TITLE SLIDE

We all love laughing.  We like TV shows and movies that are funny.  I like late night TV show comedy and sketch comedy.  We like watching funny videos on Facebook and YouTube.  My favorite Christian comedian is John Crist.  He makes fun of churches, pastors and church people.  He makes videos and posts them to his Facebook page and YouTube channel.  I have one of his videos to share with you.  It's a funny take on a couple trying to find a church to visit while on vacation.  It's funny because it is quite true of a couple who may just be looking for an excuse to skip church.

JOHN CRIST VIDEO

SLIDE #2

Joy.  The Bible says a lot about joy.  Joy is a fruit of the Spirit according to Galatians 5: 22 - 23, the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Joy is something we have and show if the Spirit is manifest in our lives.  Therefore, joy comes from the Spirit.

Joy is different that happiness.  Happiness is something we find from things outside of ourselves.  A friend or family member may make us happy.  Our job may make us happy.  A beautiful day may make us happy.  Happiness is found in the world.  Joy is found inside ourselves. Joy can remain regardless of whether or not we are happy.

In the Scripture, Paul lists all the things he and his friends are going through.  They are persecuted and suffering.  He says, but, still, we have joy.  He maintains joy because joy is something circumstances cannot steal.  He can be in jail and have joy.  He can be poor and have joy.  He can have nothing that makes him happy but have joy.  Because, joy is in his heart thanks to the Holy Spirit.

There are things we can do to cultivate joy in our lives and ways of life that we can allow to steal our joy.  I rely on an old list from Joyce Meyer of joy keepers and joy stealers.  There are 7.  For every way of living that steals your joy, if you do the opposite, you can keep or find your joy.

SLIDE #3

First, let God give you the gifts He has planned for you.  Quit trying to work it out yourself. Talk to Him about what it is you want and pray about what it is He needs to do in you for you to receive what He wants to give you.  Don't try to work out what you want in your time and in your own way that does not require you to be transformed or grow in the process.  Be led by the guidance of the Spirit to do the work of the Spirit which will lead to your growth and receiving God's blessings in the way He sees best for you.  The work of the Spirit may be difficult, but it will bring joy while works of the flesh will bring exhaustion and frustration.

SLIDE # 4

Second, you will become a curmudgeon if you try to make religion about rules and judgment.  The life lived in the Spirit is about living a life of love.  If you are trying to live by the letter of a law that you think will make you righteous, you will find yourself and others always falling short of that law.  At Bible study on Tuesday, we talked about guilt and judgment.  We acknowledged that sometimes Christianity can be made a religion of judgment, guilt and condemnation, but, in following Christ, we should seek to have empathy and compassion instead.  The Disciples of Christ at its core doesn't subscribe to rules and creeds.  We are a movement of values and freedom.

SLIDE #5

Third, keep it simple.  Don't try to complicate things.  This includes over thinking things, worrying too much about what others think, accumulating too much stuff, trying to do too much and trying to make things perfect.  “Living a complicated life will steal your joy.”  Keeping it simple will give you power and peace. (P. 919). Mixed signals and mixed messages are confusing because you’re trying to make it complicated. I have an old friend who would read a devotion out of 3 or 4 different devotional books every night before bed.  That's too many messages in 20 minutes of reading.  Read one devotion and meditate on it for the remainder of your prayer time or simply open your Bible.

SLIDE #6

Fourth, excessive reasoning and excessive worrying. This is another one we kinda talked about at Bible study on Tuesday evening.  You can reason your way into or out of just about anything.  You can try to figure out any problem you want.  You can look for a sign and search all ends of the earth looking for the sign you want.  The Bible is rife with opportunities for you to prove or disprove, reason or explain anything you want if you're willing to take a verse out of context.  Turning to Philippians 4: 6 - 7 gives us the remedy to this: “**6**Don’t be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. **7**Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.”

SLIDE #7

Fifth is anger. There are 4 major emotions: mad, sad, glad and afraid.  All emotions are given to us for a purpose.  We know we feel these emotions in response to someone doing something.  If someone has mistreated us, we may be mad.  Being mad at an injustice is okay.  Being mad all the time about everything is not okay.  Being mad or angry can fuel us to advocate for ourselves or others.  We have to be careful to act with compassion not vengeance when we're angry.  We do well to remember that sin angers God, but God responded with mercy through Christ.  Following God's example is to forgive, not act out, when we are angry.

SLIDE # 8

Sixth, don't covet.  This is one of the 10 commandments.  Don't covet, don't be jealous, or don't envy.  When we are unhappy with what we have and only want what others have, we'll find that there's always something more that we want or think we need.  A want is something that needs balance like anger and other emotions.  It's okay to want something, if we can still be happy without it. Jealousy is the green eyed monster that will steal our joy and infect our lives with unhappiness and strife.  John 10:10 says Jesus has come that we may have life abundantly.  You have abundant blessings.  We find joy when we count our blessings and enjoy His abundance rather than focusing on what we don’t have.

SLIDE #9

Seventh is general discontent.  We are all sad sometimes.  We all have moments of feeling unsatisfied.  Joyce Meyer says life is a journey of mountaintops and valleys.  We can't live on the mountaintop all the time or we wouldn't feel exhilarated or enthusiastic or excited about a special experience.  We also can't live in the valleys.  There are times to live up top and down below and times for the straight paths on the plains.  There may be an occasional dark night, but a life of discontent can rob you of joy.  If we go back to Philippians 4 chapter, we find Paul's encouragement in verses 11b – 12**: “…**I have learned how to be content in any circumstance. **12**I know the experience of being in need and of having more than enough; I have learned the secret to being content in any and every circumstance, whether full or hungry or whether having plenty or being poor.”

That's a few secrets to cultivating joy in your life and guarding against habits, situations and emotions that can infect your life and steal your joy.  May it be that we find joy in this and everyday.  Let our laughter be our thanksgiving.

**Joy break - Following sermon**

There’s a little old Christian lady who lives next door to an atheist. Every morning the lady comes out onto her front porch and shouts, “Praise the Lord!” The atheist yells back, “There is no God.” She does this every morning with the same result. As time goes on, the lady runs into financial difficulties and has trouble buying groceries. She goes out on the porch and asks God for help with groceries, then yells, “Praise the Lord!”

The next morning, she goes out on the porch and there’s the groceries she’d asked for. Of course, she yells, “Praise the Lord!” The atheist jumps out from behind the bushes and says, “Ha. I bought those groceries. There is no God.” The lady looks at the atheist and smiles. She shouts, “Praise the Lord – not only did you provide for me, Lord, you made him pay for the groceries.”