

**“What Do You Want to Be Like When You Grow Up?-Love, Joy, Peace”**

I don't know how many of you have any idea what a Nintendo DS is? If your kids were born before 1995, then you probably do not know, unless your grandchild has one. It's this (show one). It's a handheld game device/computer. It's really pretty amazing. It has programmed games you can purchase for way too much money. It has wireless capabilities, so you can play games online or surf the internet. And it has really cool little apps and it has a camera.

This DS belongs to my son, Andrew. One day he comes up to me and says, “Dad, I want to take our picture together to find out how much we look alike.” There's a program on this device that measures your percentage of physical likeness. The results are that Andrew and I have 11% likeness, which makes us unrelated. His mom and he are 24% alike, which means that they are related. His older sister, Caroline, and he are 34% alike, which makes them closely related. His good friend Matthew and he are 44% alike which apparently makes them siblings! I'm not exactly sure what to do with these results except to conclude that the program is flawed!

This series, “What do you want to be like when you grow up?”, is really an opportunity to look at our lives and see how much our lives resemble Jesus. The point is that as we mature spiritually, our lives should increase in resembling Jesus' life. Does your life bear close resemblance, like sibling, or does it appear to be unrelated to the life of Christ? Underneath this question is an understanding that what we are doing now is shaping who we will become.

And what Aaron introduced to us last week is that it is God's desire for our lives to deeply resemble Jesus and so through the Holy Spirit, God gives us gifts, or signs of God's presence in our lives that will assist us in the process of becoming more Christ like. And the Apostle Paul describes these gifts as the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.** What Paul is saying is that if the Spirit of Christ is in us, then these things should be coming out of us. And as Aaron described last week, it's not like all nine of these qualities suddenly appear to the max in our all at once. The Holy Spirit places them in us, but we also have a part in their growth and development in us. Remember the image of the orange last week. A grower can't create an orange, but the grower can assist in the growing and protecting of the orange tree. We have a role in cultivating these gifts in us, so they can develop and mature. And through our journeys of faith, the idea is that we grow more and more into Christ-likeness. Through our effort and through the grace of God, these fruits, these signs of God's presence in our lives, become more and more visible in our lives, that we look more and more Christ-like.

Something to consider as we go through this series is that if we get this right, it changes everything! Living out love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, living that out changes everything with everyone! It changes our closest relationships and it changes how we see the stranger. It changes the priorities that drive our lives. That's why this list is so important and why we are taking time to explore it because this stuff can change your life! It can change the world!

So picking up from Aaron's introduction last week, which you can find online at [www.spwired.com](http://www.spwired.com), what we are going to do from here is take a three of the fruit each week, which today means that we are zooming in on Love, Joy, and Peace. And as we do that, just a reminder that there is space on your program to take notes, and also we publish a study guide each week that takes up the theme of the message and guides you through reading scripture on your own.

Let's begin with Love. In a sense, Love is both the first fruit listed and is also the over-arching theme of all the fruits listed. All the other fruit listed are encompassed within love, they are some aspect of demonstrating love, they relate to love.

The word “love” in the English language has so many different meanings and uses and nuances that we are going to have to define just exactly what brand of love are we dealing with here. The good news for us is that in ancient Greek there were four words for love. One word is for romantic love, another one for friendship, another for familial type of affection, and yet another word, Agape, is the one used in the New Testament to describe selfless, sacrificial love.

Agape love is about the decision to love, not the feeling of love. Adam Hamilton has a great definition, ***Agape – the dogged determination to show kindness and act lovingly even when it is not deserved.*** When we think of love we think of feelings. We can get carried away by love, we act out of feelings we call love, but this is not what Agape love is. Agape love is born from will and choice, not from our feelings. It is choosing the loving thing even when we don't feel like it. It is choosing the loving thing in disregard to self.

There is another place in scripture where Paul unpacks agape for us, where he tells us what this love looks like in action. We read it at weddings because it has a poetic rhythm to it, but Paul was not talking about romantic love, he was talking about God-like selfless, unconditional, sacrificial love. And it wasn't just pie in the sky pretty words for Paul, this was where the rubber hit the road, this was practical teaching. So let's see what he had to say in **I Corinthians 13:1-8, 13 TNIV**

*If I speak in human or angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

OK, let's see what he is saying here. Paul is really saying that anything that doesn't come from the motive of agape, won't last. He uses images of significant things in our faith; preaching, prophesying, faith, generosity, and sacrifice to emphasize the supremacy of love. What he's saying is that the great things we do only stand the test of eternity if they are motivated by love. Otherwise, they will fade to nothing.

