



FEED MY SHEEP

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The Fruit of Joy, Part 1

{The reader should picture this man, Wilbur, speaking in a deadpan, monotone voice, with a VERY negative attitude and voice inflection}

Good morning. *(sigh)* My name is Wilbur. I know it's sunny outside this morning, but I wish the weather was better. Too much sun can give you skin cancer, you know. I am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. I've been a Christian all my life. I go to church every Sunday—morning and evening—and most of the time, on Wednesday evenings, too.

I am very glad that I am a Christian. Last week my cat... got *(choking up)*...my cat got run over by a car.

I have many friends. They're all Christians and go to my church. They're all happy people, too...like me. Last month my car broke down...on a trip...and I had to have a new... transmiser—or whatever that thing is called. It cost me \$3,000. But I didn't mind because I have a credit card.

At church we learn about Jesus and how to get saved. I got saved a long time ago, so mostly at church I just learn about Jesus and how to rejoice in the Lord.

Six months ago, my wife divorced me. When I asked her why she wanted a divorce, she said I was such a drag, such an unhappy and negative person to live with. But I told her she was really messed up and she was so blind because she can't even see that I'm one of the happiest people in the world.

As a Christian, you're supposed to be happy. I

know that because that's what my preacher said...and so that is what I do. I am a very happy person.

My boss has the same problem as my wife—I mean my ex-wife—because two weeks ago, he called me into his office and told me I ought to lighten up and try to find some joy in life. He said that I was too pesta—too pestamistic or something, whatever that is, and that I was always dwelling on the negative.

I told him that wasn't true because I'm a Christian and therefore I am very happy. Plus, I told him some other things that I can't repeat here. I admit, they were not too nice. The next week he fired me...it was the same day I ran over my cat.

All in all, it doesn't really matter. So what if I lost my job. It wasn't *my* fault. My boss was a jerk anyhow! So what if my wife divorced me; it isn't my fault that she can't see how cheerful I am all the time.

Well, to tell you the truth, I really don't have that many friends, even at church anymore. That's OK though; they're all just a bunch of heretics and hypocrites anyhow. I can deal with that. I'll just go on being the same joyful person I always have been. *(End of Wilbur's lament.)*

Alright, enough of that play-acting. The Bible does say of course, that there is a time to mourn and a time to weep, but this guy is ridiculous! I was exaggerating to make the point, and I am certain that we all know people like that...The kind of person who, if they were told they just won the Powerball lottery in the amount of 300 million dollars, would react by saying something

like: “Oh, that’s just great; I’ll probably get in a wreck and die on my way to pick it up.”

The person I attempted to portray in that caricature is the antithesis of the joyful Christian. In this short series of Bible studies I am herewith commencing, we are going to discuss joy, along with some other fruits of the Spirit.

A number of years ago, we began a study of the fruits of the Spirit. When we did a general introduction to the fruits of the Spirit, we learned the difference between the *gifts* of the Spirit and the *fruits* of the Spirit.

We also discovered that the term “godliness” encompasses all the fruits of the Spirit. The fruits of the Spirit come to us through the grace of God and therefore we presented studies in FMS on the topic of grace. That was entitled *Grace for the Race*.

Following that, we began a study of the specific fruits and focused first on humility. Another way to describe the fruits of the Spirit is that they are, in effect, the character qualities or the virtues of Christians. All Christians, at all times, should be striving to put into practice what we learn and to make these new behaviors the dominant pattern of our lives.

The fruits of the spirit (more or less of them) are mentioned in a number of places in the New Testament, but the most complete list is in Galatians.

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

All these virtues and others fall under the general term godliness. Godliness is *not* an option for a Christian. The pursuit of godliness is the *work* of a Christian. We seek the grace of God to be enabled to practice them in our daily lives, **not** to *earn* salvation, because salvation is not earned. It is a free gift. Instead, we practice the fruits because we *are* saved, not to get saved! We practice the fruits because doing so is pleasing to our heavenly Father. We want to please Him because He has already saved us unto eternal life. And so godliness is part of our sanctification process.

