

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
June 16 & 17, 2012
James Madsen
Fruit of the Spirit: Peace
Galatians 5:22-15**

Good morning, everyone. I am James Madsen, and I work in Adult Ministries with the amazing Debbie Ducar. It is really a joy for me to share with you on Fathers Day. It gives me an excuse to brag about my family. (*Slide shown.*) These are the kids in my household. You see my son Connor, who is 11, and Luke, who is 13 months, and then the queen of the household, Ruby, our 3-month old black Lab puppy. My wife Anna and I decided that Ruby and Luke are actually going through similar developmental stages. You laugh, but you don't have to live there. They are both teething. They both have toys that squeak. Neither one of them is housebroken. They both get us up in the middle of the night. They both put everything they find on the ground right into their mouths. Everything! Neither one of them understands the word *no*, and they both have this irresistible urge to do the very thing that is destructive to them. For example, they both are drawn to chewing on power cords. Every day. So like a thousand times a day, we have to pull them away from the power cords.

It reminds me of what John Crosby said last week in the introduction to the fruit of the Spirit, that there are two paths to choose from: the path of the sinful nature which leads to destruction, like chewing up power cords, or the path of the Holy Spirit. Let's look at the passage again that talks about the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5. This is what Paul writes.

¹⁶ So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

I think the word *nature* here suggests that, apart from God, we have these desires that we were born with in our broken, sinful state, and we naturally want to live them out. Paul goes on.

¹⁷ 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, so that you do not do what you want.

We can all relate to that internal conflict, right? We all experience that. Paul says,

¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. ⁹ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious:....

Well, I think they are obvious when the Holy Spirit is in us and we are listening to the Holy Spirit. Paul gives us a partial list of some of these behaviors.

...sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

Paul gets tired of listing them. There are more. He says,

I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

These are all behaviors that are destructive. They are both self-destructive, and they destroy relationships.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
²³ gentleness and self-control.

In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is all characteristics that cause relationships to flourish. John Crosby promised last week that each preacher in this series would bring you two bullet points about the fruit of the Spirit before we dive deeper into one specific aspect of the fruit of the Spirit, so here are my two bullet points for you.

- First of all, the fruit of the Spirit describes the character of Jesus.

I think one thing that could be confusing about the fruit of the Spirit, at least when it comes to grammar for those of you who care about grammar, is that Paul talked about the fruit of the Spirit in the singular even though there are many characteristics that make up the fruit of the Spirit. We naturally revert to calling them the *fruits* of the Spirit, but that is incorrect. The fruit of the Spirit is actually describing the nature of Jesus Himself. That is why it is in the singular. So when we exhibit joy and love and peace and so on in our lives, we are reflecting the nature of whom Jesus is to other people. This leads us to the second bullet point then.

- The key to bearing more fruit lies with Jesus Himself.

I think most of us would like to be more loving and joyful and kind and so on. The common solution we use is to try harder, but I can tell you from my own experience, the try harder method usually leads to failure and frustration. The fruit of the Spirit is really all about relationships, and growing in this area begins with our relationship with Jesus. Jesus Himself said,

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit...."

The word *remain* here in the Greek denotes intrapersonal relationship. Jesus is simply saying that if we are in relationship with Him, we will start to take on His characteristics. The closer we get to Jesus, the more we become like Him. A branch produces fruit because it stays rooted to the vine. It doesn't produce fruit as its goal. The goal of the branch, really, is just to stay connected to the vine because the vine is the source of life. The fruit is just the result of being connected. So our goal isn't to bear fruit, our goal is to be close to Jesus. The fruit of the Spirit then becomes the by-product of that goal, that relationship. Our main job isn't to work harder, our main job is to remain. This is a picture of resting in Jesus, resting in who He is and in what He did for us on the cross. (*Slide shown.*) We are going to talk more about that when we dig into peace.

So we take on the characteristics of Christ as we cling to the vine. If we draw close to Jesus, the

fruit will be evident in all our other relationships. The best example that I have seen of this in my own life is my own father. I have often wondered why Hallmark prints more than one card that says, "Dad, you're the greatest!" You know, there can be only one greatest dad, and I think my dad is the greatest.

What is the secret to my dad's success? It is his relationship with Jesus. Every day as long as I have known him, he has made it a priority to spend time reading the Word of God and talking to Jesus. It is not just a matter of doing spiritual disciplines, but allowing that personal relationship with Jesus to transform his whole life. Because my dad draws close to Jesus, his character reflects Christ by exhibiting love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in all his interactions with others.

