

**Christ Presbyterian Church**  
**Edina, Minnesota**  
**June 9 & 10, 2012**  
**John Crosby**  
**Fruit of the Spirit: Joy**  
**Galatians 5:22-25**

This summer we are going to start studying a way of living. All of us are living our lives in a way that will lead to certain results. Together we want to look at a path for life that will change us so that where we are now is not where we will die. It is called the fruit of the Spirit or the attributes of someone who follows Christ and is found in the Book of Galatians. This first week I would like us to look at the whole passage so would you please take out the Bibles that are in front of you. Everybody grab a Bible in front of you, if you would, please, and grab a pencil also. Galatians 5, page 1,815. I'd like you to underline what is called the fruit of the Spirit so that when somebody comes the next time, they can see that we read this part of God's Word. Beginning with verse 16, the apostle Paul says,

<sup>16</sup> So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

<sup>17</sup> For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other....

There is this internal battle going on inside of us.

...so that you are not to do whatever you want. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

This is the part we should underline.

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,  
<sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

According to the apostle, there are two paths in life, and we wake up every day and decide which path we will follow. Each of them starts to change us. Each of them starts to bear fruit in our lives. We are going to spend the summer talking about what it is like to have the fruit of the Holy Spirit start to emerge inside of you wherever you are in life. Each week I want whoever is preaching to try to give two bullet points at the very front of the sermon about this whole concept of the fruit of the Spirit because it sounds so mystical. The first one today is this:

- You build a bridge, but fruit has to grow.

You build a house and you study for a test, but fruit has to grow on its own. The fruit of the Spirit is God's work, and all we do is prepare for that fruit. The fruit of the Spirit cannot be done by us. It has to be done by God. What we are talking about this summer is like watering the grass or fertilizing the plants or weeding or pruning back. God is the one who grows us, so you don't have to feel like if I just try a little harder, I will get the fruit of the Spirit. God does that. What we do is tend to the garden. The other one is very simple. It is just this:

- There are so many different kinds of you out there, so many different kinds of people. That is how many different kinds of fruit God will produce.

God does not expect you to be like me or me to be like her or her to be like him. Different people; different fruit. If you predicted the kind of fruit God would want most of, love is a no-brainer, right? In Paul's list the first fruit of the Spirit is love. Love is at the heart. Love God. Love people. But what is striking is that joy is number two on the list. Right after it says love, it says joy. Remember we can't make the fruit of the Spirit happen. You cannot make yourself joyful. It is something that grows inside of us as we get closer to God, and the reason that joy grows inside of us is because God grows inside of us because that is who God is. If you don't get anything else out of this sermon today, I hope your picture of God changes. **Joy is at the heart of whom God is**, and we will never understand the significance of joy in our lives until we understand the importance of joy to God.

Dan was trying to explain what joy is like to the kids. It is not easy to explain. Everybody knows it, but you can't explain it, right? Because it causes different feelings. Joy is how you feel when you see a sunset that is perfect. Joy is how you feel on a roller coaster ride. Or maybe just after the roller coaster ride is over, you feel joy. Joy is that first view of the ocean, especially if you are with children and they see it, too. Joy is finishing a workout. Joy is watching a child being born. You think that is the greatest joy in your life until you see that child walk across the stage and get their degree and know that the bank of Crosby is closed. That is joy. It comes in all shapes and sizes. The thing that strikes me about joy is that it is here, and then it is gone.

How are we to be joy filled? My view of joy changed obviously when I had children. My youngest is Maggie. When Maggie was four or five years old, it is hard for us to remember how old she was, but we were in our house in Eden Prairie. One evening she got sick, progressively more and more sick. She went into the bathroom. She was sitting on the toilet, throwing up, sitting on the toilet, throwing up. It was just a terrible evening, and Laura knocks on the door and comes in and says, "Oh, honey, how are you doing?" Maggie looks up at her mom and she goes, "Oh, Mommy. I'm sick as a dog, but I'm happy as a lark." Joy comes in the gift of life in the present moment and having hope for the morning. It says in Psalm 30,

<sup>5</sup> ...weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

How do we get joy? The problem for me is that it is no surprise to see those kids up front filled with joy, right? That is what a kid's life is. They live in joy. But then we grow up. We get busy, and we get worried, and we sin. We get forgiven, and we sin again, and we get cynical. Some of us are good people, and some of us turn into curmudgeons. All of a sudden, we are old on the outside, and the joy is a flicker. John Ortberg says,

I want you to imagine for a few minutes what the world might be like if God were not supremely joyful. What would the beginning of the world sound like if God worked the way that we human beings often approach our work?

Ortberg says it might sound like this.

