



Theme: Freedom to Flourish – Discovering Who You Were Meant to Be

“Finding Love, Joy, and Peace”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber, April 30-May 1, 2022, at Summit Church, Durango

Weekly Memory Verse:

²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace... – Galatians 5:22a

VIDEO Sermon Starter

I was at our college and young adult ministry, Rooted, on Maundy Thursday two weeks ago to talk about the Last Supper and Communion. As we gathered, they asked each of us to introduce ourselves and share the strangest or most interesting job we have had. I was a bit embarrassed to share that one of my strangest jobs was selling cherries out of the back of a truck on the side of the road when I was in high school. I answered an ad in the paper, and I would meet this gentleman in a vacant lot near my house and he would have a truck filled with cherries and sometimes other fruit. I had paper bags and a scale and would weigh the fruit by the pound, and we only took cash. I worked at the back of the truck and the owner worked at the front and paid me really well.

One day he left me in charge, and I ran out of paper bags, so I

went to the front of the truck and found paper bags with strange green vegetables and them. I didn't think much of it because I found some empty paper bags as well. It wasn't till a few days later that I realized what was being sold out of the front of the truck. Let's just say it took me a while to catch on to things back in those days and I was pretty naïve. So, I reluctantly tell you that your pastor was a part of one of the first marijuana dispensaries in my little sleepy town in California back in the 1980s!

I thought I was doing one thing, but I was really doing something else, and that can happen to each of us if we are honest. We THINK we are going the right direction, doing what brings us joy, and then we realize we are not. Many had that experience during the pandemic, evidenced by so many people changing jobs. Today we continue in a new series of sermons asking a profound question about ourselves. We have had Easter weekend two weeks ago and then last week Wade talked about the difference Easter is meant to make in our lives because it changes everything. Now we have an opportunity to be made new. It's an appropriate question as we celebrate today with our eighth-grade students who are deciding to confirm their faith and claim it for their own.

SLIDE Do you know who you are meant to be?

I'm not talking about your ideal weight. I'm not talking about your ideal house or job or retirement. I'm not talking about how you look on the outside, but you are on the inside. Do you know the person you were meant to be? Do you know the person you were created to be in the values you were created to embody? Do you have a picture in your mind of what that would look like? What I know is that if we don't have a goal or a picture of what it is supposed to look like, we can end up in many different places.

Today, we are going to look at a scripture passage which gives us a clear picture of who God created us to be. We are going to wrestle

with the kind of human being God longs for all of us to be. Galatians 5:22-23 is what we call the “fruits of the Spirit.” It’s a list we memorized in our Vacation Bible School one of the first years I was here is your pastor 20 years ago. We actually sang a song which helped us, and the kids memorize these attributes. Over the next few weeks, we are going to encourage you to memorize them and internalize them, even pray over them daily. Our aim should be to live into these and so let’s say them together out loud.

BIBLE

²² **But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**
²³ **gentleness, and self-control.**

My hope is that you might memorize these over the next few weeks. Today were going to focus on the first three, and in order to understand these fully we must know where this letter is written and who was the audience. Galatia was not a city but a region of the Roman world in the first century that we now know as modern-day Turkey.

GRAPHIC Galatia Map

The Mediterranean Sea is on the left and we know of four churches in this region where Paul stopped on his first missionary journey. We find those in Derby, Iconium, Lystra, and Pisidian-Antioch. You can read about this missionary journey in the book of Acts, chapters 13 and 14. The entire letter of Galatians is only 6 chapters and will take you about 15 minutes. What’s interesting about this letter is that it is one of the first documents we have from our New Testament, written about 20 years after the death and resurrection of Christ. It also is fascinating because Paul is steaming mad when he writes this letter. You can feel it as you read the letter in certain spots.

When Paul traveled through this region of Galatia, he preached in the synagogues in these cities, but was forced out by the Jewish leaders who didn’t like his preaching. He was a Jewish rabbi, but the leaders

didn't agree with what he was teaching and so they forbid him to meet in their places of worship. They were threatened also because of large crowds gathering to hear what Paul had to say about the Messiah in Jesus Christ. Some of the Jews do believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior, along with a large number of Gentiles, non-Jews who were mostly Roman and had interest in the God of the Jewish people. Paul preaches, **"salvation through the cross of Christ."**

He goes on to show how Jesus fulfills God's promises and that his sacrifice reconnects us to God and to each other. Paul says we no longer have to use the Hebrew law and strive to be good enough to receive God's grace and mercy, because Jesus has done this work for us on the cross. Instead, we are meant to be free to simply receive forgiveness and then respond by living into God's love for us by loving God, loving others, and sharing that good news. Not just the Jewish people, but everyone can receive this gift of grace and be connected to God, not just now, but forever.

