

## Joy- The Sunshine Fruit

When I think of sunshine I think of the warm days of summer. I think of children laughing and playing, picnics, beach days, barbeques, and warmth. Those thoughts in turn make me happy and I find myself smiling. Why? Because all of those thoughts bring joy and happy memories.

If you know the song sing along...  
I have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.  
Where? Down in my heart. Where? Down in my heart.  
I have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.  
Down in my heart to stay.  
And I'm so happy, so very happy.  
I have the love of Jesus in my heart, down in my heart.  
And I'm so happy, so very happy.  
I have the love of Jesus in my heart.

That song alone puts a smile on my face. Joy is something Jesus wants us to experience. Not only because He loves us but because it makes us feel good. And, having a happy spirit is so great for our health. It's also contagious and we can share it with others, lifting their spirits too!

There are times we can't always be joyful, like Ecclesiastes 3 says, there is a time for everything and Jesus is right there by our side through it all. But if you're just having a down day and feel blue, find one thing to be joyful about, at least every few hours. It could be as simple as the birds outside singing or that you're alive another day. Praise God and be joyful. Bring the sunshine into your heart. And if you get stuck remember, you have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in your heart to stay!

Psalm 33:1, Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him.

Proverbs 15:13, A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.

Proverbs 17:22, A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

## Forest Fires

We've all seen on T.V. when forest fires get out of control and begin spreading quickly and wildly, in all directions, destroying everything in its path, leaving only ashes behind. Sometimes they become so out of control that towns and cities have to be evacuated. If you've never had to be in that situation, count your blessings.

I've never experienced such destruction, but like many I have watched firefighters in parks and along roadsides as they have controlled fires that are set to get rid of the old foliage so the new vegetation has a chance to grow. Those fires are never as big as forest fires but they spread rapidly just the same.

In James 3:5 Jesus talks about the tongue (our words) being just like forest fires. All it takes is one spark to ignite others with destruction or encouragement. Because we are all human and daily come short of God's glory we like to gossip, and one lie told to one person will spread like those fires, reaching anyone who is willing to listen and continue the lie; especially when they're about another person. The Bible says the devil is the father of all lies (John 8:44). Do we really want to be associated with him?

Our words can be destructive when we use them to tear someone down too. It not only hurts the recipient but begins a spreading fire of negativity. Jesus specifically tells us in Ephesians 4:29 that our words should only be used for edifying and building up so those who hear can be given grace. The Bible is full of verses about the words we speak and the effect. Proverbs 16:24 says 'Kind words are like honey, sweet to the soul and health to the body'.

Here are a few more texts about the effect of kind words and hurtful words:

Proverbs 12:18-19 (NCV) Careless words stab like a sword, but wise words brings healing. Truth will continue forever, but lies are only for a moment.

Proverbs 13:3 (NCV) Those who are careful about what they say protect their lives, but whoever speaks without thinking will be ruined.

Proverbs 15:1 (NCV) A gentle answer will calm a person's anger, but an unkind answer will cause more anger.

Proverbs 15:4 (NCV) As a tree gives fruit, healing words give life, but dishonest words crush the spirit.

Proverbs 17:28 (NCV) Even fools seem to be wise if they keep quiet; if they don't speak, they appear to understand.

Proverbs 21:23 (NCV) Those who are careful about what they say keep themselves out of trouble.

Proverbs 25:11 (NCV) The right word spoken at the right time is as beautiful as gold apples in a silver bowl.

Matthew 12:36-37 (NCV) And I tell you that on the Judgment Day people will be responsible for every careless thing they have said. 37 The words you have said will be used to judge you. Some of your words will prove you right, but some of your words will prove you guilty."

Colossians 4:6 (NCV) When you talk, you should always be kind and pleasant so you will be able to answer everyone in the way you should.

So today and every day, let's begin to watch what we are saying so we don't accidentally start a fire and so when we face Jesus we will not be ashamed of what we have said. Forest fires kill and leave ashes behind and we don't want to leave ashes behind in our path or cause anyone to stumble off the path away from God. Be a blessing and you will be blessed.

Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.

Proverbs 11:25

## Hiding Place

Remember as a kid always playing hide and seek with your friends or family? You always tried to find the best hiding place where no one would ever think to look. For most of us it was hard being quiet or patient but in the end it was always fun.

