

Joy

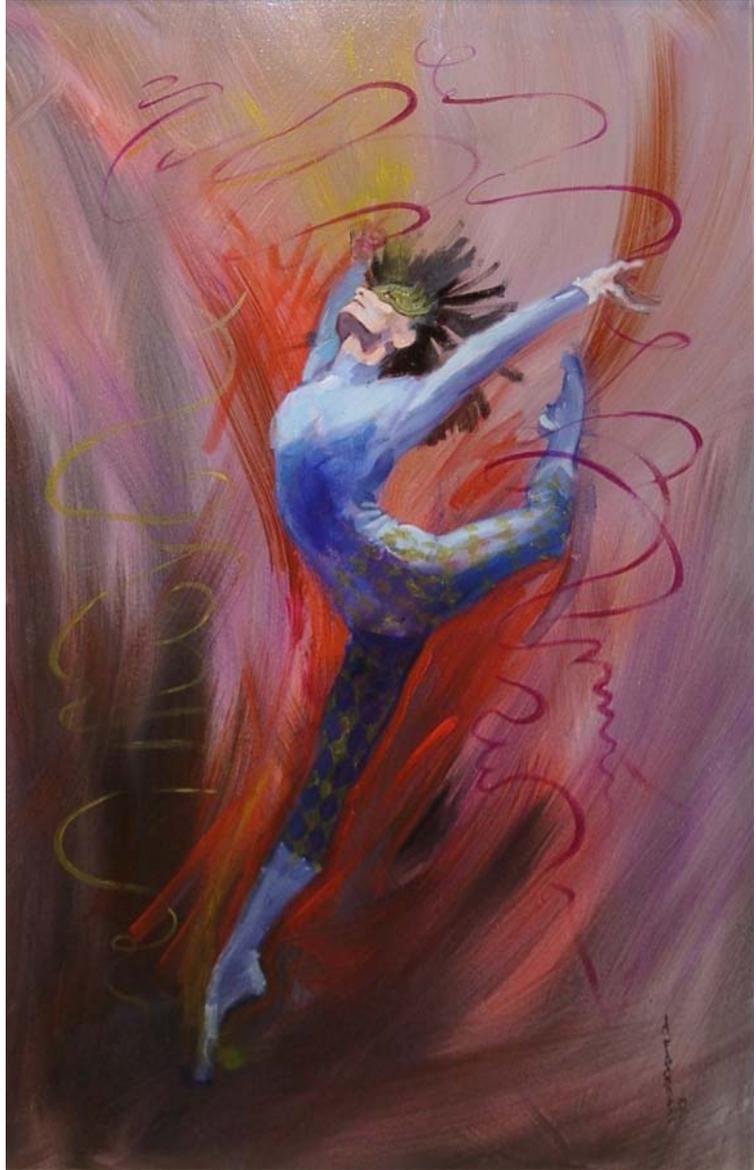


THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE,
PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GENEROSITY, FAITHFULNESS,
GENTLENESS, AND SELF-CONTROL . . .

IF WE LIVE BY THE SPIRIT,
LET US ALSO BE GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT
GALATIANS 5: 22-25

The life of a
Christian
Should be a
perpetual
jubilee,
A prelude
to the
festivals of
eternity.

Theophane
Nenard



The place God calls you to is the place where
your deep gladness and the world's deep hungers meet.

F R E D E R I C K B U E C H N E R

LIFE ON THE VINE



JOY

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say,
Rejoice.”
Philippians 4:4

The Theme

According to Jesus' parables in Luke 15, joy is a defining characteristic of the life of God. So if God's life is marked by such joy, then believers called to embody that character should bear the fruit of joy in their living.

The Word

- ◆ **DAY 1: Read Luke 15:1-32 (*parables of joy*)**
Listen as much for what these parables say about God's joy as what they say about lost and found. Pay attention *to whom* Jesus addresses these parables.
- ◆ **DAY 2: Read Isaiah 65:17-25 (*joy of Israel's restoration*)**
What is the nature of the joy God's people experience in the new heaven and new earth?
- ◆ **DAY 3: Read Habakkuk 3 (*joy no matter what*)**
Look for the connection between remembering God's mighty acts of deliverance and rejoicing in God's continued presence even when "no fruit is on the vine."
- ◆ **DAY 4: Read 1 Peter 1:3-9; 4:12-14 (*joy in suffering*)**
How do you respond to the notion in this passage that Christian joy may come in the context of suffering?
- ◆ **DAY 5: Read Chapter 3 in *Life On the Vine*.** After reading the chapter, work through the study guide on the following pages.