One of the main issues which came up for the Jewish leaders is that **Paul insisted men did not need to be circumcised to follow Jesus**, and older women marry a circumcised male, to be part of God's covenant people. You can imagine how it would go over if I told you that in order to join Summit Church men needed to do a little surgical procedure that would make you wince in pain and hurt for a while or marry someone who is already circumcised. Just to relieve any fears, I'm not going to show you any images or video footage of circumcision to make the point...pun intended. We try to keep the sermons G rated!

My guess is that not many people would join if that were one of the requirements to being a part of the church. That's not even counting the 613 laws you would need to follow which includes changing your diet, the way you wear your hair, how you dress, and a multitude of other rules. These issues were non-starters for many of the Gentiles and kept them from receiving the grace of God in any form. Paul maintains that God is not looking for people to simply follow

these rules and have a surgical procedure done.

Instead, Paul says people do not need to be circumcised, but baptized. When we go in the water and come out with a sense of being refreshed and made new, that is now the sign of the new covenant and becoming a part of God's family in Jesus Christ. When he is writing to the people of Colossae in his letter to the Colossians, he says this in chapter 2.

BIBLE

¹¹ When you came to Christ, you were “circumcised,” but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature. ¹² For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

That is why baptism is so important in the Christian faith, because it is a sign of a new covenant with God, and of us claiming our true identity as we go into the waters and come out as something new. We celebrate that this weekend, and we did that with some of our college students and confirmation students on Thursday night.

GRAPHIC Baptism 1

GRAPHIC Baptism 2

GRAPHIC Baptism 3

Earlier in his letter to the Galatians, Paul puts those 613 laws in perspective when he writes these words in chapter 5.

BIBLE

⁶ For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, there is no benefit in being circumcised or being uncircumcised. What is important is faith expressing itself in love.

BIBLE

¹⁴ **For the whole law can be summed up in this one command:
“Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

Paul is echoing what Jesus says when he says the greatest commandments are loving God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. Jesus tells us that all the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments, which is what we find Paul focusing on in his letters to those early churches because they were struggling to remember these simple commandments. It's why we have them as our simple mission statement.

SLIDE Love God. Love others. Share the good news.

Paul wants us to get these big ideas because if we do then everything else falls into place. The conflict was with Jewish religious leadership that were worried if the rules were thrown out then chaos would reign. In some ways, they saw Paul as being too liberal in how he applied his theology. There were some followers of Jesus who believed you must follow the 613 laws and be circumcised and if you didn't then you couldn't receive grace and salvation. We might call these the legalist or the “circumcision party.” They were concerned that Paul was being to open. They were worried people would live godless lives if they didn't follow the rules.

This group would follow Paul and go into every town after he left to contradict his teaching about the gospel. They would tell people that there were some things Paul got right, but they still needed to follow the 613 laws and have this surgical procedure. They offered to do circumcision and give people the rulebook. Some people became confused. Some people got circumcised. Some just laughed and said it all sounded stupid. Paul gets word of this, and he is angry. We pick up on that in this letter to the Galatians. At one point he even says that if they like circumcision so much, why don't they just cut the whole thing off! Some of you can't believe I just said that in church, but it is in the

Bible so go ahead and read this letter when you get home today.

What we learn in this letter is what happens to all of us as humans. Whether it's in a religious group or some other collection of people, there always will be those who are hyper focused on the rules and getting everything just right. I want to be clear that it is important to have boundaries and guardrails, but when we are overly focused on the rules and getting everything just right, we sometimes miss the bigger point. If we have grown up in a religious institution where there was a huge focus on the rules, we can often find much guilt and shame, which is what Paul encountered as he came in the conflict with some of the other religious leaders of his day.

GRAPHIC Beatles Albums

Maybe you grew up and heard the phrase, **“Don’t drink. Don’t smoke. Don’t chew. And don’t hang around with those who do.”** I remember being told not to listen to certain kinds of music when I was a kid, especially playing records backwards where we could hear the devil giving us instructions instead of the Beatles singing, **“Love Me Do.”** I remember students in one of the youth groups in another church near mine who were asked to bring in their records and break them as a sign of loyalty to Jesus. One of my friends told me I needed to bring my Beatles blue album and red album and white album and break them over the trashcan, or I was going to hell. I couldn’t even sell them because that would lead someone else astray. I must admit that I couldn’t bring myself to do it. I don’t know what we do today with everything being digital and streaming! I look back on some of those moments and some of the things I hear today and I’m not sure Jesus would be too worked up about it.

