



THE FPC JOURNEY

**Walking in Freedom,
Wholeness, and
Intimacy**

January 2026

www.ReachingTheValley.org

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH OF SANTA
CLARA

OR



J

JOY

Y

By: Karen Grether

The Savior rules, the Savior reigns.

Blessing in my heart; love.

Blessing in my brain; calm.

Fear is gone.

Hope and Joy remain.

Abiding with Jesus in this Godly domain.

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Joy in Expecting

By: Teresa Wiegman



Joy is experiencing something you have expected.

When a baby takes his first steps, his parents are overjoyed because he has reached a milestone in his development. They expected him to walk someday and now it is happening!

The people in Israel expected a Messiah to come. They waited for generations. Perhaps some got to the point of doubting. God's timing was perfect (it always is). Conditions had to be just right. Rome had to rule over Israel and have corporate punishment (crucifixions). The oppression of Rome kept the people in Israel in place, but it also made them long for the day when God would send a Messiah to rule over their nation with righteousness (and freedom from taxes).

The Pharisees and Sadducees had to be in a place where they guarded their religion (to keep it alive under oppression). They had to be on the defense against anything or anyone who would be a threat. (They were already treading lightly under Roman oppression). For them, a Messiah would conquer Rome and re-establish their power in Israel.

Joy in Expecting (cont)

When the time came, the shepherds were overjoyed when they found the baby Messiah in the manger just as the angel had told them. Chances are, they did not live long enough to witness the Lamb of God thirty-three years later when Jesus revealed himself. However, they were overjoyed at seeing the Messiah, whom they had expected all of their lives. And they believed the angel that this baby was indeed the Messiah. (Of course, witnessing a host of angels singing “Glory to God in the Highest” would have been lifechanging in itself!)

We can expect Jesus’s Holy Spirit to guide us each day and rejoice when we see His hand in our lives and our friend’s and family’s lives. God continues to bring joy to those who expect Him. Look for Jesus in your day and you will find Him.



JOY CAN BE SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS....A PERFECT APPLE STRUDEL....

By: Sui Lim

.... It all started on a busy winter afternoon in the office, where back-to-back meetings left little time to forage for snacks. The cafe kiosk had several cookie types and one last apple strudel. I didn't have high hopes for the strudel, but for variety's sake, I decided to try it. Here's a photo of it - very small, no more than the size of a small fist. A very modest-looking pastry with no aspirations.

But oh, the first bite was simply amazing - light flaky crust with just the right amount of shatter, the oh-so-fresh apple filling that blended the perfect balance of sweet and tart. I marveled at this perfect combination in stunned silence. It called to mind immediately memories of two bakeries from my childhood - where the fragrance of baking apple sweetness filled the air. I never got the chance to try one of those bakeries - only walked longingly past it almost weekly. The other bakery made apple turnovers that were the gold standard in my mind for the longest time. Why did this taste experience and these memories bring such a moment of pure joy?



I think that when we encounter a glimpse or taste of perfection, however momentary or mundane the experience, we are experiencing the divine - what God had meant for us to enjoy in His original plan for us. I think that He built into each of us a flickering memory of Eden and a foretaste of the new heaven and new earth that He will bring. A brush with the divine awakens us, sharpens our awareness, reminds us that perfection does exist and will come in its time. And that reawakened hope gives us great joy as God touches our souls.

JOY: THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF HEAVEN

By: Chrys Sahgal

Joy, in particular for Christians, is often misunderstood. It is not mere cheerfulness, nor is it the denial of sorrow; at least not for us. But rather, joy is a deep, steady confidence rooted in what God has already done, is doing, and will do in Jesus Christ. As C. S. Lewis puts it, "Joy is the serious business of Heaven." That seriousness does not make joy grim; it makes it durable.

Lewis was careful to distinguish joy from pleasure. Pleasure, he noted, is often within our control, while joy is not. Joy comes to us as a gift, sometimes unexpectedly, and points beyond itself to God. In *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis describes joy as a longing that no created thing can finally satisfy. This longing is not a defect but a signpost. If we find that the world cannot fully satisfy us, it may be because we were made for what he called "infinite joy," not smaller substitutes. In short, we have a longing that can't be satisfied by earthly things because it can only be satisfied by what it was created for: heavenly things.



This understanding resonates deeply with the Reformed tradition. John Calvin taught that where the Spirit of God reigns, joy is present. Not as emotional excess, but as the fruit of a life reconciled to God. Joy flows from gratitude, from knowing we are bound to God not by fear, but by grace. It is the response of hearts awakened to God's mercy.

JOY: THE SERIOUS...(CONT)

N. T. Wright brings this theological vision into sharp focus through the lens of resurrection. Christian joy, he reminds us, is not the same as happiness. Happiness depends on circumstances; joy is a “settled habit of heart.” It grows out of the conviction that in the resurrection of Jesus, God has already dealt with the world’s deepest problems. Sin and death have been confronted and defeated, even though their shadows remain. Joy, then, is not naïve optimism but resurrection-shaped realism.

This is why joy can coexist with lament. Augustine famously confessed that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. That rest does not remove struggle, but it anchors us within it. Christian joy does not pretend that suffering is unreal; it insists that suffering is not the final word.

