

# “The Living Fruit Diet”

Philippians 4:1-7 and John 15:1-11

A Sermon by Dr. Jim Davis

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It's good to be back in worship with you. Last week I was in Dallas watching my daughter Joy participate with her team in a national competition for cheerleaders. The competition was disappointing. The team didn't finish on top. But the trip was a terrific time for our family. We got to spend three days together and I got a great chance to be with Joy before I preach this sermon all about her!

Actually, I'm not going to preach about my daughter this morning. But I do want to preach about joy, because joy is something God wants to be part of my life and yours. Paul says it. “Rejoice in the Lord always. I'll say it again, rejoice.” And Jesus says it. “I've told you these things, so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete.”

So joy is something Jesus believes you and I can find in life. Paul does too. But the question is where do you find it? And how can you find it completely? Before I answer those questions though, I want to tell you a story.

The story comes from a man I'm looking forward to hearing this week. He's going to be at a Gathering in Orlando where more than 2000 Presbyterian pastors and elders are going to start a process to bring into being a new Presbyterian denomination. And John Ortberg is going to be preaching to us in worship on Thursday morning. And maybe he'll tell us this story. I've heard him tell it before. Anyway, the story goes like this ...

“Many years ago,” John says, “I was giving a bath to our kids. We have three children and at that time, I had a custom of bathing all of them together as kind of a timesaving device. Anyway, one night, Laura was already out of the bath, getting ready for bed, Johnny was in the rinse cycle, and I was trying to get Mallory dried off. She was out of the water, but in no particular hurry as far as drying off was concerned. In fact, she was doing what had come to be known around our house as the “Dee Da Day Dance.” It consisted of Mallory running around and around in circles chanting: Dee, da, day! Dee, da, day!

It's a relatively simple dance. We think she invented it. It's a Dance of Great Joy

and an amazing sight. But on this particular occasion, I was kind of irritated. So I said to her: Mallory. Hurry! So she started running around faster in little circles, chanting: Dee da day more quickly. And I said: No, Mallory! That's not what I mean. Stop with the "dee da day" stuff and get over here so I can dry you off. Hurry up!

She was four or five years old, and she looked up at me with her big, brown eyes and asked me a very profound question: Why? I had no answer. I had nothing to do. I had nowhere I had to go. I didn't have a sermon I had to write. I didn't have a task that needed to get done. I had just gotten so addicted to hurry and rush, so preoccupied with my own agenda that here was life - here was an invitation to dance right in front of me - and I had a choice to make. After all the "Dee Da Day Era" doesn't last forever. So I just put the towel down, and in that little bathroom, I did the "Dee Da Day Dance" with Mallory.

And I was reflecting on what happened that night a few days later, and I realized that I tend to divide my life up into two categories: Living and Waiting to Live. And the bigger category is my life is the second one: Waiting to Live.

- standing in line
- driving some place in the car,
- waiting for a meeting to end
- trying to get a task completed,
- worrying about something bad that might happen,
- being angry or regretful about something that did happen.

These are all moments in my life in which I am really not living. I'm waiting to live. These moments are just a part of my life I'm trying to get through."

"Just another part of life I'm trying to get through ..." how much of your life is like that? How many days have you had lately where life is something you're just trying to get through at home, at school, or at work?

If you can relate, if you've had a few days like that lately, then maybe you'll relate to this too. It's a new version of the creation story, a new twist on Genesis. And it goes something like this.

"In the beginning, it was 9 o'clock, so God had to go to work. He filled out a requisition to let there be light. He went to work on the project and when he finished, he thought about making stars, but it sounded like too much. So he said "it'll do" and decided to call it a day.

The next day, God separated the waters and made the dry land. And he made it flat and functional. And he thought about making mountains and valleys but decided it wasn't really worth it. So he looked at what he had done that day and said, 'I guess it'll do.'