And then, Paul moves to very plain, simple descriptions about agape. This is what it looks like.

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

This describes God's love for us...the unconditional, gracious, love we receive through faith in Christ even though we could never deserve it. This is the love that the Holy Spirit continues to pour into our lives throughout our journeys of faith. Our part of cultivating this gift in us; our part in resembling God's love in greater ways is to choose to live this selfless love, even when we don't feel like it and especially when someone does not deserve it from us. As we give this kind of love away, the spirit of Jesus replenishes our souls with more.

When I think about this agape love described in I Cor 13, I don't think I will ever be able to read these words again without thinking of the stories of selfless people who risked their life to try to save others during the tornado. I will forever have pictures in my head of the people helping each other in the aftermath of the storm.

I asked some of the folks in our church who lost their homes week what they think agape looks like now. Where did they see agape? Everyone mentioned the friends, co-workers, and complete strangers who descended upon their homes and helped do whatever was needed. Some of you commented that the people who came to help were very sensitive to what you were going through. Mike Robinson told me a story about a crew at his house who raked everything from the foundation to the curb with leaf rakes, and they were careful not to disturb any of the plants that were struggling to survive because they wanted it to look as good as it possibly could. That was one way he saw agape love.

Several mentioned the selflessness of people who not just came to help, but the people who offered their homes and took them in. I think of the people I know who took the entire next week off work and went out and found people who needed trees cut and debris cleared. One crew went to a house a few days after the storm and offered to cut the trees. The lady asked how much they wanted. Turns out she had already been approached by 3 crews who wanted her to pay them. When this group of men said that they didn't want anything, they just wanted to help, the lady almost cried. Those guys were agape to that woman that day. So

much so that when they finished at her house, she took them around to her neighbors and they were able to help several people in that neighborhood that day.

I think about the Shultz family that has been hanging around doing all kinds of things this week. They came from Colorado, giving up their family vacation time, and brought the whole family; Brian, and Becky and 5 kids ranging from 15 to 5. They have been several places doing lots of different things from helping people move to fixing up a newly rented house, to sorting and organizing a trailer full of donations on our parking lot. They are willing to do anything and everything if it can help in the smallest way. That's what agape looks like.

It can be about the big sacrificial gift of love that someone doesn't deserve. But it is also about choosing the loving way in small selfless acts without worrying whether or not someone deserves it. Because of the tornado, we have seen this kind of love put into action to a degree otherwise unthinkable. Our perspective on agape will always include our experiences over the last month. Our challenge will be to remain open to God's spirit and continue to doggedly choose the loving thing, remembering that agape is about choosing to love more than the feeling of love.

You probably won't like the ways that we cultivate this gift of the spirit. It's about choosing the loving thing, which means choosing selflessness, sacrifice, servanthood. Practice those things and you will find agape, you will greatly resemble Jesus.

JOY – The biblical understanding of joy is something that is beyond the circumstantial. That's why James can write something seemingly absurd as this:

***Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds...James 1:2 TNIV***

The joy James is pointing toward has nothing to do with happiness, it has to do with fulfilling God's purposes. Putting our faith into action produces joy. It has to do with seeing hope and trusting God's ways no matter what the circumstances are. James is offering encouragement and he promises that joy will accompany us when we follow the ways of Jesus, even when following Jesus brings trials and hardships. That's because Joy is connected to our relationship with Jesus – with our eternal relationship with him. Joy springs to life in us through our confidence that Jesus is present with us in all things and that we are participating in his mission. That's how James can make a statement like that. And we know this to be true from our own experiences over the last 5 weeks. Even among all the devastation and grief and hardship, we can experience the joy that comes from the presence of Jesus. We may see Jesus in the kindness of someone and we know He is with us. Or maybe we experience joy as we put Jesus' love into action for someone. This is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Joy really is the ability to celebrate that Christ is with us in all things, even the when we face the bad things.