The fruit of joy...just what is joy? To attempt to

define it we can turn to a dictionary and we can turn to the Bible. Let me give you the dictionary definition first—not because it is the highest authority. It is not. But we turn there first because after we consult its definition, we can set it aside and spend the rest of our time seeing how the Bible uses it and in that manner come to a biblical understanding of the word *joy*.

I like Webster’s 1828 dictionary because it was imbued by Mr. Webster with a large degree of biblical correctness, if we may invent the term as opposed to political correctness.

Webster’s says for the word *joy*: “1. The passion or emotion excited by the acquisition or expectation of good; that excitement of pleasurable feelings which is caused by success, good fortune, the gratification of desire or some good possessed, or by a rational prospect of possessing what we love or desire; gladness; exultation; exhilaration of spirits.

2. Gayety; mirth; festivity.

3. Happiness; felicity.

4. A glorious and triumphant state. (Who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross. Heb. 12)

5. The cause of joy or happiness. (For ye are our glory and joy. 1 Ths 2)”

And then Mr. Webster gives the verb forms.

To see how the Bible defines joy, we simply take our concordance and begin to look up all occurrences of the word joy or its various forms, including joyful, joyfully, joyfulness, joyous and we must not neglect rejoice, rejoicing, etc. Because if we neglected the rejoice words, we would miss over half the approximately 500 occurrences.

Obviously, we will not examine all those occurrences for the present Bible study, but we will try to capture the essence of biblical joy so that we can understand it sufficiently in order to progress in our spiritual maturity.

The Bible teaches that we are trichotomous beings. We consist of body *and* soul *and* spirit. The soul is the mind, the will and the emotions. In other words, the soul is what we think, what we decide/judge and what we feel. Narrowing it down to just the emotions part of our soul now, let us list some emotions. Let’s begin with negative emotions first. Some of the common negative emotions are sadness, grief, fear, anx-

ious, angry, rage, bitterness. A few of the positive emotions are happy, peaceful, elated, excited, amazed, loving, warm (emotionally; i.e, affectionate).

Normally, when people talk of joy they would classify it among the positive emotions, right? But isn't that quizzical? Isn't that puzzling? Because joy is biblically defined as a fruit of holy *spirit*, so would it not be *properly* categorized as belonging to the spiritual realm then?

Can you see why so many people think that the soul and spirit are the same thing? Yet we know they are not, but certainly there is some inter-relatedness. You see, true and godly joy is a quality of the heart.

When we say the heart, we mean more than that flesh and blood organ in your chest which circulates your blood throughout your body. From the most ancient times, the heart has been a metaphor for the very center and essence of our being, of both soul and spirit.

And so we appear to have both a soulish side and a spiritual side to our being, with some of the same qualities applying to both. Therefore when we speak of joy as being a quality of the heart, it is both spiritual and soulish—and it also appertains to the physical body as well.

Notice that in Proverbs 15:13, it says:

Proverbs 15:13 A merry heart maketh a cheerful [glad, joyful] countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.

The word merry there is also translated *joyful*, and the word *broken* is better understood today by the word *wounded*. So...

Proverbs 15:13 A joyful heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is wounded.

We can see how the idea is derived that the joy that originates in the heart then manifests on our face. I have mentioned previously of this effect, how that a genuine smile is detected by a full-face smile. You can see the warmth in the eyes.

Proverbs 17:22 A joyful heart doeth good like a medicine [cure, healing]: but a broken [or a

wounded] **spirit drieth the bones.**

Let us first recognize that this use of the word *medicine* is not that which we understand today. Because today's allopathic medicines are drugs which generally and merely treat symptoms and do not actually get to the root cause and heal the disease.

But the Hebrew word there translated *medicine* actually means a cure or a true healing. So do you suppose that could be literally true? That a joyful heart does good like a cure. You bet it's true. I have heard the story many times about Norman Cousins, who was the long-time editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*. He was diagnosed with cancer and when he read this verse, he decided to have brought to his hospital room all the old comedy movies he could get his hands on. (Abbot and Costello, the three stooges, etc.) He literally laughed himself well. He wrote a book about it called *Head First*. Neuroscience has shown that when we laugh our brains produce endorphins which assists one's body to correct itself.