On the other extreme, we can think that because we have received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we can live our lives however we want because we are saved! Jesus just wants me to be happy, right?! It’s easy to fall into this trap of thinking that we can

simply come to church and sing some nice songs and hear a nice sermon and then go gossip and backbite and devour others by treating people however we want. We don't worry about our addictions, and we have no problem becoming focused on our material possessions because we have said yes to Jesus. We even convince ourselves that Jesus wants us to be rich and happy and self-indulgent. I got dunked in the tub and I'm saved and so now anything goes because I got heaven locked up!

Both these paths lead us away from God. In Galatians, Paul is trying to thread the needle and find the middle road between rules and anarchy. It's not about following the rules to the extent of feeling guilty and oppressed, and it's not about doing whatever we want because we have Jesus on our side. We can be enslaved to the rules, and we can be enslaved to our brokenness, our sinful nature. Paul describes this in verse 16 of Galatians 5.

BIBLE

¹⁶ So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.

We all wrestle with this "sinful" nature, those things which separate us from God and from others and from ourselves and who we were meant to be. We all say things we wish we hadn't said, and we do things we wish we hadn't done. It's part of what it means to be human. We all wrestle with a self-absorbed way of living that is focused on what we want. Every moment of every day on our phones, in advertising that bombards us and tells us what we need because we don't have it. When we live this way, we find ourselves in the end not very happy or fulfilled. We feel lost and adrift.

Paul encourages us to be guided by the Holy Spirit instead. He lists all the things that are sinful nature craves and then he tells us what it looks like to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

BIBLE

²² **But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!**

SLIDE Attributes of God

Something important to note about these fruits of the Holy Spirit is that they are attributes of God, describing what God is like. The Scriptures also teaches that we are made in the image of God, and so these are meant to describe us, and not just the way we act because we follow the rules, but because they grow out of us. It is not about working harder at these things, but about allowing God to grow them in us.

SLIDE Attributes of us

Not only are the attributes of God, but they are meant to be gifts that God gives to us because we are God's family, God's offspring. They are meant to be in our DNA if we will allow them to grow. They reflect for us the highest ideal of what we are meant to be as human beings. They are formed in us by the Holy Spirit when we allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through us.

SLIDE They are given freely

We experience them in our hearts so that we can then share them with the world. Just like God gives these things to us, we are invited to give them to others as we live our lives in this way. Do we always get it right? No, of course we don't. We are human and imperfect, but we are invited to allow God to work within us in these ways, to change us and shape us into the image of Jesus Christ.

SLIDE They are gifts

We can't make them ourselves. They are gifted to us as we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. How many of you have fruit trees on your property? How many of you have seen a fruit tree? You can plant

the tree or a seed. You can water it. You can care for it. You can trim it up. But can you make one on your own? Can you make the fruit on your own? All we can do is create the environment in which the tree is free to make its fruit. Paul uses this metaphor of the “fruit of the Spirit” because the same reality applies when it comes to these things growing in our lives. All we can do is create the environment and the space and then allow God to work. It’s both our work and it’s the work of the Holy Spirit which come together to create the Fruits of the Spirit.

SLIDE Agape = “selfless care for another”

It’s important to note that Paul begins this list of the fruits of the spirit with the most important one that really leads to all the rest. It is a foundational fruit which sets the stage for all the others which follow. Agape, the kind of love Paul talks about in this list of the fruit of the spirit, is a dogged determination to do the loving thing and bless others. It is about choosing to do the loving thing when it’s hard. While erotic love might be important at the beginning of a romantic relationship that leads to marriage, without agape, no marriage will survive. This kind of love is not a feeling, although it can lead to feelings, but it is a choice, an act of the will. There are 260 verses in the New Testament which mention and use this word for love in some way. The night before Jesus is crucified, Jesus tells this to his disciples, those first followers who would carry out his mission, in John 13.

BIBLE

³⁴ So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. ³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

The Greek word used in the first manuscripts of John’s Gospel use this word for love, agape. When the apostle Paul gives us the great chapter on love in 1 Corinthians 13, one that we often read in weddings, and that people who are not even Christian have heard

before, he uses this same word, agape.

BIBLE

⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

Notice that none of these are feelings or emotions, but choices that we make about how we treat another person. We were made for this kind of love, made in the image of God. When Jesus gives us the two great commandments to love God and love others as we love ourselves, it is this same kind of love which is used. Paul tells us that if we don't have love, we have gained nothing, because it is the central, defining characteristic of God, and of us as humanity who are made in God's image.

