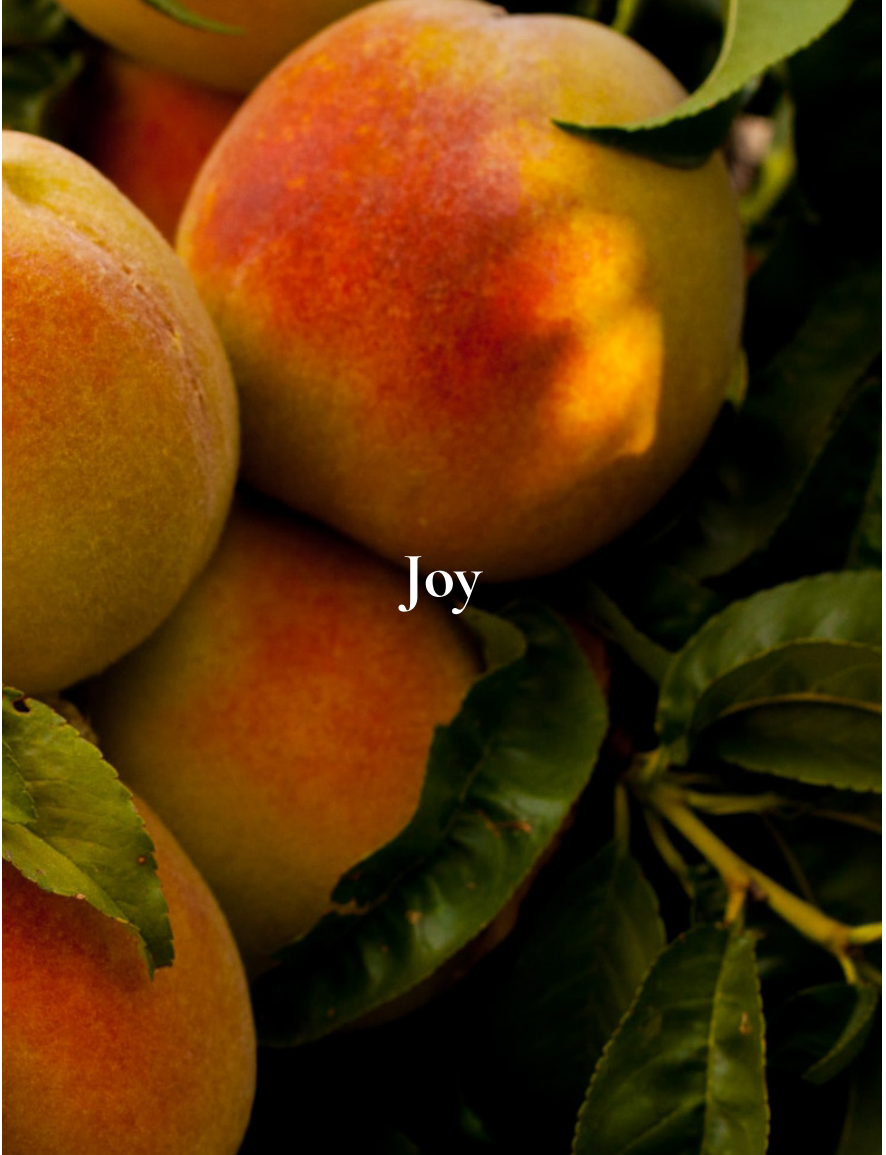




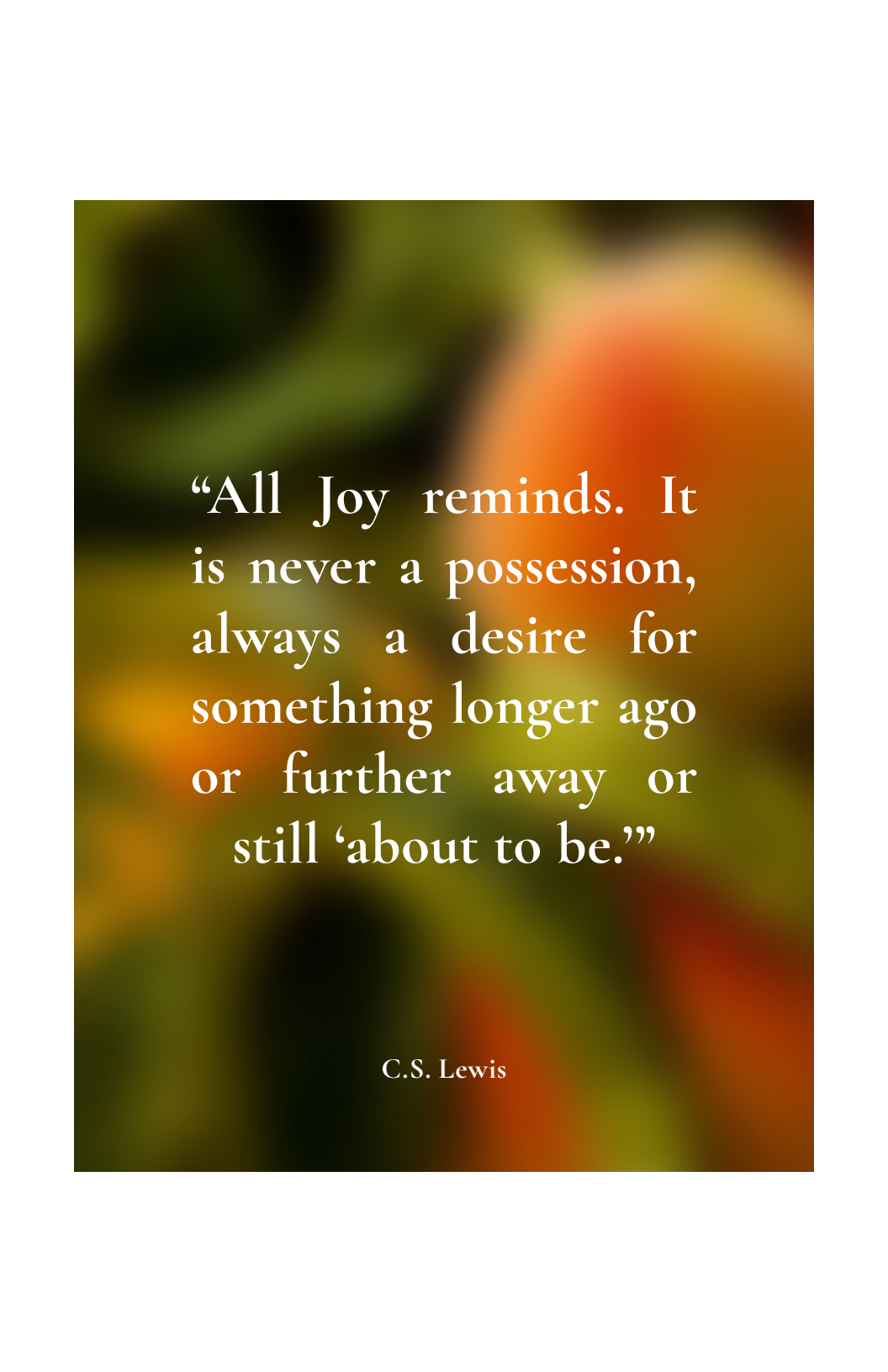
fruit

but the fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy**, peace, patience, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control





Joy



“All Joy reminds. It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still ‘about to be.’”

C.S. Lewis



Circumstantial

Psalm 13 is only six verses long. It starts with desperation, pleading, and sorrow. “God, why won’t you help me? Where have you gone?” It’s a familiar cry and more honest language than we may be used to hearing in a church building. The author is begging, defeated, and sounds almost hopeless. But a few verses later, the laments have turned to praise. “My heart rejoices in you.”

Can someone possibly say such opposite things in such a short span of time and mean them both? How does he move so quickly from fear, abandonment, and sorrow to trust, praise, and joy?

The author of this psalm can’t have found himself suddenly happy or safe mid-composition. Somehow, the author of this song can acknowledge his own pain but end in hope. He can be defeated, destitute, abandoned and still end with praise. His trust in the love of God saves him from despair even if it doesn’t save him from his immediate circumstances.

If this is joy, then it is not the fleeting feeling we've come to describe as 'happiness.' That feeling is mostly contentment with our circumstances, the enjoyment of safety, and the company of people we like. That feeling is as fleeting as the material goods and positive emotions that bring it.

True joy is just as accessible to someone experiencing the lowest of lows as it is to someone experiencing the highest of heights. It is not a feeling that can come and go with circumstances, although it does come with comfort, hope, and even happiness.

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me.

PSALM 13:3-6

- How do you know God loves you? Is it only because of the good things in your life?
- How is joy different than happiness?
- What things save you from despair?
- What brings you hope?
- Is it possible to experience joy and suffering at the same time?