When I asked one person what Joy looked like to them, they said, "It looks like my FEMA trailer!" And I am sure that FEMA trailer is a sign to them that there is hope, there is renewal. Among the folks I visited with this week, they could all name moments of joy even in their loss, but honestly those examples were not as apparent or numerous when compared to recognizing agape. I found that reactions about joy were widely divergent. One woman shared that she has had more joy in the last month than she has in a long time. For her that comes from a spirit of gratitude that sees blessings in each day. She is able to see God at work in amazing ways in her life and in the lives of many others since the storm. She said "no more pity parties. I am loved and I am not alone." She is experiencing joy daily.

For others, though, joy is not as constant as it is for that lady. It shows up in moments and experiences that sustain them, but those moments are less frequent. One person shared that these have been long, dark, depressing days. And sometimes in those dark days, Jesus sends a reminder that he is walking with us and we are able to celebrate his presence and find some joy that can hold us up.

One family was having a bad day and they were sifting through the rubble of their home looking for a cross that had special significance. They looked for a long time and were disappointed when they couldn't find it. They were tired and worn out, but decided to go over to a storage unit that had some of their things in it. Friends had helped pack up stuff and took it over there and this family didn't know what was there, so they decided to go take a look. When they opened the door to the storage unit, they saw the cross they had been looking for. One of their friends had found it, and they had mounted it on a beam long the top of the storage unit as a symbol that Christ is present in all things. In that moment, it was like Jesus said, "I am here for you", and they could celebrate, experience joy.

We can find joy in moments of clarity when Jesus gives us signs that we are never abandoned, that he is always with us. But the life of a Christ-follower is not just about experiencing joy, it is about carrying joy into the lives of others. It is about letting others see in us a spirit of hope and redemption and celebration that God is in our world, God is in our life, and that shines through no matter the circumstances.

We have a role in cultivating the gift of joy in our daily lives. Paul gives us some great advice on just how to do that in I Thessalonians 5:16-18 TNIV.

***Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*** It's a pretty simple formula. 1) Look for the presence of God in all things – even the hard things. 2) Connect frequently with God in prayer. 3) No matter what you face, find something for which you are grateful, or hopeful.

So now let's take a quick look at our third fruit for today – PEACE.

Biblically, peace is not the absence of conflict. It comes from the greek word, Eirene. This is the root of the name Irene, which means person of peace. Eirene and it's Hebrew equivalent, shalom, are concerned with wholeness. We might say, "I can't get a moment's peace". What we mean is that the circumstances around us are noisy or disruptive. Biblically, peace, like joy, is not circumstantial. Peace is something internal...it is a gift of wholeness based on God's love for us. God's forgiving love makes us whole, restores our soul. This is the kind of peace that Paul is writing about in Philippians 4:6-7 TNIV.

***Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

This peace really is a mystical thing. It's a wholeness from being deeply known by God and loved by God – even when life is far from whole – our souls feel at home in God's presence, we are whole in that we are God's. This kind of peace is deeply rooted in an assurance of God's love for us.

When I asked people this week about peace, one response was "knowing people love me and God loves me, that brings me peace." That's a simple and profound statement, don't you think?

One man said, "Honestly, I am not there with serenity. There hasn't been much of that for me, especially in the daily circumstances. What little peace I have right now is that I know God loves me and that I am not abandoned."

Another man said, "Haven't had much peace. You don't get much circumstantial peace, but what peace I have found comes in the morning when I get up and read my Bible and pray, when I spend time with God.

And I really think that is the key to cultivating peace in our lives. It's spending time with God. In reading scripture and in prayer we are experiencing God's presence and encountering the reality that God really does love us! We may think we are unlovable, unforgiveable. But time with God gives God the chance over and over to get into our stubborn hearts that he really does love us, as we are. And in the wholeness of God's presence in our daily lives, we find shalom, peace.

The program on Andrew's DS is probably not going to change. No matter how many times we do it, it will tell us that we are not related...it will not change. In it's eyes, in the lens of that camera and the math of the programming, our resemblance will not increase.

Fortunately, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ pours gifts into our being that help us look more and more like Jesus. Our family resemblance is not based on what we look like on the outside, but begins as our hearts and souls and minds are reshaped to resemble the Love of God through Christ our Lord. And when our lives resemble Jesus's life, then the world really can see him...they will see him in our selfless love, our contagious joy, and in the wholeness of our peace.

(I'd like to thank Adam Hamilton of Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, KS for the inspiration for this message.)