Paul argues in his letter that love is the opposite of selfishness and our sinful nature and desires. When we put others first, we push aside that selfish nature which puts ourselves first. Paul is not telling us to not take care of ourselves or totally deny ourselves any pleasure. I always remind you that we cannot give what we don't have, so we do need to have a healthy sense of self-respect and self-care. We are not infinite, and we are not God, which is why we need Sabbath and rest. We still must take care of ourselves if we are going to take care of others. Caring for ourselves allows us to take care of others first.

Whenever I do a wedding and I meet with couples and Dupree marriage work, I remind them that it is this kind of love they are signing up for. They will not always "feel" loving feelings for the other. They may someday fall "out" of love with each other. It's impossible to always be in love with each other because only God can do that. Sometimes we get irritated and frustrated with the other person.

Sometimes we drift apart. But what God asks us to do in the marriage covenant is agape one another. We choose to do the loving thing even though the feelings may have faded. What I have seen is that when two people choose to give agape, and they pray to God to be a blessing to their spouse, to encourage them and lift them up and think about their needs first, to try and speak their love language, over the course of a life together we find not just happiness, but joy.

GRAPHIC Grandparents Lane 1937

GRAPHIC Grandparents Lane Yosemite

My mom's parents, Howard and Ruth Lane, were married more than 60 years. I remember asking my grandfather before I got married how you make marriage last for that many decades. I'll never forget him telling me that it wasn't easy and knowing my grandmother I certainly understood what he was talking about. She was challenging at times. Of course, he was quick to point out that he was no Sunday picnic every day either! He told me there were two things which had made their marriage last. One was faith and the other was love which was agape, the willingness to serve one another even when it was hard. I got to watch him live that out as he cared for my grandma when she had dementia and a series of small strokes. Even as he dealt with cancer, he always did what he could for his bride.

Imagine a world where humans were always practicing love and agape. What would that look like? Louis Armstrong recorded a song in 1967 that imagined what a world would look like that was ruled by love. He was criticized harshly because it was released during a time where there was much civil unrest during the civil rights movement, the Vietnam war, the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. People wondered how he could record such a fluffy song during those years. So, in 1970, he released a response to all those critics that you may or may not have heard.

VIDEO What a Wonderful World 1970

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nGKqH26xlg&ab_channel=RoundMidnightTV

What a wonderful world it would be if we were all living the fruit of the spirit. If we allow the Holy Spirit to form us and shape us and re-create us, how would the world be different. It would be a wonderful world, wouldn't it? We cannot change anyone else, but we can invite the Holy Spirit into our hearts to change us. When we allow the Holy Spirit to give us the strength and courage to live a life of agape, we can experience the next fruit of the spirit, which is joy.

SLIDE Chara = "choosing inner gladness or delight"

Most places describe joy as a feeling of happiness. What's interesting is that Scripture doesn't typically use this definition. Instead, joy is something we choose, and we can experience it independent of our circumstances because of that. It comes from the confidence that God is with us and has the capacity to transform adversity and bring something good from the most difficult of circumstances. Paul writes about this in Romans 8.

BIBLE

²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

It doesn't mean that God causes bad things or anything to happen, but that God can use those things and we choose to believe that God is at work which brings us a sense of inner gladness or delight. The book of James puts words to this idea of joy in a very succinct way in chapter 1.

BIBLE

² Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³ For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to

grow. ⁴ So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

We find these moments develop faith, character, and hope, helping us know that we don't need as much as we thought we did. God will take the adverse circumstances and bring about something beautiful and it's a choice we make to believe that. Joy is a state of mind and heart, even when we can't see how it might all come together, recognizing that there is something larger at work in our lives than just these things that we see all around us. It is captured by Paul when he writes to the people of Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 5.

BIBLE

¹⁶ Always be joyful. ¹⁷ Never stop praying. ¹⁸ Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

¹⁹ Do not stifle the Holy Spirit.

Notice that Paul connects this idea of being joyful with not stifling the Holy Spirit and allowing it to work in our lives so that we can experience this sense of joy even when we don't feel happiness. I think of one of our members who lost everything in a fire. They shared with me how at first it was deeply saddening, and then it was freeing and has enabled them to connect with others who have lost everything. They felt a sense of joy that was deeper than happiness, discovering what was most important in their life and letting go of things which are temporary. They found through prayer and being thankful in every situation, even this tough one, led them to joy. Plus, they said, now they wouldn't have to worry about their kids fighting over their stuff! That brought them great joy.