My youngest, was one of the best players I know. When she was two we were all outside playing and she disappeared. I went looking for her everywhere I could think of, even used the words, “Where’s Lily, I’m gonna get her”. Usually too a two year old that starts the giggles, but not with her. Finally after looking and looking, panic, fear, and prayer, she emerged. Where was she hiding, behind the couch. As she got older she continued to find unexpected places to hide and knows how to be silent and patient. For instance, when she was six we moved to a new place and she and her cousin played hide and seek. She won again as she hid under my kitchen sink in an empty unused hole.

Finding the best hiding place is always fun and as we get older we begin to look for different kinds of hiding places. Places where we can feel safe and get away from the noises around us. Places we can hide where no one will find us. For mommies it’s their bedroom or bathroom. For many teenagers it’s their bedrooms or a tree house or fort. We all just want somewhere to feel safe.

But, we all have been offered the best hiding place when we’re afraid, lost, hurt, need protection, or just want restful peace and quiet. Psalm 119:114 and 32:7 both say that the Lord is our hiding place. He is our shield and deliverance and we can trust in Him. The best part is God is never silent and can always be found. Make God your hiding place today.

You hide them in the shelter of your presence, safe from those who conspire against them. You shelter them in your presence, far from accusing tongues.

Psalm 31:20 NLT

## Laundry Baskets

Laundry, laundry, laundry. This at times is such a dreaded word. We all have to do it in order to have clean clothes, right? For some it's a daily chore in their home, others do it once a week or every couple weeks. And it's not only the idea of washing and drying the clothes that we dread it's the sorting, the mounting messes in our children's rooms, and the sock! Oh the socks, I believe there is a black hole just for socks.

Some people have found systems throughout the week to help with their sorting and for others, like myself, every family member has their own baskets and by laundry day we just dump all the clothes into a pile and sort them into the appropriate baskets (whites, darks, lights, etc). Then we wash, dry, fold and start all over again.

A few thoughts have come to mind to me when I think of laundry and all out laundry baskets and sorting. My first thought is a steady one I have had since my kids were babies. If I begin dreading laundry I remind myself of the clothes I'm folding. Each pair of pants or the shirts, each mismatched sock all represent my growing children, my family, and my husband. They are God's gifts to me and even if I have to wash, dry, and fold all the clothes I have been blessed with a family to have that privilege. It's actually been fun to start folding little baby clothes and watch them progress to bigger clothes over the years.

The second thing laundry reminds me of is myself and my sinful nature. We wash clothes when they're dirty and need to be cleaned. We want to wear clothes that make us feel fresh, new, and clean. That is how we as sinners are. In sin we are dirty, filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), but like the laundry we can ask the Lord to wash us and make us clean (Psalm 51:2), and when we follow Jesus He will do just that (1 John 1:7).

The third thing sorting laundry is its baskets (especially dark and whites). This reminds me of a story found in Matthew 25:31-46. We find the Son of Man has come with His angels now sitting on His throne as King. He separates the nations into two groups; one on the right and one on the left just like a shepherd does with his sheep and goats.

The king will praise the group of the right for helping those hungry, lonely, less fortunate saying, "anything you did for even the

least of my people, you also did for me. Come my Father has giving his blessing, receive the kingdom of God prepared for you.”

The king then looks to His left and tells the people, “Go away from me you shall be punished in the fires prepared for the devil and his angels for anything you refused to do for even the least of my people, you refused to do for me.”

So next time your laundry day rolls around and you sigh with a bug “ugh”, remember these lessons you could glean from it. We have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, our sins forgiven, and have a promise that we can live forever in God’s kingdom when we choose to follow Him.

Revelation 1:5-6 (NCV)

5 and from Jesus Christ. Jesus is the faithful witness, the first among those raised from the dead. He is the ruler of the kings of the earth. He is the One who loves us, who made us free from our sins with the blood of his death. 6 He made us to be a kingdom of priests who serve God his Father. To Jesus Christ be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.

Revelation 7:14-17

14 I answered, “You know, sir.” And the elder said to me, “These are the people who have come out of the great distress. They have washed their robes[a] and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Because of this, they are before the throne of God. They worship him day and night in his temple. And the One who sits on the throne will be present with them. 16 Those people will never be hungry again, and they will never be thirsty again. The sun will not hurt them, and no heat will burn them, 17 because the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of water that give life. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”