Obviously, there is whole lot more to biblical joy than simply laughing yourself silly at old comedy routines, but I think that God honored that bit of faith that Mr. Cousins had placed in that one little verse in God's Word. While we are speaking of the heart and joy, consider these other proverbs.

Proverbs 12:20 Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy.

That is to say, those who counsel peace will experience joy in their hearts. Notice peace and joy go together. Both of them are fruits of the Holy Spirit. But also be advised that this does not mean that there is not a time for war. There is such a thing as a *righteous* war. This proverb is not referring to peace as opposed to a righteous war. This proverb is setting the contrast between wicked counsellors who devise evil and unrighteous wars as opposed to good men who in their hearts desire peace. It is they who will have the joy of God.

Proverbs 12:25 Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.

YLT (Young's Literal Translation) **Proverbs 12:25 Sorrow in the heart of a man boweth down, And a good word maketh him glad.**

Clearly, we must add the words *glad, gladness,* etc. to our study of joy because that is what it means here and in most places. It is essentially the same as joy. In my view, the first part of this verse should read “Heaviness in the heart of man maketh him stoop.”

Heaviness is sadness and sorrow, or being burdened with anxiety and worry. I believe that if an individual constantly experiences that “heaviness” of heart, that he/she will eventually manifest it in the body with rounded and or/slumping shoulders, neck forward, head bowed and the beginning of hunch back. Because if one carries that heaviness of heart year after year after year, what happens to the spinal cord? That person becomes stooped and bowed over. It results in much pain in later years, as you can well imagine.

We use a phrase describing “people that have the weight of the world on their shoulders.” Well, over time, the emotional and spiritual manifests itself in the physical body, that much is becoming widely known—even among M.D.’s, praise God!

We have all seen the pictures of the ancient mythological god named Atlas who is shown stooped down and carrying a globe on his neck and back. And if you have ever been to a chiropractor—oh, and let me stop there and mention that these doctors are not necessarily good singers, so this has nothing to do with choir practice—they are chi-ro-practors not “choir-practors” (as I have heard some public speakers mispronounce it! ☺ Just had to get that off my chest.)

As I was saying, your chiropractor can tell you that at the very top of your spinal cord, the first vertebra is called the Atlas. And if your Atlas vertebra goes out of alignment, it usually results in problems all the way down the spine—at least that is the theory of some chiropractic schools.

But we are concerned here with the spiritual implications as well, for if a person is suffering under such burdens of grief and sorrow and carrying the weight of the world on their Atlas vertebra, then should we be surprised if they manifest those spiritual and emotional imbalances in their spinal cords? It shouldn’t surprise us at all.

What is the solution? To receive the spirit of joy from our Father and to manifest the fruit thereof. But

you ask, how do I do that? Later in this series, we will discuss some of the obstacles to joy. Meanwhile, continuing in this same proverb, the solution offered right here is from the fruit of the Spirit offered by another person. It is called kindness. If a person is heavy of heart, why not see if we can practice non-random acts of kindness.

You caught that, didn’t you? I don’t know if that bumper sticker is extant all over the United States, but here in the eastern United States there is a sticker commonly seen on car bumpers (along with a plethora of other “New Agey”-type stickers all over the rear windows of their Subaru’s). This particular one reads “Practice random acts of kindness.” Well, okay. But I simply question the need for the word “random.” How about just practicing kindness, period. There is no randomness about it. Just do it with the deliberate, conscious intent to manifest God’s love every time you do it.

So if you know some one who is suffering from a heavy heart, for whatever reason, see if you can practice kindness in the form of what the proverb calls a *good word*. Now a word to the wise here. We must use both wisdom and discernment in knowing if we are to say anything; secondly, what to say; and thirdly, how to say it.

For example, if a person just lost a family member and they are suffering from grief; that is no time to try to do your Abbot and Costello routine. There is a time to mourn. A good word is a word of encouragement, of giving hope...and in this instance comfort in their time of grief.

(To be continued)

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