

Session 5 • The First Fruits: Love, Joy, Peace

Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a; John 14:27

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the fruit of the Spirit begins with the three graces the world most wants and least understands: love that wills the good of the other, joy that survives circumstances, and peace that the world cannot give.

Catholic Touchstone. Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God; it is the form of all the virtues and the source of the fruit the Spirit bears in us (CCC 1822, 1827).

What You Need to Know

Note the grammar before anything else: "the fruit of the Spirit is" (5:22), singular. Fifteen works, one fruit. The works of the flesh are a mob, pulling the self in every direction; the fruit of the Spirit is one organic life showing many facets, the character of Christ forming in a soul. Tonight we take the first three facets; the next two sessions take the rest.

Love here is agape, the love Paul anatomizes in 1 Corinthians 13: not first a feeling but a willing of the other's good, patient and kind, proven under cost. Joy is not optimism or good mood; in the New Testament it keeps showing up in prison (Philippians was written from custody and mentions joy repeatedly). Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of right order; Jesus explicitly distinguishes his peace from the world's version (John 14:27).

Keep the causal arrow pointed the right way all night. These three are fruit: they grow from the Spirit's life within, they are not manufactured by effort so that God will approve of us. We cooperate, prune, and water; we do not generate. Anyone who has tried to feel joyful on command knows the difference.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

God reveals his own character to Moses in the cleft of the rock: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). The fruit of the Spirit is not a random virtue list; it is the family resemblance, God's own character reproduced in his children.

Nehemiah tells a weeping people that "the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10), and the priestly blessing Israel heard for centuries ends at our third fruit: "the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Numbers 6:26). Shalom is bigger than quiet: it is everything in right order, wholeness, the world as God intends it.

Voices of the Church

St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Story of a Soul, Manuscript B (summary)

Searching the Church for her place, St. Thérèse read 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 and found her answer where Paul points: the more excellent way. She realized that the Church had a heart, that this heart burned with love, and that her vocation was love itself. Without love, apostles would not preach and martyrs would refuse their blood.

Her discovery is tonight's discovery: charity is essential to holiness, and whatever gifts we receive are meant to be used in love. Having a gift is not proof that its holder is holy.

St. Philip Neri

Early biographies (Gallonio, 1600) and tradition

The apostle of Rome was famous for holiness that laughed. His earliest biographers, beginning with Antonio Gallonio's *Life* of 1600, record him using jokes and deliberate absurdities to puncture his own reputation for sanctity. The tradition that grew from that witness treasures his cheerfulness as soil for grace: cultivated, contagious, and, by grace, chosen daily. Disciplined cheerfulness disposes a soul to receive joy; it does not manufacture it.

St. Augustine

Confessions 1.1 (summary)

The most quoted sentence St. Augustine ever wrote diagnoses the world's restlessness: you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. Peace, he learned by long experiment, is not found by rearranging circumstances but by coming home. The peace the Spirit bears is that homecoming beginning now.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1822-1829 on charity: the virtue by which we love God above all things and our neighbor for his sake; it is the form of all the virtues, and its fruits are joy, peace, and mercy (1829). Notice the Catechism's own causal chain: joy and peace grow out of charity.

CCC 736 teaches that by the power of the Spirit, God's children can bear the fruit Paul lists; CCC 1995 adds that the Holy Spirit is the master of the interior life.

CCC 2304-2305 on peace: not merely the absence of war, but the tranquility of order, the work of justice and the effect of charity; earthly peace is the image and fruit of the peace of Christ.

Thread Watch

Threads in play

Vine. The singular "fruit" tonight is a quiet setup for Session 8: one fruit because one life flows through the branches. If anyone notices the singular and asks why, praise the observation and answer briefly: one fruit with many facets because one life produces it. Session 8 gives the source a full night.

Sealed guess. Some participants will start suspecting the guesses connect to this fruit material. Acknowledge the good instinct, say the connection gets its full night in Session 8, and leave the envelopes sealed as promised.

Session Goals

1. Have the group discover the singular "fruit" versus plural "works" from the text.
2. Define agape from 1 Corinthians 13 as willed good rather than felt affection.
3. Distinguish Christ's peace from the world's peace using John 14:27.
4. Keep the causal arrow right: fruit grows from grace; it is not manufactured to earn grace.