And the days went on like that until the end of the work week. And God was burned out. So he breathed a sigh and said, 'TMIF. Thank Me, it's Friday and time for a weekend!'" And the real story of creation doesn't read anything like that, does it? Because creation isn't something that God was just getting through. It was something that brought him great joy.

"On the first day, God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light. And God saw that the light was good." It was good. It gave him pleasure to look at it, joy just to watch it. It was good. And it's not just the creation story. It's the same story all the way through the Scriptures.

God rejoices over his people in the Old Testament. Then, at the start of the New Testament, at the birth of Christ, he sends some angels to tell some shepherds, "Behold I bring you news of great joy." Through Christ he tells us there's more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than almost anything else. And in the Book of Revelation the heavenly city is filled with joy. The life of God, at least as far as we know, is full of joy.

And God wanted our lives to be full of joy too. Our lives were meant to be like his life. We were created in his image to reflect his glory and his joy. But we marred the image, and gave away the joy because we turned our back on God and turned our eyes from joy towards something more temporary called pleasure. And we haven't been able to get joy back into our lives ever since, not by ourselves, not completely, not consistently. But there is a way.

And Paul wants to show it to us. The fruit of the Spirit, Paul says in Galatians, is joy. So if we want to experience more joy in our lives we need to learn how to let the Spirit play a larger role in our lives. We need to learn to let the Spirit show us where to find the fruit of joy.

And it may come as a surprise to you but the fruit of joy is always available to us. That's what Paul says in Philippians. You can rejoice always, he says. You can always find joy, but only if you know where to look. Do you know where to look?

I was on a plane a few years ago, and there was a man sitting next to me. He had

his laptop out and he was doing some work. Then I glanced over toward the window. I was sitting in the aisle. He was sitting in the middle seat between me and the window. And I noticed he'd finished his work and the homescreen on his computer was the picture of a little boy.

I asked him, "Is that your son?" And that was all it took. He started talking. Yes it was his son, actually his only child so far. His name was Donny. And the picture on the laptop was taken when he was six months old. Now he was two.

The man kept going. He beamed at me and told me the story of when his son had taken his first steps, when he'd spoken his first words. He said he had a more recent picture on his Palm Pilot. He got it out and showed it to me. Then he showed me a whole string of pictures of Adam doing things any two year old does.

He showed me at least ten pictures, one at a time, with commentary. And when he finished he said, "I can't wait to get home to my son. I could look at these pictures all day. They never get old for me." And he smiled at me again. And he closed his laptop, and he leaned back in his seat and took a nap.

But I sat there thinking "Why is this man so preoccupied with his son? It isn't because of his achievements. He's a pretty normal two year old. And then it hit me. God is preoccupied with me in much the same way. I'm the child on God's screensaver. So are you. And here's the reason I know that. It's because the Bible tells us we are the children of God.

So let this truth sink in deep this morning. God loves to watch you. He watches every step you take carefully. He hears every word you say, every prayer you pray. God loves to watch you.

And he doesn't just watch you. He watches over you. Do you know what the most frequent promise in the Bible is? It's not the promise of forgiveness of sins. It's not the promise of eternal life. No, the most frequent promise in the Bible is God's promise to be with you. "I'm with you," God says. And he says it over and over. "I'm with you. You're never off my mind or out of my sight. And I'll be with you in every day of your life."

That's why Paul can tell to you rejoice always. Not because the circumstances of your life will always be terrific. They won't. But Paul doesn't tell you to rejoice in what's happening to you. He tells you to rejoice in the Lord. "Rejoice in the Lord always," he says. "And I'll say it again, rejoice." Not in what's got going on

in your life, but in who you've got going through it with you.

If today's a good day, remember God's with you. Celebrate with him. If today's a bad day, remember God's with you. Listen to him say, "I'll get you through this. My strength is sufficient for you no matter what. And I'll go through this with you and get past this with you."

So take this lesson and walk through your life with it. What's happening in your life is not nearly as important as who's at the center of your life. Make that lesson a part of your daily diet and the living fruit of joy will show up in your life each day.

Let's pray ...