

CAN WE DO BETTER?

Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT) - ²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

INTRODUCTION TO OUR STUDY

This series of discussions are intended to cause us to look at ourselves in the mirror of God. The standard God sets is simple. It is himself.

According to **Genesis 1:26**, God created man (mankind) to be in his image and likeness. Everything following in scripture is to help us to become more like him. This is why Spiritual Growth is mandatory and not optional. It is through the process of Spiritual Growth that we move from our natural, carnal selves into our Spiritual selves. We move from carnal minds to Spiritual minds equipping us for our Spiritual home.

The Holy Spirit speaking through the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Church in Galatia helps us focus in on the characteristics of God. As we consider these characteristics, the question we want to consider is, "Can we do better?"

The answer to that question for all of us is a resounding YES. Not only is it yes, it is yes to every characteristic. No matter where we are on the ladder of discipleship, there is another rung for us to step up to. To be pleasing to God, we must always strive for the next level.

Prayerfully at the end of our study and discussions, each of us will identify ways in which we can do better and be more like God. The ultimate goal is to become one with Christ (**John 17:21**), and when anyone interacts with us, it will be just as if they encountered Jesus Christ himself. Amen.

I. JOY

1) The Fruit of the Holy Spirit are characteristics of God. Therefore, God must have joy. What brings God joy?

- a) Creation. We see several times in the creation story in Genesis 1 that God saw what he created was good. He rejoiced over it. It brought him joy.
- b) His Son. We see this in several New Testament scriptures. **Matthew 3:17 (NLT)** - And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."
- c) US. We are God's delight, his crown jewel of all creation.

Zephaniah 3:17 (NLT) - For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears.^[b] He will rejoice over you with joyful songs."

- d) God gets pleasure from taking care of his children.

Luke 12:29-32 (NLT) - "And don't be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don't worry about such things. ³⁰These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. ³¹Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need.³² "So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom.

2) What is biblical joy?

Real joy is spiritually generated. True joy rests above life's circumstances. It is like life's situations are a ground level, or even the highest mountaintops at their worse. But joy is like an airplane cruising at 40,000 feet above the earth unaffected by what happens at ground level. How does biblical joy differ from happiness?

- a) How does the Holy Spirit produce joy in the Believer?

a) The Holy Spirit reveals God to mankind. He actually reveals the very mind of God.

1 Corinthians 2:11-12 (NLT) - No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own Spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit. ¹² And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us.

b) It is this revelation of God in the Word of God that gives us confidence in many things. Such as God's power, God's essence, God's sovereignty, God's Love for us, God's history of intervention on behalf of his children, and much more.

c) The human mind cannot understand all of God, but we know enough to believe in him and to trust him if we choose.

d) The greater the trust in God, the greater the joy the believer will experience. If we have not grown to trust Him, then we are riding the rollercoaster of happiness.

e) The Holy Spirit generates joy in the believer by what he has revealed in scripture, and by the inspired Word, we know that God is always in control, he is always watching, and he cares.

f) No human being knows the future, but our knowledge of God gives us confidence in an unknown future. Thus, our joy is uninterrupted.

g) God's essence is goodness. **(Matthew 19:17)** When we trust this, we know God is controlling the situation to our ultimate, long-term, spiritual good.

h) Understand there can be a difference between what we consider good and what God considers good. As we grow in the Lord, our wills become more and more aligned.

b) What causes us to lose our joy?

1) Based on the above discussion, we lose our joy when we stop trusting in God.

2) When we trust ourselves, or other people, both of which are unreliable, we will see success and failure through our own eyes. God is communicating clearly to his creation that we are limited.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT) - Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.⁶ Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.

Jeremiah 10:23 (NASB) - I know, LORD, that a person's way is not in himself, Nor is it in a person who walks to direct his steps.

Psalms 119:105 (NLT) - Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.

Jeremiah 17:9 (NLT) - "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?"

- 3) We tend to lose our joy when we cannot get out of the way. When the most important thing is "what I want," we have already forfeited the joy that comes from God.
- 4) As we grow in our spiritual walk with Christ, "what I want," means less and less to us. Then we will be more like our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Luke 22:41-42 (NLT) - ⁴¹ He walked away, about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, ⁴² "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. ***Yet I want your will to be done***, not mine."

- 5) We will also lose our joy when we decide to live apart from God. When we live sinfully, we evict the Holy Spirit from our hearts, and kick God out of his chosen dwelling place.

Galatians 2:20 (NLT) - My old self has been crucified with Christ.^[e] It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

- 6) Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot have God's joy. For our spirits commune together.

Romans 8:16 (NLT) - For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children.

- c) Can someone who is not a child of God receive true joy?
- 1) According to number 6 above, NO.
 - 2) If the Holy Spirit generates joy, then a person must have God's Holy Spirit to receive God's joy.
 - 3) A non-believer is relegated to receiving a different joy based on worldly things and circumstances, which is really happiness.
 - 4) Happiness comes and goes in an instant. As soon as whatever caused the happiness is gone, so goes the happiness itself.

d) Contentment generates joy.

Philippians 4:11-12 (NLT) - Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned **the secret** of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.

No contentment, no joy!!!

James 4:1-3 (NLT) - What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? ² You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. ³ And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

- 1) As we can see from James 4, when we are not content, not only joy, but even happiness can be hard to find. There is nothing wrong with wanting and striving for better, but it must be done inside the boundaries of God's law. Look closely at the approach James shows us, how defiled the heart can become! He is not writing to the heathens. He is writing to Believers. **James 1:1**

e) Sharing joy (testimony & witness)

Sharing our God given joy can be a big part of our evangelism. When we share, we give others a reason to be in a right relationship with

God through Christ. Sharing our joy can peak curiosity in someone. It can plant a seed. It can reveal someone who has an ear to hear.

John 15:11 (NLT) - I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!

- 1) From this “overflowing” that Jesus speaks of in John 15 comes our testimony about the goodness of God and his intervention in our lives.
- 2) We no longer believe that the good things in our lives are because of luck, or a fortunate happenstance. We must be willing to share that we believe there is a God in heaven that is directing and controlling all things.
- 3) Yes, there may be a cost to sharing like this. We might get labeled by an unbelieving world that cannot stand the light of Christ. Jesus warned us not to be ashamed.

Mark 8:38 (ESV) - For whoever is ashamed of me ***and of my words*** in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

- 4) Let’s look closely at what Jesus said. Probably none of us are ashamed of Jesus. We will confess him as our Lord and Savior to anyone. But are we ashamed of the words he spoke???