"Joy is not the mere sensation of pleasure — it is a pervasive, constant, and unending sense of well-being that flows from vision, peace, righteousness, and hope."

Dallas Willard



Grief

Feeling sad about sad things doesn't mean you are bereft of joy. Nothing can snatch you out of the love and comfort and safety of Christ, not even the deepest depression. It doesn't mean you're bad at being a Christian. It doesn't mean you've been abandoned or forgotten. Jesus never asked us to be ashamed of our weeping. Shame that comes from feeling like you are the only one who doesn't have it all together, like no matter what you do nothing turns out, like you are responsible for your own suffering, is from the enemy.

Christians in particular have a problem with being up front about the painful parts of life. Everything gets covered up and filtered through rose-colored lenses so it can have a positive spin. Where did this desperation for good experiences come from? Are we afraid of scaring off potential converts by acknowledging that not everything will be perfect once you cross over?

Yes, Jesus came to bring joy and abundant life. But Jesus is also a man acquainted with grief, a man of sorrows. He does not give us happiness at the expense of erasing our pain. Allowing ourselves to grieve our past hurts, fears, or disappointments, sets us free from them and we can move unencumbered to joy.

At times, joy may feel more like grief than happiness.

*He was despised and rejected by
mankind, a man of suffering, and
familiar with pain. Like one from whom
people hide their faces he was despised,
and we held him in low esteem.*

ISAIAH 53:3

- Do Christians have a problem faking happiness?
- Have you felt pressure to move on from pain too quickly?
- When do you suppress negative emotions?
- Who do you confide in?
- What have you not taken time to grieve?
- What is holding you back from the freedom to experience joy?

*“Joy is something we
have to choose and
then work for.”*

Francis Chan



Rescue

Scripture calls us to joy, to sing new songs of praise. And it would be a great disservice to reduce it to the fleeting feeling of enjoyment. It isn't just gladness when things are going right, it is strength and refuge when they aren't.

Joy can be a strong and powerful weapon against despair. While we aren't meant to ignore our pain and we have the freedom to express our sadness and grief, we don't have to succumb to it. We mourn, but we mourn as those who have hope. We weep, but we are comforted. Happiness rooted in God is a bigger, grander, holier thing than mere satisfaction with our circumstances.

Joy is the hand cupping your chin, lifting your head when you are downcast.

Joy is knowing that stars shine brightly even when the clouds hide them from your view.

Joy does not ignore, “In this world you will have trouble,” but it also hears how Jesus finishes that sentence: “take heart; I have overcome the world.”

The psalms sing to a God who has the power to turn mourning into dancing, to turn sorrow into joy. It is not a false cover-up, an erasure of pain. It’s more like rejoicing that healing is possible. Redemption is coming and has come. It is the celebration after the rescue

Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

NEHEMIAH 8:10

- How can joy be strength?
- What aspects of your life seem to diminish your joy?
- What aspects of your life enhance your joy?
- When does 'joy' feel like work?
- When in your life have you had to choose joy? How did God work in your life through that?

“Don't give up now

A break in the clouds

We will be found

Rescue is coming now”

David Crowder



Abundance

So much of our idea of happiness is dependent upon our personal success, immediate surroundings, and comfortable relationships. We are focused on very temporary and changeable things, instead of on what is eternal and cannot be lost.

When life and circumstances feel unfair, it can be tempting to wrap ourselves up in anger, sadness, and self-pity. We limit ourselves on the joy and happiness we're willing to feel when, in the moment, it is more comforting to have something to blame.

But when we refuse to let go of our negative mindset, we miss out on so much that God offers us. Jesus called us to abundant life, but we have to be willing to follow him into it, and let go of what holds us back.

*"The thief comes only to steal
and kill and destroy; I have come
that they may have life, and
have it to the full."*

JOHN 10:10

- Does God want us to be happy?
- What is 'abundant life?'
- What are the joys that God promises to provide?
- What temporary things do you look to for happiness?
- Do you trust that God will provide joy in your life?

*“Whatever it is,
do not be afraid of
plenty. Joy is not
meant to be a crumb.”*

Mary Oliver

Unsettled Collective exists to create bold, and at times subversive, discipleship content that will encourage people in faith while also provoking them into action. We create artistic devotional material for individuals, groups, and teams that spark discussion and challenge our perception of what Christianity is, what a church should look like, and who is welcome at the table.

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