The Book

Joy is the satisfaction that comes when we find that for which we've been looking. So to pursue joy itself is akin to looking for something not because you want to find it, but because you want the pleasure that accompanies finding it. Such a strategy is bound to fail, however, because joy—as C. S. Lewis well noted—cannot be pursued for its own sake; rather, joy is a byproduct whose “very existence presupposes that you desire not it but something other and outer.” Joy is simply one of the consequences of being open to that which is beyond one's self. To pursue joy for its own sake, in order to take delight in one's own delight, is to ignore this crucial “other-directedness” of joy.

This outward movement of joy is perhaps why Scripture so closely links joy and love. By reflecting on the character of God's love as grace, as gift, as we did in the last chapter, we are prepared to see the significance of the etymological connection between the Greek word for “grace” (*charis*) and the New Testament word most commonly translated as “joy” (*chara*). Both words developed from the same root, and both imply the activity of freely taking delight in something or someone beyond one's self.

(Kenneson, p. 59)

The STUDY GUIDE

Exploring the Roots of JOY

What do you think distinguishes joy from pleasure? Consider the link Kenneson identifies between the New Testament word for grace (charis) and the New Testament word commonly translated as joy (chara). When have you taken delight in something beyond yourself?

What connection do you see between love and joy?

In studying the parables in Luke 15, keep in mind a few points:

1. Luke likely intended the entire chapter to be read/heard as a single unit. Some scholars believe the repetition and thematic similarities of the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin are a set up for the last parable of the lost son.
2. None of the primary figures in the three parables—the shepherd, the woman, the father—exhibit “rational” behavior in seeking what is lost; their unfathomable searching mirrors their unrestrained joy.
3. In all three parables, the profound joy and celebration in finding what once was lost eclipses any need to justify or explain why the sheep or the coin or the son became lost in the first place.

Examining the Fruit of JOY

Character of the Fruit

Take another look at the three parables in Luke 15:1-32 with these questions in mind:

- ◆ What do the three parables have in common?
- ◆ What does the inclusion of a celebration at the end of each parable say about God?
- ◆ What keeps the elder brother from celebrating with his father over the return of the prodigal?
- ◆ How do you think the Pharisees reacted to hearing these parables? How does your reaction to hearing these parables compare to how you think the Pharisees reacted?

Now compare how 1 Peter 4:12-14, Colossians 1:24, and James 1:2-4 make a connection between suffering and joy.

- ◆ Why do these passages seem to view suffering as an occasion for joy?
- ◆ How is the joy described here in the Bible different from the happiness (though sometimes called joy) pursued in the world?
- ◆ When have you experienced joy in the context or aftermath of a time of trial, sorrow, or pain? How did you experience God?

Obstacles to Bearing the Fruit

Kenneson identifies what he believes are at least three obstacles to bearing the fruit of joy on our lives. Reflect on each one and the questions that accompany them.

(1) Manufacturing desire (advertising)

- ◆ What evidence do you see in our culture that consumption is a way of life?
- ◆ Where would you say you learned “how to be a consumer”—what clothes to wear, what foods to eat, what car to drive, what house to buy, what shampoo to use, etc.?

(2) Glorifying the new

- ◆ Why is the “new” so often promoted as being superior to the “old”?
- ◆ To what extent would you say a “glorifying the new” mentality exists as part of your congregational life?
- ◆ What assumptions lie at the root of the perception that what is old or traditional is somehow less desirable?

(3) Looking for more

- ◆ What is the danger in a “more-is-better” approach to life?
- ◆ How does fear characterize many of our consumer practices of trying to buy happiness, glorifying the new, and always seeking more?

Bearing the Fruit of JOY in the World

Cultivating the Fruit

In response to the obstacles consumer culture places in the way of Christian joy, Kenneson suggests we cultivate the fruit of joy in these ways:

- ◆ *Seek a more joyful worship*—the reconciling work of God in Christ should be celebrated in the same way a parent celebrates finding a lost child.
- ◆ *Develop a habit of thanksgiving and contentment*—praising God for what he has already given us can hold in check our tendencies to seek what we think we have to have.
- ◆ *Appreciate and reconceive the church’s tradition*—rather than rejecting the old for the new, let us rejoice in our heritage and imagine new possibilities inspired by that legacy.

In cultivating these practices, what changes in behaviors and attitudes would be required of you? What risks would be involved?

Begin a practice of starting the day giving thanks and praise to God before turning to the many tasks at hand.

Make a list of your heart’s deepest desires. Go over the list and ask of each item:

- (1) Why do I desire this?
- (2) Is this desire in line with God’s desires for me? and
- (3) Who among my Christian friends can help me discern this?

Pray Psalm 100 every morning and evening for a week. Try to memorize it.