All right, those are your two bullet points. Today we want to dig deeper into the biblical idea of peace. I think peace is one of those characteristics we are not so aware of when we have it as much as when we don't have it. What do you think? Yes? Like we know we don't have peace when we are having a misunderstanding with our spouse. We know we don't have peace when we are feeling unloved, unworthy, or insignificant. Or we know we don't have peace when we are up at 3 a.m. worrying about something. We have a tendency then to simplify the meaning of peace to harmony or the absence of conflict, but I think this idea of peace is rather anemic. In the biblical tradition, the concept of peace goes much deeper. The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*. You are probably aware that in Israel, Jewish people greet each other, saying *shalom*, peace, right? Both when they meet someone and when they depart. When they greet each other with peace, I don't think they are really saying to their neighbor, "I hope you don't have conflict today." There is something much deeper there. Tim Keller defines peace this way: "the presence of joy, total flourishing in every dimension of life (relationally, emotionally, spiritually, physically), the way things ought to be."

I wonder how much these greetings of *shalom* not only impart the desire for their friends to experience life the way things ought to be but also the acknowledgment that our life is broken and not what it should be. Can you relate to that idea? That life is broken, that it is not exactly the way it should be? If you are like me, it is not hard to find those broken places. This is the kind of peace that I hunger for, a peace that brings redemption to my brokenness, a peace that fills my empty places, a peace that conquers my insecurities, and a peace that gives me a hope and a future. Isn't this exactly why Jesus came to earth? To provide a means for us to have this kind of peace? This is the message of the Gospel.

My wife once said to me that there are five words that you should hear every Sunday at church, and this thought really stuck with me. Do you want to know what the five words are? Yes, you do, don't you? *Jesus died for your sin*. I know you are all counting them, aren't you? This is, in a nutshell, the Gospel of grace. Because of our sin, we deserve condemnation and eternal separation from God, but by grace through faith in Jesus, we are saved. It is a simple truth but a powerful truth. Another way to remember what the Gospel is, is to remember John 3:16.

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

I think sometimes we can fall into the trap of thinking that this good news of grace only has to do with our ticket into heaven, but in reality, the Gospel changes everything. You see, the work of Christ on the cross is the key to our peace. It is what brings us abundant life, joy, hope, and

salvation. It is Christ's death on the cross that has brought us peace with God the Father. The apostle Paul tell us in Romans 5:1,

5 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....

Colossians 1 when he says this about Jesus.

¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. ²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation....

Our peace with God is achieved through the violent death of Christ on the cross. How easily we can forget that we were once enemies of God, alienated from Him. In Ephesians 2 Paul puts it even more bluntly when he says that because of our sin,

³ ... we were by nature objects of wrath.

How amazing, this gift of grace, that we can go from being objects of God's wrath to being reconciled to God and then presented before God as holy without any blemish and free from accusation. It is remarkable, isn't it? Talk about a sense of peace! Talk about life being restored to the way things ought to be. God sees us as whole and holy, not because of our efforts but solely because of this gift of grace. But the Gospel doesn't end there, it offers us even more. The Gospel of John, John 1, says that everyone who puts their trust in Jesus will become children of God. We will be adopted by our heavenly Father.

¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God....

Because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, we go from being separated from God to being able to experience a personal relationship with our heavenly Father. In a world where our earthly fathers are in varying degrees imperfect, our heavenly Father offers us a flourishing relationship. I came across a list of all the benefits of being in a relationship with our heavenly Father, all the things that our heavenly Father does for us. (*Slide shown.*) Let's look at a few of these.

- My Father loves me.
- He cares for me.
- He forgives me.
- He is compassionate and giving and understanding and accepting of me.
- He satisfies me.
- He persistently pursues me.

And this is just a partial list. Pretty amazing, isn't it? What does it do for your soul when you read this list? We cannot help but be moved by this. This is a picture of peace. This is a picture of

flourishing in your relationship with God, life the way it should be. Your heavenly Father loves you. He cares for you. This isn't conditional on your behavior. You don't have to earn God's acceptance so the pressure to perform is off. This relationship is freely yours to take and receive. This is part of the peace that Jesus offers you, and when we have salvation through Christ and really embrace it, it becomes priceless to us. We no longer have to seek our self-worth through our popularity, our looks, our career, our reputation, whatever our identity is in. This peace releases us from our insecurities and our worries, and it brings peace and contentment to all other aspects of our lives.

My wife once said to me that if we are not experiencing joy in our lives, it is because we are not living in the fullness of the Gospel. I think the same thing is true of peace. The daily benefits of the Gospel are available to all of us who are in Christ, but I think the reality is that we don't always feel them present. Is that right? We don't always feel that they are there. That is why Paul commands us in Colossians 3:15,

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

This is a command. The benefits of the Gospel are there for all of us, but we have to make the decision to believe that the Gospel is true no matter what the circumstances. My friend, Kim Greene, who works at a church in Richmond, Virginia, says that this verse is like an umpire who has made the call that this is true. She says that peace is not meant here as a subjective feeling but rather as an authoritative rule. It has the power to dictate our actions and shepherd our hearts.