For the church today, joy is both a witness and a discipline. In a weary and anxious world, joy testifies that God’s new creation has begun. It is learned through prayer, nourished by Scripture, sustained in worship, and practiced in hope. Joy then becomes an act of trust. It is a quiet, resilient confidence that the God who has begun a good work and will bring it to completion.



Joy, then, is not an accessory to faith. It is one of its clearest signs.

“The joy of the LORD is your strength.” – Nehemiah 8:10

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

Dear Church,

For many of us, the word joy can feel out of reach. We might think, “Joy is for people whose lives are easier than mine,” or “Joy is for children, not for grown-ups with real problems.” Yet Scripture speaks of joy not as a luxury for a few, but as a hallmark of life with God. Joy is not a thin smile we paste over our pain; it is the deep, steady gladness that flows from belonging to Christ.

In this Advent season, I’d like us to reflect together on what the Bible means by joy, where it comes from, and how we can live more fully into it—right in the middle of ordinary days, difficult relationships, and uncertain futures.

1. What Is Biblical Joy?

Our culture often equates joy with feeling good: pleasant circumstances, comfort, success, or the absence of trouble. The Bible goes much deeper. Biblical joy is:

- **God-centered:** anchored in who God is, not in how life feels today.
- **Grace-based:** rooted in what God has done for us in Christ, not in what we achieve.
- **Spirit-given:** a fruit of the Holy Spirit, not a personality trait or passing mood (Galatians 5:22).

In short, joy is the deep, quiet, resilient gladness of knowing we are loved, forgiven, and held by God.



One of the most striking things about Scripture is that joy is not only something God gives; it is something God has.

- The Father delights in His people: “He will rejoice over you with gladness” (Zephaniah 3:17).
- Jesus speaks of His joy: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).
- The Spirit produces joy within us as we abide in God.

Closing Letter cont...

Biblical joy, then, is sharing in the joy that already lives in the heart of the Trinity. We are invited to rest in a God who is not indifferent or cold, but who rejoices to save, restore, and dwell with His people.

This is why the psalmist can say: “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Psalm 16:11)

Joy is not found by chasing feelings; it is found by seeking God’s presence. When our hearts are turned toward Him in prayer, worship, and obedience, we are drawing near to the fountain of joy itself.

2. Joy in the Midst of Suffering

Biblical joy also has everything to do with how we walk through suffering, not how we avoid it. The New Testament repeatedly calls believers to rejoice not only apart from trials, but in them:

- “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds...” (James 1:2).
- “We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance...” (Romans 5:3).
- Believers are said to rejoice, “though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials” (1 Peter 1:6).

This does not mean we pretend pain is pleasant or deny the reality of grief. Jesus Himself wept at the tomb of Lazarus, and in Gethsemane He was “sorrowful and troubled.” Biblical joy can coexist with tears. Indeed, the Christian life is often described as “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:10).

The radical difference is where our eyes are fixed. Suffering narrows our vision to the immediate wound; joy widens our vision to include God’s presence, God’s promises, and God’s future. We do not rejoice because of evil or loss, but because God is with us in the midst of it and is not finished with our story.

The cross and resurrection of Jesus are our pattern: out of the worst pain, God brings the greatest joy. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus endured the cross “for the joy that was set before Him.” In His love, He walked through agony in order to bring us into His joy.

Closing Letter cont...

3. Joy as the Fruit of Abiding

Joy is not something we can manufacture by willpower. We cannot simply tell ourselves, “Be joyful!” and expect it to appear. Joy is “the fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22–23), which means it grows as we remain connected to Christ.

Jesus uses the image of the vine and branches:

“Abide in me, and I in you. ... Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.” (John 15:4–5)

How do we “abide” so that joy can grow?

- Daily prayer: bringing our real selves—fears, hopes, sins, and sorrows—into God’s presence.
- Meditation on Scripture: letting God’s promises and character reshape our inner world.
- Obedience of faith: discovering joy not only in what we believe, but in how we live it out.
- Confession and forgiveness: joy withers when we hide sin; it blossoms when we walk in the light (Psalm 32:1–5).
- Gratitude: intentionally

These practices do not earn joy; they clear the space in our hearts for the Spirit to work. Over time, the Spirit quietly forms in us a more stable, sturdy joy—one less tied to our circumstances and more firmly anchored in Christ.

Joy does, in a real sense, involve work and discipline: the steady choice to spend time with God, to know who He is, and to align our desires with His for us and for those around us.

So this Advent season, my prayer is that you will begin—or continue—to cultivate the habit of experiencing joy and sharing it. May the Lord teach us, as a church family, to rejoice in Him always, and may His joy truly be our strength.

Blessings in Christ,

Dennis

Call for Submissions: Share Your Stories with Us!

We'd love to hear from you! The FPC Journey is now accepting story submissions from members of our congregation. This is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the lives, actions, and experiences of the people around us. However, please note that submissions should focus on stories about others — not about yourself. Think of it as an opportunity to highlight the good deeds, inspiring moments, and heartfelt connections that make our church community so special.

Please submit your stories to Chrys Sahgal : sahgalchrys@gmail.com . We can't wait to read your contributions and continue celebrating the amazing people in our congregation!

While we truly appreciate every submission, please understand that not all stories may be included in the newsletter due to space limitations. If your story isn't featured, please know it's not a reflection of its value — we simply strive to include a diverse range of voices and experiences in each issue. Thank you for your understanding and continued contributions!