SLIDE Joy is like Grace

The root for joy is the same as the root word for grace, and they are meant to be seen as similar. Grace is a free gift that we don't do

anything to deserve, and it's how we talk about God's love. You can't earn God's grace or unmerited favor, it's just offered as a gift, and understanding that should bring us great joy. These words joy and agape and grace are all meant to be connected. I think about the many people I have sat with just before they leave this life and enter eternity with God. I have sat with persons who, in those final moments, realize that every moment and every day is a gift, and they find joy in the smallest things.

Once again let's remember that we are invited not just to receive these fruits of the spirit as gifts from God, but to share them with others. We share joy by offering grace, unmerited and undeserved favor, to other people. I think about people I have met who radiate joy because they are offering themselves fully on a regular basis. One of those persons is someone that we have supported who is offering aid in Ukraine right now. Dan Bergman was a part of our congregation before he helped to start the new Vineyard church here in Durango a number of years ago. We found out that he was traveling with Samaritans purse to use his medical skills with those who were fleeing the violence and this past week I got a video from them, and it was wonderful to see Dan's face and hear his voice. I thought you might appreciate this update and celebration even in the midst of tough moments like a war that seems senseless to most of us.

VIDEO Ukraine Relief

When we live out agape love and joy, we begin to move towards peace as these build on one another. The Greek word for peace that is used in this text means to join things together, and the idea is that as we experience the peace of the Holy Spirit, we are connected and joined together with God and with each other.

SLIDE "Peace is to join things together"

More importantly, we join together inside of ourselves, and we become a whole person again. The Holy Spirit longs to bring us a sense

of peace that also means wholeness, which is the Hebrew word Shalom. There was a song we used to sing when I was a kid, “I’ve got peace like a river, I’ve got peace like a river, I’ve got peace like a river in my soul.” Have you ever sat in front of one of the rivers in our community and just watch the water flow? There is a sense of peace and calm in connection that comes. Every year we do baptisms in the river, and I love this idea of God’s peace washing over us, helping us to connect to God, to each other, and to ourselves.

When the apostle Paul writes his letter to the Philippians, chapter 4, he is writing from a prison cell. He is wondering if he will be executed and, in that context, he writes these words that we read this past week and connect so powerfully to this idea of peace, and how it connects to joy.

BIBLE

⁴ Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!

BIBLE

⁶ Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

There is this deep idea of peace which comes from resting in God and allowing the Holy Spirit to calm our hearts. Once again, this is a gift given to us and not something we can force or somehow work harder to attain. We realize it is a gift given to us by the Holy Spirit, we also recognize that we must be willing to give it away and not hold onto it for ourselves. This is another reason that peace is like a river, because it is meant to flow through us and not simply gather algae and mold like a pond with scum on it. Sometimes, this is about being with others who are afraid and offering God’s peace by simply being present with them, like Dan talked about as they are serving in Ukraine.

I was talking with someone recently who struggles with deep anxiety and needs medication to manage that as a could become overwhelming. She talked about one of the best things her husband does is gently grabbed her face, look her in the eyes, and say to her gently, “I’m here with you. Look me in the eye and focus on this time and place with me. We will get through this.” That is agape and joy and peace all wrapped into one moment.

My hope for each of us is that we would be people who, in our hearts, have invited the Holy Spirit to lead us, guide us, form us, and shape us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Jesus calls us to be people who bear fruit that will last. I hope that we can grow in opening our hearts wide to the Holy Spirit so this fruit will be produced in our lives. Let’s say these things again.

BIBLE

²² **But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**
²³ **gentleness, and self-control.**

Would you simply put your hands out in your lap and pray these words with me under your breath?

SLIDE Prayer

Holy Spirit, come and fill me...

Empower me to choose You and not the flesh...

Produce in me love, joy, and peace. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

April 30 - May 1 Order

1. Ely welcomes people and says, **“Today we look at how we can be the people we were created to be and how love, joy, and peace are central to that discovery.”**
2. Two Songs
3. Jeff welcomes and invites people to wave and be seated.
4. OFFERING VIDEO PLAYS
5. Announcements by Jeff (Check News Section on Website)
 - a. Easter Offering
 - b. QR code for guests
 - c. Drinks with the Pastor
 - d. Confirmation and Baptism weekends.
6. Invite congregation to prepare their hearts for the message.
7. Sermon
8. Prayer
9. Two Songs
10. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
11. Offering SLIDE and Focus (Confirmation and Baptisms)
12. Care Ministers (If any are present)
13. Prayers and Closing Thoughts
 - a. Greet our Confirmation Students
14. Closing Prayer