paul exhorts us to rejoice in the Lord (3:1), many who claimed to be Christians were not relying only upon Christ and His shed blood for salvation, but rather they were trusting in themselves (3:2; 4-6). Paul explains how he had to come to the point of counting everything of himself to be a LOSS so that he could be FOUND in Christ. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said it this way: “There are many people who never know the joy of the Lord because they have failed to see themselves as miserable sinners. The only way to be happy in Christ is to be desperately unhappy without Him.” Make JESUS the CENTER OF YOUR JOY!