I know that sometimes our feelings can lead us astray. Just because we feel unworthy though, it doesn't mean that it is true. Or we can feel that God doesn't love us, but that doesn't make it so. These feelings work to undo the peace that Christ has bought us on the cross. *(Slide shown.)* I think it is naturally challenging for our broken hearts to look at this list and believe this is true for us. How can God love me if such and such is happening in my life? Or I am such a sinner, how could God love me? But Paul commands us to believe. Paul commands us to believe that this is what your heavenly Father thinks about you regardless of what is happening in your life, regardless of what that voice of discouragement is saying about you. **My challenge for you is to embrace the good news of the Gospel and let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. Believe it is true. Believe because it is true! Live in that truth.** Remain in Jesus. Rest in Jesus. Just embrace the love that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have for you.

(Slide shown.) This is a great picture of my son, Luke, isn't it? Don't you think Luke is one of the cutest babies you've ever seen? How come I'm the only one raising my hand? We are not leaving until everyone raises their hand. I've learned a lot this year from watching Luke. One of the things I've observed is that babies don't worry about whether or not their moms love them. They don't worry about whether or not they are worthy of such a big love. Luke just rests in his mom's love. It is the source of his comfort and identity, and I just learned a lot about how to rest in God's love from watching Luke.

Let me just wrap up today by giving you some tips on how you can let the peace of Christ rule in

your heart. First of all, I encourage you to meditate on this list describing your relationship with our heavenly Father. Maybe you want to write down the things that are most significant to you, or if you would like this list, I would love to email it to you, jamesm@cpconline.org. Do you know what would make my day? If I got 700 emails today, and I could send this to you. That would make me happy. Take this list. Put it on your bathroom mirror, and every morning when you wake up, read through the list. Read it until you believe it and feel God's immense love for you.
[list included below]

If you ever go to one of my classes, you will hear me say that I preach the Gospel to myself every day which is true. I do it because I need to be reminded of the reality and the goodness and the necessity of what Jesus has done for me. It is the hope that gives me peace amidst the internal and external storms of life, so today I'm doing what I do every day. I'm preaching the Gospel to myself. You just happened to show up to hear it. Tomorrow I'm going to do it again, but it will just be me and the dog. But we need to hear it, so I just encourage you to continue to meditate on the truth of what the Gospel has brought you.

The second thing is to learn more about the blessings that come with being a child of God. Here is an exercise you can do at home. Open your Bible. Read Ephesians 1 and 2 and make a list of every spiritual blessing and benefit you see there because you put your trust in the work of Jesus on the cross. My guess is that you could find about 20 of them. Meditate on that list. It's a little homework for you.

The third thing is to spend time alone with Jesus. We talked about this at the beginning. Talk to Him. Listen to Him. Learn more about Him. Make room for Jesus in your life. If this is a new idea for you, then I say, start simple, ten minutes a day. Maybe you can start by reading one chapter of the Gospel of John a day, and then just spend some time talking to Jesus about your life. Listen to Him say, "I love you." Jesus is present in you through the Holy Spirit. He is your peace.

Finally, then, choose to believe this peace is yours. Daily make that choice to let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.

Two weeks ago I heard John Crosby say that the grace of Jesus reminds us that we are beloved and broken at the same time. The peace that Jesus brings doesn't totally remove all the broken things in our lives in this present age, but it brings redemption. It brings hope. It shines a light in dark places. It can bring perspective to difficult situations, and it reminds us that we are loved in a big way.

My son, Connor, who is 11 now, is my pride and joy. He is my son from my first marriage, so I only have him from Thursday afternoon until Saturday morning. I was thinking back to the days when he was at daycare, like maybe eight years ago. I was really struggling with the brokenness of my life. The highlight of my week was picking up Connor at daycare on Thursdays, that moment when I would walk into his room and see his face light up. He would run to me and give me the biggest hug. Every week the teacher would come up and say to me, "All day long Connor has been saying, 'Today my father comes.'" That was always a picture of *shalom* to me, that moment in the midst of my brokenness, when life was the way that it should be. It gave me hope that God was at work in the midst of my broken life.

It reminds me of my favorite parable, *The Prodigal Son*. You know the one where the son wanders off from his father, squanders his inheritance on a life of sin, ends up in a pig sty, and

then decides to come back to the father, repentant. My favorite part is that the father is waiting in expectation for the return of his son, and when he sees him afar, he runs out to meet him and gives his son the biggest hug. He wants to show him how big his love is. I love that parable because in some way every day, I am the prodigal son in desperate need of God's grace, and every day my heavenly Father runs to me. Like Connor, today we can say, "Today my Father comes, offering peace, love, and grace to any of us who wish to receive this gift through Jesus Christ." Amen. Let's pray together.

Father, we are so thankful for this love You have given to us. Father, I confess that we don't always feel Your love, that we have wandered off whether in our sinfulness or in our busyness because we think we have a better plan than Yours, but we come before You now and know that You are here now. I just pray that You would impress upon us how much You love us. We thank You that You sent Your Son to die for our sin so that we can have this relationship with You. It is our hope and our future. In Thy Name, we pray. Amen.



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.