In the beginning it was nine o'clock so God had to go to work. He filled out a requisition to separate light from darkness. He considered making stars to beautify the night and planets to fill the skies but thought it sounded like too much work, and "Besides," thought God, "That's not my job." So He decided to knock off early and call it a day. And He looked at all He had done and said: "It'll have to do."

On the second day God separated the waters from the dry land, and He made all the dry land flat, plain and functional so that behold, the whole earth looked like Chicago. He thought about making mountains and valleys and glaciers and jungles and forests but decided it wouldn't be worth the effort. And God looked at what He had done that day and God said: "It'll have to do."

And God made a pigeon to fly in the air, and a carp to swim in the waters, and a cat to creep upon the dry ground. And God thought about making millions of other species of all sizes and shapes and colors, but He couldn't drum up enough enthusiasm for any other animals. In fact, He wasn't too crazy about the cat! So God looked at all that He had done, and God said: "It'll have to do."

At the end of the week, God was seriously burnt out, so He breathed a big sigh of relief and said, "Thank Me, it's Friday."

That is what it might sound like if God did not have joy but, of course, Genesis sounds nothing like that. Instead it is a song that throbs with this refrain: God spoke, and it was so, and God saw that it was good. On the first day, on the very first day, God said, "Let there be light," and there was light, and God saw that the light was good. The first day was a joyous day, and God did a little dance and said, "That's good!"

And on the second day, God said to the light, "Hey, Light! Do it again!" and the light did it again. And the second day was a joyous day, and God did a little dance, and it was good. And on the third day, God said to the light, "Hey, Light! Do it again!" and the light did it again and started everything up, and God did a little dance again. And that's the way God has done it every day since the creation of the world.

God spoke, and it was so, and God saw that it was good, and there was joy. What do we sing in the song "Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee"? There is a verse in there that says, "Mortals, join the happy chorus, which the morning stars began..." God spoke, and the stars didn't just give light, they started to sing with joy. Dallas Willard writes this,

You won't understand God until you understand that God is the happiest Being in the universe. God knows sorrow. Jesus was remembered among others things as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." But the sorrow of God, like the anger of God, is His temporary response to a fallen world, and it will be banished forever on that day when the

world will be set right, for joy is God's basic character. Joy is God's eternal destiny. God is the happiest being in the universe.

Here is why that matters, that God is joy-filled. Because God sent His Son, Jesus, and Jesus said,

<sup>11</sup> These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

"I have said all this to you so that My joy, the joy of God, might be in you, and your joy might be filled to the top." Any of you ever read Winnie the Pooh? Who is the one character who did not know about joy? Eeyore! You don't hear Eeyore saying, "I've said these things to you so that my joy might be in you." That was Jesus. Jesus was known as one filled with joy. He was so well known for joy that He was accused of being a party animal, a glutton. That was part of the reason people loved to be around him, and His goal for you is to live with Him and be filled with authentic, God-honoring, truth-embracing, pain-defying joy. To miss out on joy is to miss out on the reason for your existence.

At this point in the sermon, Presbyterians go, "Oh, that's good," and they write notes instead of experiencing joy. C. S. Lewis says, "Joy is the serious business of heaven." Probably the single most famous statement from our heritage as Presbyterians is the Westminster Catechism. It is a series of questions that used to be taught to children. The first question asks, "What is the chief end of man?" and the answer is "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." We forget that. God is the happiest Being in the universe. The apostle Paul put it like this in Philippians 4,

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

The most common holy days in the Old Testament are not times where we are to confess our sins. They are feast days because God loves parties, and He wants to invite you to the party. I want to live like that. I want joy inside me that will not stop. I want that for you. I don't want you to be smart. I don't want you to be holy. I don't want you to know all the rules. I want your life to be filled with joy unquenchable. I want that joy but I cannot make myself joyful. I can have good moments, but part of what I am learning about spiritual life is that it is not until I get closer to the God who is joy itself that I get joy, and when that leaks out, I need to get refilled.

Can you imagine what would happen in the world if the two primary characteristics that people associated with followers of Jesus were love, "Look how they love people," and joy, "They are filled with joy. What's up with these people?" Can you imagine how it would be different? Do you think that is how the world looks at the church of Christ? "Wow! They are party animals! They are filled with joy!" No, we get robbed of joy. All of us, don't we? It starts when we are a little older than the kids in the children's sermon. Those kids are joy-filled, right? Joy is one of the reasons that Jesus says,

<sup>3</sup> ... "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Children are filled with joy, but then these little joy-filled bundles are sent to school, and it robs

them of joy. “How am I doing in school?” “Are my teachers happy with me or are they mad at me?” “What if my parents find out?” It doesn’t really matter at all what you are doing. “What if my parents find out?” “What if I get in trouble?” And, “Do they like me? Do they like me? Do they like me?” The things that cut us off from joy are most often not altruistic concerns about the evil of the world or other people or suffering. It is just stupid stuff about me. I look back at those moments as a child, and I want to say to that kid, “What are you so worried about? It’s third grade! Why would you let any of that stuff rob you of your joy? Why don’t you shake things up a little? Why don’t you get into a little trouble once in a while?” That is the only part of that whole list that I followed.

