

Grow Upward Bearing the Fruit of the Spirit (II)

Աճել՝ Հոգիից Պտուղներով

Galatians 5:22-26

Illustration: I recently read about a simple village called **Roseto in Pennsylvania**. There was a study done on this small community where people lived long lives (90s and 100s), yet their eating habits were very bad. They smoked, drank alcohol, did not exercise, did not eat healthy, yet they lived longer life. Now after many generations, when things changed and people moved out of the village, people started saying they needed their space, their freedom. They started to die early. They started to have heart attacks like all of us. They discovered that being connected, having healthy relationships helped the family live longer.¹

I am not suggesting we should live unhealthy life; but the point of the story is obvious. Humans need relationship. Humans are created to be connected. Thus, how important is it to be connected with God? And because of our connection with God we can be connected with each other not in an artificial way, but a genuine way. Last week we studied the Fruit of the Spirit. We covered the first one: Love.

The next flavor of the Fruit of the Spirit is *Joy*, which directly comes out of the Love of God.

Joy has a special **aroma** that gives flavor to life.

Please let us not confuse Joy with Happiness. In the Bible, we read **330 times about Joy, and only 26 times about Happiness**. Happiness depends on what happens to you; circumstances are extremely important to bring happiness. Yet, **joy is internal. Only God can give us Joy**.

-In the story of the prodigal son, when the younger son returned and repented, **father took him back with great joy. The father rejoiced when the 'lost' was found**. And the prodigal **son rejoiced by being found**. Yet, the older son did not

accept this return. **He lost his joy**, and he excluded himself from the **“banquet of joy.”**

One cannot have God’s joy with resentment in his heart. Resentment and joy cannot exist together.

-There is also the fact that we relate real joy with the absence of suffering and sorrow. In Jesus, suffering and complete joy meet.

He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; (Isaiah 53:3a)

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown? (Isaac Watts)

Love (joy, peace...) and suffering met in Jesus. Jesus was full of love and joy in his sufferings. That is extremely important for all of us to experience this kind of JOY.

So what is Joy according to Jesus?

“This is to my Father's glory, that **you bear much fruit**, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain (abide) in my love. If you **obey (keep) my commands**, you will **remain (abide) in my love**, just as I have obeyed (kept) my Father's commands and remain (abide) in his love. I have told you this so **that my joy** may be in you and that **your joy may be complete (full)**. (John 15:8-11 NIV)

Jesus said these words, and soon after he went to the cross. He could experience divine joy even while he was in pain.

The third flavor is ***Peace with God***

Peace has two meanings:

-Serenity and order in a city, country, family, relationships.

-Second, the Biblical understanding of peace comes from the Hebrew *Shalom*, which is not just freedom from trouble, but **peace in totality**. This kind of peace can only come as the **Fruit of the Spirit**. It is an inner peace, a **sense of wholeness and well-being**.

Illustration: There was a painting contest with the theme of “**Peace**”. Many artists painted great pictures. Sunsets, the calm landscapes of the Pacific Ocean, Hawaiian beaches with still waters. Yet, one person drew a completely different view. The weather was stormy, the colors were gray, black and white, the sea was rough, and the wind was blowing everything away. And in the corner of the painting there was a bird that was sitting in her little nest peacefully protecting her chicks in the midst of the storm.

To stand still in the midst of the storm needs an inner peace that only God can give.

Let me go back to the beginning of the chapter 5. Before mentioning the works of flesh and fruit of Spirit, Paul’s starting point was **freedom from sin**, the “old life”, the flesh.

**“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”
(5:14)**

No one can have inner peace when they **are not freed from the “old life.”** Inner peace is the fruit, and it is result of being freed from sin to a new life through Christ. I think it is worth examining what is bothering you this morning. Do you have inner peace, joy and love?

Eugene Peterson describes peace as “the realization that God works through the disparities and contradictions of my experience and brings them into harmony.”²

Therefore, **Love, Joy, and Peace, we receive from God and they transform our inner life**. Those internal characteristics will be manifested outward in our behavior. We GROW upward.

Let me finish with a word that we all face which interrupts our lives:

Stress is a huge problem in the life of most people. Some of the things cause stress are:

1. Life Circumstances or Changes: They could be simple things like these. You are trying to arrive to an appointment but get stuck in traffic. You had a flight to catch, something happened and you missed your flight. The economy hit hard, and it affected your life. Let me give you more serious stuff. You wake up to find out that you have a terminal disease. You lose your spouse. You have a child with special needs. These are circumstances beyond your control.

2. Difficult Relationships: These are people who make your life miserable. They do not cooperate with you. They always find something wrong in your life. Whatever you do, it is not good enough for them.

3. Physical and Emotional Pain: Some pain that you cannot understand why you need to have. “Why me, O Lord? Why is this happening to me right now?”

All these stresses make your life miserable. You can lose your love, joy, and peace.

The answer to this stress is surrendering to God. What does it mean to surrender? Letting the control be in the hand of God. You see that is the only way the Spirit of God will work in you. That is the only way the Spirit will produce the fruit in you. We need to trust God.

Let me share with you the famous prayer called Serenity Prayer. Most of you have seen only the first part of the prayer.

Here is what you know:

“God, grant me the **serenity to accept** the things I cannot change, **the courage** to change the things I can, **and the wisdom** to know the difference.”

But the actual prayer goes as follows:

*“Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world*

*As it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
If I surrender to His Will;
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life
And supremely happy with Him
Forever and ever in the next.” (Reinhold Niebuhr)*

“Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace.... Trusting that you will make all things right...” (You are giving the control to God. Romans 8:28) The Spirit can produce fruit when you surrender to God. Let go, allow God to be in control. Stop being a control freak. The most insecure people are control freaks. They become angry, bitter, self-centered.

We will face stresses that are beyond our control. Surrender, give the leadership to the Chief Commander. Paul says it the best:

I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11-13, ESV)

Also Isaiah has this about peace:

**You will keep in perfect peace
those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you.
⁴ Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal. (Isaiah 26:3,4 NIV)**

There’s an old gospel song that says, “One day at a time, sweet Jesus, that’s all I’m asking from you. Just give me the strength to do every day what I have to do.”

Another hymn that I grew up with:

Day by day, day by day,
O, dear Lord, three things I pray:

to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly,
follow thee more nearly, day by day.

Day by day, day by day,

O, dear Lord, three things I pray:

To see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly,
follow thee more nearly, day by day,
by day, by day, by day.

1. The Roseto Effect; http://www.uic.edu/classes/osci/osci590/14_2%20The%20Roseto%20Effect.htm
2. Eugene Peterson, *Traveling Light* P 165