

The Obvious Christian: Characteristics That Make A Christian Stand Out.
Message 2 – The Joy of an Obvious Christian, January 13, 2008
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Looking into the eyes of my wife to be, and saying, “*I do.*”, looking upon each of my children for the first time, walking on the stage at Moody Bible Institute and receiving my degree from the hand of Dr. George Sweeting; these moments, and so many more, have brought great joy into my life.

Can you think of a time when something **really good** happened to you? Did it give you joy? I’m sure it did!

According to the dictionary, **joy** is *the emotion of great delight caused by something good*. This definition associates joy with positive events and circumstances. But with this definition, what will happen when we face difficulties and negative circumstances? **Our joy will be gone right!**

This past summer, my daughter Anna went out to Oregon with her two daughters. At the end of the first day she called and said it was ***the best day*** of their lives. They went to the ocean, picked up seashells, and just had a great time. But the second day she called, it was just the opposite. They got lost in Portland, they were two hours late for an appointment, and her youngest daughter fell and broke her front tooth. It was simply a miserable day.

Have you ever had days like that when you went from being full of joy to being full of misery? I imagine we all have. Wouldn’t it be great if there was a way we could experience joy regardless of our circumstances? The Bible teaches that we can. Look with me at Galatians 5: 22...

Rather than simply a response to good things, according to this verse, biblical joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is a characteristic of those who have been identified with Jesus Christ by personal faith in Him. When we receive Jesus as Savior, the Holy Spirit enters our life and produces this characteristic. It is one of the characteristics that make us **obvious** as Christians. It helps us to **stand out** in our world.

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Maybe you look at your life and wonder, “*Why don’t I have more joy then?*” That is actually were we left off in our message last Sunday.

First, we must be sure to have Jesus Christ as our Savior. Receiving Him by faith identifies us with Him.

And **second**, we must live lives under the control of the Holy Spirit. Upon doing so, He produces the characteristics of Christ in us, so that we stand out in the world as an obvious Christian.

The world today needs to see Obvious Christians. Their view of Christianity is distorted because the behavior of too many Christians has been distorted. We want to claim identity with Christ, but live like the world. There needs to be a distinction! People need to see that our identity with Christ is obvious. As with the Apostles of old, by watching them and listening to them, people knew they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). As it teaches in 1 Peter 3:15, we want people, who watch and hear us, to come and ask, “*What makes you different?*”

The word *joy* used in Galatians 5: 22, and throughout most of the New Testament, refers to leaping and spinning around with pleasure (Ungers Bible Dictionary). Have you ever been so happy that you just started jumping around?

Watch any sporting event of significance, like the college football championship, the moment one team wins, what happens? Immediately, they start jumping up and down and spinning around! That’s the expression of joy!

For a good Bible illustration of this kind of joy, take a look with me at Acts 3: 1-10...

Rather than read it, let me tell you what happened...

That’s joy!

Probably all of us have experienced some moments of walking, leaping, and

praising, but are we really expected to have that kind of joy **even** when facing difficulties? Look at James 1:2-4...

We are to consider difficulties, trials, hard things **all joy!**

Do we rejoice in the difficulties themselves? Not at all! We rejoice in the fact that we don't have to face them alone, but that God is with us, working in our lives in the midst of them. As it tells us in Romans 8:28...

On the night Jesus was betrayed, as He taught His disciples in the Upper Room, one of His lessons dealt with this kind of joy in order to prepare them for the challenges that were ahead of them. Take a look at John 15:11...

Before giving any consideration to what Jesus taught His disciples on this occasion, what were some of the things that were about to happen to Him? Jesus was about to be betrayed, forsaken by His disciples, arrested, and illegally tried, spit upon, mocked, beaten, and crucified!

Did Jesus know all of this was going to happen? Yes He did.

With all of this before Him, all of which His disciples would have to endure, what did Jesus want to remain in them? ***His joy!***

And to what extent did He want them to experience His joy? ***Fully!***

Going through the most heart-breaking time of their life, Jesus wanted them to experience His abiding joy.

How was it going to be possible for them to experience the joy of Christ in these difficult circumstances to come? In verses 1-8, Jesus told them to abide in Him.

To abide in Christ and to walk in the Spirit refer to the very same thing. **We believe His words, depend on Him, and yield to the Spirit, rather than ourselves, the world, or our circumstances. We allow Him to lead, direct, and influence our lives.** If you've done that, then you know it does make an obvious difference.

The book of Philippians has the reputation of being a book about joy. Joy is the key word of the book, and is used by the Apostle Paul, 19 times. There is an interesting link between Paul's introduction to the first Christians in Philippi, and his circumstances when he wrote his letter to them.

In Acts 16: 16-25, when Paul and Silas were in Philippi for the first time, they were arrested, publicly beaten, put in prison and in chains. Their response to those circumstances was prayer, praise, and song! As a result, their testimony as Christians was **obvious** to everyone, people got saved, and the First Church of Philippi got started!

Should that be an expectation in our difficulties? Without question! And when you and I respond with the joy of Christ in such difficulties, just as with Paul and Silas, our Christianity will be **obvious**, and people will notice.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, he was again a prisoner restricted by chains and a guard in Rome. Under such circumstances, what he wrote to them provides us with practical and realistic insights about joy. Look at Philippians 1: 12-26...

Paul was in chains, but he knew God was using his circumstances, so he rejoiced, and wanted the Philippians, who were going through persecution, to rejoice as well. The same message is repeated throughout the book with different circumstances, so that we will know it applies across the board. Our joy isn't based on our circumstances; our joy comes **out of** our identity with Christ!

The Hastings Bible Dictionary says Christian joy is *the sign that the soul has found its object* (page 500).

As Christians, we will be able to express joy, regardless of the circumstances, when Christ is the object of our soul.

Are good circumstances the object of our joy, does everything have to go our way? Or, is Christ the object of our soul? If He is, then His joy will be **obvious** in our life.

To consistently exhibit the joy of Christ, regardless of our circumstances, is to stand out in the world as an **Obvious Christian**. May it be true of both you and me!

Now the last thing in the world I want to happen is to preach a message on joy and to have you leave without joy, or feeling guilty because of it. For that reason I want to give you a checklist that should help you experience the joy we have talked about.

First, to have this joy, we must have Jesus as Savior. As it says in 2 Corinthians 13:5, examine yourself and make sure you are in the faith. If you are not sure, then make sure. Admit, Believe, and Call...

Second, it is possible to be a Christian but to allow any number of sins to interfere with our joy. In 1 John 1, it teaches that sin breaks our fellowship with God making us feel like an unbeliever. But 1 John 1:9 provides the answer, it says...
Doing so restores our fellowship and our joy.

Third, joy is a fruit of the Spirit; it is manifested in our life when we are under the control or influence of the Spirit. It has been my habit to regularly, consciously yield control of my life to Him. If we don't do that we tend to keep control for ourselves. So, as it teaches in Ephesians 5:18 constantly make sure you are under the Spirit's influence.

Fourth, it may be you have check off each of these things and still lack joy. That happens sometimes as we recover from sin, as we go through a time of grief or disappointment, or even when we have allowed ourselves to become physically exhausted as Elijah had done. On such occasions I have found it helpful to regularly pray the prayer of David in Psalm 51:12, "*Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation: and uphold me with thy free Spirit.*"

Let's conclude with prayer...