

Introduction

I'd like to begin today by asking you a question, the very nature of which will prevent you from answering it. What is the least known attribute of God? What is it about Him that most Christians don't know? Let's examine our texts and learn what that is and what it means to us

God Is Utterly Joyful

John 15:11 and 17:13 are part of the "**Last Supper**" discourse of Jesus on the night before He died. In them, He identified the purpose for which He taught His disciples the things He did. As 17:13 says it, it was **"that they may have My joy made full in themselves."**

The words "**My joy**" teach us something about Jesus during His earthly life. He was a person of robust joy. That partially explains why John the Baptist had questions about Him in Matthew 11 and why the stodgy Pharisees accused Him of being a glutton and drunk in Luke 7. People had never seen anyone as joyful as He was.

It's often said that Jesus shows us God and that's right. He does. He's the second person of God, God the Son. The person He was and the life He lived on earth, therefore, reflect the person and life of God the Father and Holy Spirit as well. We rightly conclude as a result that Yahweh (God) is the most joyful being in the universe. He is in fact infinitely and perfectly joyful. I'd quickly note that this joy of His has accompanying tones that include happiness, hilarity, enthusiasm, passion, and delight.

God's Life Is Utterly Joyful

Now, since God Himself is joyful, so is His life. We sometimes tell people to "**get a life.**" But we don't have to tell Him that because He has a life and what a mind-boggling one it is – beyond our imagination.

Our other text, Job 39:13-18, gives us a glimpse into that life of

His. In it God described the ostrich to Job. Verse 13 – It's ugly and eccentric. Verses 14-15 – It's clumsy. And verses 16-18 – It's dumb. Several weeks ago, I preached that God invented the universe before He created it. The ostrich, therefore, began as an idea in His mind. He gave thought to how He'd make it – ugly, eccentric, clumsy, and dumb.

But why did He invent it that way? Our text, with its hilarious description, suggests the answer. It was for His entertainment and ours. The bizarre looks and behaviors of ostriches thoroughly entertain us. But they entertain God even more so. He gets a far bigger kick out of them than we do. That implies that God has a life. It also illustrates what part of that life is. He gets joy from the same kinds of things we do.

Think of it this way. Human beings are constantly **"losing"** themselves, as we say it, in a host of activities, experiences, and events. I've known people who lost themselves in electric train sets, scuba diving, dog shows, antique cars, astronomy, traveling, and much more. They experienced extraordinary joy in those things. But God can **"lose"** Himself in things immeasurably greater and more exciting than those.

Consider the pictures of the Eagle Nebula that the Hubble Space telescope sent back in the 1990's. As you can see from the power point images, they're phenomenal. They show clouds of gas and dust reaching six trillion miles from top to bottom. Hundreds of stars, bigger and hotter than our sun, are emerging here and there in them. We **"lose"** ourselves in planetariums. But imagine being immersed in the Nebula – seeing, hearing, feeling, and smelling everything that's happening there.

Or consider the ocean with all the splendid landscapes and magnificent creatures that inhabit it. We **"lose"** ourselves in aquariums but imagine being submerged in the ocean – seeing, hearing, feeling, and smelling everything that's happening there.

Well, God unceasingly experiences those two things and countless others just like them from every possible angle and point of view. He unceasingly experiences what's going on in every square inch of the Eagle Nebula or the oceans of the earth, for instance. Dallas Willard explains it

with stirring insight this way: **“All the good and beautiful things from which we occasionally drink tiny droplets of soul exhilarating joy; God continuously experiences in all their breadth and depth and richness.”** Tides of joy, in other words, are continually washing through His being. That’s just part of the infinitely rich and deep life He lives.

Our Joy

Now let’s go back to John 15:11 and 17:13 and what Jesus wants and prays for us. It’s that we might have a joy that’s like the joy He has. We can’t have it utterly as He does, but we can have it **“fully”** to quote Him. It can be one of our most defining and observable qualities.

Joy, according to Galatians 5:22, is a **“fruit of the Spirit.”** It’s something that the Holy Spirit creates in us as we carry out our discipleship to Jesus. But as always in our lives with Jesus, we have a part to play in that. That part of ours is to cultivate joy by doing four things. These are actually spiritual practices, if we intend them to be, that cooperate with the Holy Spirit in making our lives and us fully joyful.

Laugh

First, we laugh. We’re able to because we’re in the image of God and He Himself experiences something like laughter. It’s part of His joy.

Not all Christians recognize that. In 1418, for instance, the Second Council of Constance passed this church ordinance, **“If any cleric or monk speaks jocular words, such as provoke laughter, let him be anathema (curse).”** Let’s face it. Some Christians are so stuffy that no non-Christian would ever want to become one.

But they shouldn’t be. In his book *In the Footsteps of Jesus*, Bruce Marchiano claims that Jesus **“smiled wider and laughed heartier than any human being who has ever walked the planet.”** He’s right and if we’re like Jesus, we’ll laugh too. In Psalm 126:2, the psalmist writes about God breaking through to bless Israel, **“Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with joyful shouting.”** When we’re

blessed by Jesus and His kingdom at hand, we can and should laugh.