That was a long time ago. I think about my life now, and I still serve many of the same gods. “What do other people think of me?” “Am I achieving enough?” “Have I done enough?” “Have I climbed high enough?” “Have I got enough?” “Am I secure enough?” “Do they like me, really?” “Am I sick?” “Am I going to live?” “Am I going to die?” Those are cruel gods. They promise you joy, but they don’t give it to you and, without joy, the spiritual life is just religion. It is just drudgery and rules and exhaustion. I want joy.

Now about this time, somebody is going to ask, “Well, how can you embrace joy with all the pain going on around you in the world? Is it even right to talk about joy in a world that is filled with evil and darkness and violence?” Here is an odd truth: It is often the people who are closest to the pain and evil and violence but who are doing something about it who are filled with the most joy. People who lived with Mother Teresa said that in the middle of all that suffering, what was remarkable about her was not the way that she kept serving, it was the extraordinary capacity in which she brought joy.

We are doing this sermon, literally, because of a friend of our church, Gary Haugen. Gary is the president and founder of the International Justice Mission. His mission after going to the massacre in Rwanda was to bring the justice of God to the people who were poorest without it, to children affected by sex-traffic, child slavery. He goes to places that feel like hell on earth. When he preached here, he said, “I could not do this without the joy of the Lord. People don’t just want justice to show up. They want joy.” He said, “The joy of the Lord is our strength. Celebration is the antidote to despair. Sometimes joy just comes with humor.” He said, “The biggest thing about working with the poor is the realization that God uses even *you*. I remember. I went to Rwanda. I said, ‘God, where are you?’ and God said, ‘Gary, where are you? I picked you to be my people there.’ I asked, why doesn’t God do something, and I realized God did do something. He sent me.”

Gary just Tweeted this week. I didn’t get it myself. Somebody who is in the 20<sup>th</sup> century sent it to me. Gary said this, “Joy is the oxygen of sustainable work for justice, so wisdom suggests, ‘Secure your own oxygen mask before assisting others.’” In other words, you cannot bring justice and peace and light to others without joy that comes from inside you. I want to be that person, but as hard as I try to be joyful, I can’t, so how do you cultivate the fruit of joy as the gift of God? Well, again, to say that joy is fruit means that it grows, right? It comes gradually. It starts small. There are droughts and setbacks and weeds but over time, joy can grow.

Let me give you three ways to water the plants, to fertilize the crop, to prune the bush, three ways to cultivate joy. The first, actually, was already done together. I believe that the beginning of joy is confession. We need to stand fresh in forgiveness before God so God can restore the

joy of our salvation. Psalm 51 was written after David's adultery with Bathsheba, after he has been caught. He says,

<sup>8</sup> Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me—now let me rejoice. <sup>9</sup> Don't keep looking at my sins.

<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.

<sup>14</sup> Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves; then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.

Sometimes confession is about something that you have done or not done or said or not said, like King David. Often confession is just the realization that we have left home without God. If I am living my life essentially without God, is it any wonder that I am without joy? We need to confess that we turned our relationship with God from companionship and joy to rules and fear, and we need to turn it around. Only when you are with God, only when God is with you, can you have the joy of the Lord. That is step one. Ask yourself how long it has been since you have confessed to God, "God, come close to me. Fill me with Your joy."

The second step is actually what we call a spiritual discipline, a spiritual practice. I believe that we have more joy in our lives when we practice the spiritual discipline of celebration. Celebration is remembering a time when God gave us joy, when God acted. The most common Old Testament holy day, remember, is the feast day, time to share joy with God. It is looking at my life and finding the time for God to be present and celebrating that.

Now sometimes that is hard. I have a pretty hard life. I was in the line at Starbuck's yesterday, and it was 11 minutes long. How can you be joyous at a time like that? I read a lot, and one of my favorite authors is a Russian, a 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian named Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Many of you know that Solzhenitsyn won the Nobel Prize in Literature. He was nominated for both peace and literature. Solzhenitsyn came out of the gulag, the prison camps of Russia under Stalin amidst the Communists. His most famous book is actually called *The Gulag Archipelago*. When the prisoners in the gulag were released to go out over Russia, they went underground. Solzhenitsyn says, "Those who love God go underground, and they remember the gulag and they live differently."

