

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: The Joy of Letting Go**

### **Lesson: Galatians 5:1, 13-25**

**5** *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. <sup>13</sup> You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. <sup>14</sup> For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup> If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. <sup>16</sup> So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, 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 flesh 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. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, 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 flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

My parents stayed with us for about a month and left for Korea on Thursday afternoon. Thankfully, they arrived safely at their home, and I'm sure they led Sunday worship well, as always. I'm planning to call them again this afternoon after this service. Time is such a fascinating thing, isn't it? When I was with them here, time seemed to move so slowly. But now that they've gone back, the time we spent together feels like it passed in the blink of an eye.

After they left, I started thinking about what we generally consider good and bad. My question is this: Is what we feel is good truly good? And is what we feel is bad truly bad? Good is good, and bad is bad, right? But for your pastor to be thinking about whether good is really good or bad is really bad—that's pretty complicated, isn't it? Don't you think so, friends?

Let me give you an example. Clear Lake Days started on Friday. My family and I really love this annual festival. There are so many exciting events during the festival—karaoke contests, live music, food, tractor pulls, and more. It's such a fun time. Among all these, my son's favorite is the traditional parade. He loves cars, and when fire trucks and tractors roll by, he gets so excited. But above all, he loves

the candy. Even when the beautiful ladies chosen as queens from each school pass by with their gestures, his attention is solely on the candy they throw.

Besides the parade, he also loves riding the carnival rides. After riding a few, this time he got interested in games like fishing or tossing ping-pong balls into small jars. I tried those games with him for the first time. We paid five bucks to throw ping-pong balls from a small bucket into jars. It wasn't as easy as it looked. But then, one ball finally went into a jar. I was thrilled and proud. In that moment, getting that ball into the jar felt like a good thing. Soon after, the game operator handed us a goldfish in a bag as a prize. My son was excited about raising a goldfish, and we brought it home.

When we got home and looked closely at the bag, I noticed a note saying the goldfish needed to be transferred to a tank within four hours. So, I started googling what we needed to care for it. I learned that raising a single goldfish requires a tank, gravel, a filter, food, and more. We headed to True Value, hoping to find supplies, but they didn't have what we needed, so we went to Walmart.

At Walmart, I saw all kinds of fish tanks, from 1.5-gallon to 20-gallon ones. I learned that a single goldfish needs a 20-gallon tank. As I added a filter, food, gravel, and other items to the cart, I started getting a headache thinking about the unexpected expenses for just one goldfish. After discussing with my wife, we decided to let our son choose between keeping the goldfish or getting a toy car he'd always wanted. He chose the car, so we returned home and gave the goldfish back to the game operator. This goldfish incident taught me that something I thought was good at the time could later become a source of stress and not so good after all.

Our lives seem to be a tangle of moments that are good, bad, sometimes good turning bad, or bad turning good.

Another thing came to mind. This year, I attended the Annual Conference with my parents. During the conference, we participate in sessions and worship from morning to evening and meet many people, which leaves my family and me exhausted by the time we get home. It usually takes about a week to rest and recharge. This time, having my parents with us was wonderful in many ways, but with so many extra things to coordinate, it took a little more energy than usual.

Even though we weren't fully recovered, we soon left for a family trip to San Diego. I don't know if it's because I've been living here for nearly five years, but I

still can't get used to the aggressive driving and heavy traffic in Southern California. The constant honking and drivers gesturing with both hands made it feel like everyone was angry. Everywhere we went was crowded and busy, and finding parking was always a challenge. Sometimes we had to change our plans, which added to our tired, and I found myself becoming grumpy and speaking sharply to my family.

On the second night of the trip, as I lay down to sleep, I couldn't fall asleep easily, probably because of the accumulated stress. My heart felt heavy. So, I started thinking about why I was feeling this way and what was weighing me down. I prayed to God, asking, "Lord, my parents visiting us was a good thing, attending the Annual Conference with them was good, having my father by my side when I was ordained was good, and now we're on this trip to make happy memories. So why is my heart so heavy and stressed?"

As I prayed, I felt God touching my heart, and it began to soften. I realized that my desire to show my parents the best experiences and make everything perfect was being frustrated by limited time, budget, and energy, causing me significant stress. Then, God placed a thought in my heart: My parents see me as their wonderful son and are proud of me no matter what situation I'm in. Of course, visiting places like Legoland, SeaWorld, or watching a beautiful sunset at La Jolla Cliffs would be great, but even without those, the time we spend together is what's truly valuable and meaningful.

This realization led me to let go of my desires and plans. I decided to focus more on being present with my parents, engaging in conversations with them, and expressing my love for them at least one more time while they were with us.

Friends, we all have desires. Physical desires are part of being human. We want to satisfy these desires. We think it's good when they're fulfilled and bad when they're frustrated or ignored, which can make us unhappy or stressed. However, if we keep living to satisfy our desires, thinking that's what makes a good life, we end up becoming slaves to those desires without even realizing it.

Galatians tells us that Christ has set us free and given us freedom, so we should not return to the yoke of slavery.

Sadly, we cannot choose both to satisfy our desires and to follow the Spirit. There's no compromise between following our desires and following the Spirit because they are in opposition. Galatians 5:17 says, "For the flesh desires what is contrary

to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other.”

Therefore, living according to our desires may feel good at the time, but looking back, those choices might turn out to be the worst decisions and regrets of our lives. However, there is one choice that is good now and will remain good even when we look back years later: living by the Spirit, loving one another, and bearing fruit in our lives.

Friends, what choice will you make? Will you prioritize satisfying desires that seem good by our standards? Or will you live by the Spirit, loving others and anticipating the beautiful fruit that will grow in your life?

I believe we're all fortunate because it's not too late to choose eternal life by following the Spirit. Living with a clear distinction between following our desires and following the Spirit isn't easy. Still, if you choose to live by the Spirit, I encourage you to examine your life closely. When your emotions are complicated, when you're stressed and tempted to lash out, take a deep breath, think about how you can choose and practice love in difficult situations, and above all, choose to love. I will pray that you live by the Spirit. Please pray for me as well, that I may continue to live by the Spirit.

I've shared many stories to connect with you, but the key message I want to emphasize is Galatians 5:24-25. Let's close with these verses: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.