Examples abound. One was the giant Christian intellect C.S. Lewis. Terry Lindvall writes about him: **“He was a man of laughter and surprises One bright and compelling feature we can see sparkling in his sunlight and dancing in his moonlight, is laughter.”** Another was a man many consider the greatest preacher in American history, Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon said that laughter was his favorite sound and often roared with it from the pulpit.

Some Christians don't laugh because they're too proud to. As G.K. Chesterton astutely observed, laughter has something of humanity and humility in it. That's why the proud don't laugh. Laughter, after all, is far too undignified and they far too self-important for that.

In the end, only the humble are truly at home in the kingdom of divine laughter. So, let's be humble. Let's quit taking ourselves so seriously, lighten up, and laugh. It makes our load lighter and our Christianity brighter when we do.

Play (Have Fun)

We cultivate joy by doing a second thing. Eugene Peterson wrote a book titled *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* and he's right. He does, as do the Father and Holy Spirit. God plays and we should too.

Play is nothing more than having fun and that's what we do, find ways of having fun. I know I do. I have a 12-shot cap gun at home that I shoot off as I did when I was a boy. I play hide and seek with my grandsons and dogs. I bounce a rubber ball off my garage door and pretend I'm the Yankees shortstop fielding ground balls in the world series. I collect creative metaphors. And I shoot spit wads through straws at my grandsons, although I probably shouldn't do that in restaurants. That's what my wife says at least. We can have fun in so many ways like eating, telling stories, playing games, reading, writing, using language, playing with toys, and much more.

John Wesley said that the one who plays when he's a child will play

when he's a man. He grasped the importance of play to adults and we should too. I'm not exaggerating when I say that it's essential to our mental, emotional, and spiritual health. In *The Screwtape Letters* of C.S. Lewis, the leader demon, Screwtape, teaches his underling demon, Wormwood, that humans having fun hinders Satan's cause: "**Fun is closely related to joy – arising from the play instinct In itself is has wholly undesirable tendencies; it promotes charity, courage, contentment, and many other evils.**" It's a simple point. Play assists in our spiritual and moral development and that's right. It does.

Joke Around

There's a third thing we do to cultivate joy. Joke around. Jokes are about the incongruities, oddities, and superficial sufferings of life. To joke around means to recognize, appreciate, and act on those.

People seem to think pastors have a lot of stress. So one of you gave me an "**Anti-stress kit.**" It's a large circle on a sheet of paper with the words "**Bang Head Here**" on the circle. Underneath are three instructions. #1 – Place on firm surface. #2 – Follow directions on circle. And #3 – Repeat until stress is gone or you are unconscious. The person who gave me the kit and I got a good laugh from it.

Joking around is a vital component of koinonia or fellowship. It and the laughter that goes along with it are the first things to go when people are at odds with each other. The genuinely shared laughter of joking around is one of the surest ways of human beings coming together and breaking the stalemates of life. That makes it a critical part of the community that the Holy Spirit Himself wants to create.

Enjoy the Divine Comedy

We cultivate joy by doing a fourth thing. Enjoy the divine comedy. A printer once made the mistake of leaving the "**s**" out of a word. Instead of printing "**cosmic**" as he intended, he printed "**comic**" instead. G.K. Chesterton drew a lesson from that. Whatever is cosmic is comic

and he was right. The universe and life in it reflect all of God's attributes, including His joy.

One of the components of His joy is a sense of humor and He expressed it in what He made like ostriches wildly flapping their wings, people scattering when it rains, roosters crowing, humans being able to be tickled, our sense of smell, people walking on legs, lovers kissing, and wind blowing hats off. Those things and countless more are the comedy of God.

And we need to enjoy it. We enjoy it by doing what Jesus said in Matthew 6. We "**consider**" things. We give them close examination and deep thought. That's how we find the comic in the cosmic.

Take getting rained on for example. Most of us complain about it. But let's consider it instead. People have fun with each other by putting a bucket of water over a door through which someone will walk or putting a rubber band around the nozzle of the kitchen sink hose. The object of both is to get someone wet. Can we not think of rain in that same vein? It's the excitement of God getting us wet.

Or consider walking. Think of it this way. God invented us moving around on two stick like appendages and all the different gates we have. It's a comic way of transporting bodies around. You know how we pretend our two fingers are walking and how funny it looks. Real walking is just as funny looking when we consider it.

Chesterton was right. Whatever is cosmic is comic. So consider what God has made and enjoy the comedy in it.

Conclusion

You now know two things about God that most Christians don't. First, He is utterly joyful. And second, He has a life and it's utterly joyful as well. In light of that, apprentice yourself to Jesus. Become a disciple of His. Then practice the spiritual activities of laughing, playing, joking around, and enjoying the divine comedy. Your life and you will eventually become fully joyful if you do.