I read Solzhenitsyn's first book *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* when I was still in college. It is about one day for Ivan Denisovich Shukkov in the gulag, what it is like to spend a day in a prison camp. For 178 pages it talks about deprivation and humiliation and starvation and beatings and fear, and Shukkov looks back. He gets into the bunk. He pulls the blanket over himself. He eats some illegal food.

Now for that slice of sausage. Into the mouth. Getting your teeth into it. Your teeth. The meaty taste. And the meaty juice, the real stuff. Down it goes into your belly.

Gone.

The rest, Shukkov decided, for the morning. Before the roll call.

And he buried his head in the thin, unwashed blanket....

Shukkov went to sleep fully content. He'd had many strokes of luck that day: they hadn't put him in the cells; they hadn't sent his squad to the settlement; he'd swiped a bowl of kasha at dinner; the squad leader had fixed the rates well; he'd built a wall and enjoyed doing it; he'd smuggled that bit of hacksaw blade through; he'd earned a favor from Tsezar that evening; he'd bought that tobacco. And he hadn't fallen ill. He'd got over it.

A day without a dark cloud. Almost a happy day.

There were three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days like that in his stretch....

Almost a happy day. Filled with joy! But I had to wait 11 more minutes at Starbuck's. How about you? Will your circumstances determine your joy or will you look back at those places where God shows up and see the smile of a child, see that time when your friend said, "I decided to go to Alcoholics Anonymous"? Will you remember the joy you experienced when a person said, "I forgive you," or you realized you forgave them? Practice the spiritual discipline of celebration, and joy will come in.

I lead to the last of the practices that I had. I believe that joy grows in us when we share with others the gift of God's presence in today. The psalmist says, "This is the day the Lord has made...." What is the second half of that phrase?

<sup>24</sup> This *is* the day the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

Right! This day, this square right here on the calendar, June 10. This is God's gift to you. This is the day the Lord has made. This is the day that counts because if you are going to meet God at all, it has to be today, whatever else is going on. It doesn't say, yesterday was the day the Lord has made; get over it. It doesn't say, tomorrow is the day the Lord will make; get through it. It says it's *this* day! This day! And we are called to rejoice!

I saw a friend at Starbuck's yesterday after I had gone through the torture of waiting 11 minutes, have I mentioned that before? And as I passed him, I said, "This is the day the Lord has made," and he responded, "Let's rejoice!"

Sometimes joy is defiant, "Nevertheless!" "This is the day where there is pain and suffering, nevertheless I will rejoice!" "This is as good as I can do, nevertheless I will rejoice!" The joy that God gives is not for Pollyannas, who pretend like everything is okay. The joy of the Lord is not a result of getting everything you want or all your toys. The joy of the Lord is having God get closer to you and walking through the day with God so God can show you joy because one day, this man, Jesus, who knew sorrow and joy, the most joyful man the world has ever met, this man, Jesus, He went to the cross, and we are told in the Book of Hebrews,

<sup>2</sup> ...For the joy set before him he endured the cross....

For the joy coming into the world, He endured the cross. He was buried in a tomb, and everybody thought the joy was buried with Jesus, but on the third day after He was buried, God spoke again. God said to the Son, "Do it again!" And the Son did it again. God said to the stone,

“Roll away!” and it rolled away. God said to the Son, “Jesus, get up!” and Jesus got up. He felt surprisingly good. He probably did a little dance, and every day since then has been a gift. Every day since then!

I don't know what is going on in your life today, the hard or the good, but today is a gift from God. And tomorrow will be a gift. And the next day will be a gift if you receive it. Until that day comes and, friends, it will surely come, when in the words of the prophet,

<sup>12</sup> You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

And then in Revelation,

<sup>3</sup> ... God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain....

On that day, you will hear a voice from beyond the grave and it will say to you, “I have come that your joy may be complete.” Let's play! Not, let's pray. Let's play!

Lord Jesus, when that day comes, many of us will be surprised because we think it is really about being good people but for You, it is about being filled with joy, joy that fills our hearts. I pray for my friends today, sitting here hearing this, who are jaded and say, “Yeah, but...” I pray for my friends today, who hear this and are hurting, who say, “Yeah, when...” “Yeah, if only...” I pray for my friends who just come to church that the joy of the Lord would fill them and that the fruit of joy would be in them and flow out of them. In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, we ask. Amen.

More than usual, this sermon reflects the work of others:

- Gary Haugen, talk at the Willow Creek Leadership Summit
- Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*
- Much of the thought from this sermon comes from John Ortberg's wonderful sermon at Menlo Park, CA
- Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, and his other book, *The Gulag Archipelago*.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*