Time Note

Runs 75-85 minutes. If short, cut Build question 5 (Exodus 34 cross-check) and trim the joy discussion to the Philippians exchange.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, and pour the love of God into our hearts. Where we have manufactured imitations, grow the real thing. Give us love that costs, joy that lasts, and the peace this world cannot give. Amen.

Win · Opening Questions

1. Think of someone who has loved you well over a long time. What did that love actually look like, day to day?
2. Name the most joyful person you know. Is their life the easiest one you know?

Build · Into the Text

Read Galatians 5:22-23 aloud, then have a second reader immediately reread verse 19's opening. Ask the group to catch the grammatical difference between the two lists.

1. The works of the flesh are; the fruit of the Spirit is. Why does Paul switch to the singular, and what does that suggest about how these nine grow?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The works are plural and disconnected, a mob: a person can be envious without being drunk. The fruit is one: a single life producing many facets, like one tree bearing one kind of fruit with color, sweetness, and seed all in each piece. The Catechism draws the same causal chain: joy and peace are named among the fruits of charity (CCC 1829). The singular noun suggests what grace confirms: one character forming, Christ's.

2. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a. Notice how little Paul trades in feelings. List what love actually does and refuses to do in these verses. What is agape, based on the evidence?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

It is patient and kind; it does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude, does not insist on its own way, is not irritable or resentful, does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right; it bears, believes, hopes, endures all things; it never ends. Nearly every line is a decision of the will under pressure, and even the feeling-words are ordered: love refuses to rejoice at wrong and rejoices in the right. Agape is far more than feeling: it wills the good of the other, at cost, whether or not feelings cooperate. Love seeks the other's good even when affection is difficult, and the Holy Spirit can help our feelings grow more consistent with that love.

3. Philippians keeps returning to joy ("Rejoice in the Lord always," 4:4). Where was it written from, and what does that do to the theory that joy is circumstances going well?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

From imprisonment. Paul's joy demonstrably does not run on circumstances. Christian joy is the settled gladness of belonging to God, which is why it can share a cell with suffering: it can remain present even when we do not feel happy.

Live Discovery

Send the group to John 14, the chapter they read in Session 1, hunting for the verse where Jesus gives peace and immediately distinguishes it from another kind. They should land on 14:27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." Ask: how does the world give peace? What is different about his?

4. From John 14:27 and your own experience: how does the world's peace work, and why is Christ's peace not fragile in the same way?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The world's peace is circumstantial: remove the threat, obtain the money, silence the conflict, and it lasts exactly until the next disturbance. Christ's peace is the presence of right order with God, which is why he can give it on the night before his crucifixion. It rests on something no circumstance can reach. Augustine names the mechanism: the heart is restless until it rests in God, and in the Spirit that rest has already begun.

5. Read Exodus 34:6. Set God's self-description beside the fruit of the Spirit. What do you notice, and what does it tell you about what the Spirit is actually doing in us?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness: the overlap with love, patience, kindness, and faithfulness is unmissable. The fruit of the Spirit is the family resemblance. The Spirit is not installing random virtues; he is reproducing the character of God in the children of God, conforming us to the Son (Romans 8:29).

Dig Deeper · Fruit, not achievement

The Catechism calls the fruits "perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory" (CCC 1832, taken up fully in Session 7). Forms in us: grace is the agent, we are the soil that consents. Our part is real: pruning, watering, staying attached, effort supported by grace. We cannot force ourselves to feel joyful; we can keep responding to God through prayer, the sacraments, and faithful choices, trusting him even when growth is hard to see. Session 8 shows where that life comes from.

Send · Closing Questions

1. Whom is it currently costing you something to love? What would 1 Corinthians 13 look like toward that person this week, one clause at a time?
2. Which of these fruits would you like to grow in? What could practicing it look like during a difficult week?

Live It This Week

- Pick one clause of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 each morning and make it the day's single assignment toward one specific person.
- Once this week, when anxiety spikes, pray John 14:27 slowly instead of rehearsing the circumstance.
- Do one hidden act of love that cannot be repaid or discovered.

Closing Prayer

Father, your love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Let that love bear its first fruits in us this week: love that wills the good, joy that no prison can take, and the peace of resting in you. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

Romans 5:5

...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage read or discussed in this session, in order of appearance, with key leader background.

- Galatians 5:22-23
- 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a
- John 14:27
- Exodus 34:6
- Philippians 4:4
- Romans 5:5 (memory verse)
- Nehemiah 8:10 (leader background)
- Numbers 6:24-26 (leader background)
- Romans 8:29 (leader background)