***JOY OF THE LORD -* By Lillian Cunningham**

 **“Fruit of the Spirit” (Children’s Song Video) What a great song!**

**Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV)** 22But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

# Let’s look at these verses: Scripture reads the “Fruit” of the Spirit, not the “fruits,” so all 9 spiritual characteristics make up THE “FRUIT” … also, the first word is “but”… so we need to look at what comes before the “but.”

# Galatians 5:13-21 New International Version (NIV) 13You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+5%3A13-21&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29176a)]; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+5%3A13-21&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29177b)] 15If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.16So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+5%3A13-21&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29180c)] you want. 18But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

In Verses 13-21 Paul was describing to the Galatians (new Christians) what **LIFE BY THE SPIRIT** looks like, as opposed to life in the flesh; that these things – THE FRUIT - should be evident in their lives. As Believers, these things should also be evident in **our** lives.

3 weeks ago, Sister Susan shared a message about LOVE, (God’s for us & Ours for Him & others). LOVE, *most important*, is listed first in our FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT scripture. And next is **JOY!** I believe there is significance in the order of these 9 manifestations of the Fruit of the Spirit. God’s **Love** leads to God’s **joy**, which brings God’s **peace**! I think of the **JOY** **of the Lord** as a bridge from His love to peace and contentment. When we have the peace of God living in our heart, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control will be developed and demonstrated as we Walk by the Spirit.

In her message, Susan mentioned that love is a choice, not just an emotion, and last Sunday Pastor Ralph reemphasized that. The same is true of **JOY**! God has been speaking to me about the Joy of the Lord for several months, through scripture, devotionals, prayer, and other believers.

**The joy of the Lord is a deep assurance of God’s unconditional love and faithfulness that fills us with peace and contentment, regardless of our circumstances. It saturates our soul, our entire being. It is not just a feeling, an emotion, but an intentional choice we can make by the power of the Holy Spirit. When God is on the throne of our hearts, and we are surrendered to Him as Lord of our life, we can rest in the freedom of “holy joy!” (The Joy of the Lord)**

**Remember** Verse 13: “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free.” Yes, we are free to walk by the Spirit with hearts full of JOY! Do you have Holy JOY of the Lord? Can you smile inside with calm assurance, peace and contentment no matter your circumstances?

1. The Good News is: **JOY OF THE LORD** is **ATTAINABLE!** The Definition of attain is “gain with effort” and **attainable** means “capable of being accomplished.” So, what effort must we make to attain real joy?

# First, we must *choose* to SEEK our *promised* salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Look at Romans 5:8 (NLT) 8 But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And Romans 3:23-24 (NIV) 23for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

So, we admit we are sinners, believe and confess that Jesus is the risen Lord, repent and accept Him as Lord of our life. We are redeemed! Woo, Hoo! Now, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our heart, and we have access to all of the attributes of holiness! We have all of the Holy Spirit, but… **He may not have all of us.**

Thus we begin our spiritual formation, being transformed into the image of Christ, for the sake of others! Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – it’s all in there, a **GIFT** from the Holy Spirit!

**Romans 4:7 (NLT)** “Oh, what **joy** for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight.”So, regarding joy, are we immediately and always joyful?

Maybe not… remember, the attributes of holiness are first a **GIFT** of the Spirit, perhaps not yet manifested as **FRUIT** of the Spirit! A gift is worthless until it’s *accepted* … then *opened* … then *used*. Sadly, the GIFT of the Holy Spirit canjust sit in there, languishing in our heart, unopened and unused.

So, **secondly, we must *choose* to completely SURRENDER our will to the will of God** in order to engage in the spiritual formation process!

Surrender requires loads of humility! But, think of it this way… it’s a *surrender to* ***freedom****, to walk by the Spirit with hearts full of* ***JOY!*** It is **freedom** by the power of the Holy Spirit, to access and develop the glorious GIFT planted in our heart. As our personal relationship with Christ develops and grows, we begin to open the GIFT and use it to mature in our faith journey. We **chose** to love and accept Jesus, now we **choose** to ***employ* our JOY**! By making that choice, the GIFT blossoms into spiritual fruit.

Attaining holy Joy of the Lord requires **intentionally** seeking God’s redemption and surrendering to His will and purpose for our lives. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit fills us with God’s unconditional love, and the JOY of the Lord takes root in our hearts. The result is glowing evidence of joyful assurance and hope, regardless of circumstances.

A friend and Sister in Christ wrote:

 *“We will never find* ***joy*** *and contentment as long as we are the center of our world; as long as we spend our lives on ourselves; as long as we attend church looking to get something out of it for us; as long as we read the Bible with us as the main character; as long as we see God as a genie and harbor resentment when things don't go our way...In John 10:10, Jesus said: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”… we are sabotaging the ‘life abundantly’ that we crave.*

 *The scriptures that people look at as restrictions in life are the very ones to freedom… “Die to self, lay down your life, love your neighbor as yourself, it's more blessed to give than to receive.”
If we would be brave enough to be honest, we would admit that all the striving, all the gaining of status and material possessions, all the focus on "me" hasn't landed us where we planned, right? It never will!! It's not how we were made. God tells us, gives us instructions for the very lives that we crave and we say, 'no thanks, I got this!'
 We were bought with a price, His blood. We are not our own. We will never find peace, contentment,* ***joy****, all the good stuff, living for ourselves. He gave His life for us...why do we have such a hard time reciprocating?* By Marla Geiger

In John 5:39-40 (MSG), Jesus told the Pharisees, “You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you’ll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are all about me! And here I am...standing right before you...and you aren’t willing to receive from me the life you say you want.**”** And in Revelation 3:20 (MSG) to the church: 20“Look at me. I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door,

 I’ll come right in and sit down to supper with you.”

**He waits for us to respond by seeking Him and surrendering to Him.**

1. More good news: Our **JOY OF THE LORD** is **MAINTAINABLE!**  TheDefinition of maintain is “keep in a certain state, position, or activity.” Maintained: “kept in *good* condition.” **Maintainable**: “capable of being maintained”…

After attaining our JOY, we certainly want to keep it in good condition by maintaining our focus on the **“Joy Giver.”** We do that by practicing the presence of God. We keep our eyes on Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Look to Him, spend time with Him in prayer, study the Bible, our “Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.” Get up and Serve!

In Psalm 138:3, the Psalmist rejoices, *“As soon as I pray, You answer me; You encourage me by giving me strength.”* And in Nehemiah 8:10b, he encourages the people, *“Don’t be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!”*  With vigilance and continual attention to our relationship with Christ, He gives us strength to banish the “joy stealers” that lurk in the darkness of difficulty. If your joy is slipping, be more **intentional** in practicing the presence of God!

Satan is always ready to move in and use any means to steal our joy when he sees an opening. Times of difficulty will test our resolve to remain joyful. Sometimes we must dig really deep to pull up the assurance of Joy in the Lord and stand firm. If we let “self” back on the throne during troubles, and neglect our maintenance program, our joy can be weakened by negativity, complaining, and looking back at past failures, mistakes, or abuse. (Read Hebrews 12:1-2)

Oswald Chambers wrote, *“No sin is worse than the sin of self-pity, because it removes God from the throne of our lives.”*

If indulging in self-pity, we can be defeated by circumstances, pain, illness, relationship issues, and persecution. My goodness, just watching news channels on TV can send us spiraling down into despair as we’re bombarded with accounts of all the hate, evil, corruption, death and destruction in our world! So, our worst joy stealer can be ourselves allowing it! Don’t fall into this trap!

We can hold on to our **JOY OF THE LORD** by drawing near to Him and ***intentionally*** experiencing His presence every day. (James 4:8 Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.) When we remain in prayerful awareness of His presence and rely on His strength, nothing can steal our joy! There are so many scriptures to help us –

 1 Peter 4:12-13 “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come upon you to test you… But **rejoice** inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be **OVERJOYED** when His glory is revealed.”

 Psalm 146:5 “But **joyful** are those who have the God of Israel as their helper, whose hope is in the Lord their God.”

 Romans 12:12 “**Rejoice** in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying.”

 As **believers** and **followers** of Christ, the hope of glory, of eternal life with Him, is reason enough to remain joyful in all circumstances! (Read Psalm 28:7)

1. Even more good news, our **JOY OF THE LORD** is **SUSTAINABLE**! SUSTAIN = lengthen or extend in duration or space, SUSTAINED = continued at length without interruption or weakening, and **SUSTAINABLE** = capable of being prolonged.

***Joy of the Lord is much more than happiness. Happiness is a temporary feeling, but JOY is a steadfast, deep well of faithful assurance and HOPE!***

 > Happiness is a fleeting emotion – a feeling of pleasure and enjoyment because of our ***current*** situation. Happiness can disappear when life changes, but JOY remains as a rock of HOPE! I think happiness is like an ice cream cone. You enjoy it for a while, then it’s gone. Some may even melt and trickle away to diminish our pleasure.

 > Joy is steadfast - like a nurtured garden full of delicious vegetables and fruit. It ***continues*** to produce at length, ***uninterrupted and strong***, as long as it is cultivated. We must cultivate our joy in the Lord for continued service, growth, and future impact on others. That’s our mission!

The Joy of the Lord opens windows in our hearts and minds to see more of God’s beauty and peace, as well as the needs of those around us. Psalm 40:16 … May all who search for You be filled with ***joy*** and gladness in You. May those who love your salvation repeatedly shout, “The Lord is great!”

Joy in the Lord gives a **provision** **of strength** in conviction of our assurance in difficult circumstances. 1 Peter 5:10 “And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” We can reflect God’s love, mercy, and grace by standing strong, firm, and steadfast with a joyful response to all circumstances.

Our steadfast joy allows us to see the **potential of goodness** in every situation, by trusting God’s wisdom and power to use it for His glory. Romans 15:13 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.

With the Joy of the Lord, we have **power of boldness** to share the gospel and our own story of faith with others. Every opportunity to tell them about Jesus should be joyfully seized! This is our redemptive purpose! Psalm 119:1 Joyful are people of integrity, who follow the instructions of the Lord.

**Conclusion:** We can, and should, embrace our Joy of the Lord with peaceful contentment, but JOY is also to be shared as recognizable evidence of the Holy Spirit living within us…part of our FRUIT of the Spirit! We need to reveal our joy of the Lord! It should be like an open window with sunlight streaming into a room; the brightness of our joy shining into the lives of others.

I believe the joy of the Lord is an expression of the light and love of Jesus Christ. When we experience such joy, we can’t hold back our testimony and witness of the freedom and hope we have as followers of Christ! Others can and will see the joy of the Lord in our actions and relationships. When they see our joy, they will feel the power of our witness and our **HOPE** of **GLORY** with Jesus … forever!