A Life That Glows

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Galatians 5:13-26

Sermon Series:
The Life You’ve Always Wanted

Salvation is a gift we receive, not something we earn or achieve.

A few weeks ago, many of us experienced a power outage. During the short time our family was without power, I thought a lot about people all around the world who never have electricity or enjoy the conveniences we enjoy.

When we consider the life we have always wanted, I’m pretty sure that it involves electricity, because we want access to power that enables us to live our lives with lights, refrigerators, computers, washing machines, televisions, and so on. Now this sermon is not about electricity, but it is about connecting to the power that enables us to live the lives we have always wanted.

This is one of the issues that Paul is trying to clarify in Galatians, the first letter he ever wrote. After his first missionary journey, a dispute arose over the nature of salvation. What does it mean to be saved and to follow Christ? What do we have to believe and do? What does it actually look like?

The Bible makes clear that though we were created to have a relationship with God, everyone has sinned—missed the mark of God’s holiness—and the consequence is that we are separated from God. We are spiritually dead.

Let’s return to our illustration of electricity. A lightbulb is dead when disconnected from the electrical current, even though it still exists. In the same way, when we are disconnected from God, our capacity to have an interactive relationship with God is dead.

Now, there is nothing we can do about this in our own human striving, so we need to be saved or rescued from our deadness. We are saved by grace when we trust Jesus and what he has done for us in his life, death, resurrection and ascension. We become spiritually alive. Salvation is a gift we receive, not something we earn or achieve.

In Galatians 2:20, Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

So, let’s go back to our electricity analogy. When a dead lightbulb gets screwed into a socket and connected
And we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us and fills us and empowers us to live the lives we always wanted.

Life in the flesh is an inner messy, disordered kind of life that results in broken relationships and factionalism, while life in the Spirit results in the fruit of the Spirit producing the qualities needed for good, healthy relationships. In using the term “flesh,” Paul is not referring to our physical bodies, as some have mistakenly understood. Simply put, life in the flesh is life apart from God.

We are meant to love God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength, so what Paul has in mind is the "total person living outside of God's will and apart from God's guiding influence through the Spirit." Lives that are not lived in surrender to God are against God, at war with God, reflecting internal disorder that ripples into relationships leading to broken families, systems and institutions. Pastor Tim Keller divides the deeds of the flesh into these categories:

- Sexual sin, such as fornication, impurity and licentiousness.
- Religious sin of idolatry and sorcery.
- Social sins that destroy relationships; such attitudes and actions as enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy.
- Substance abuse, reflected in drunkenness and carous-
Salvation means we are free from our sins to be restored to an interactive relationship with God. This is not a comprehensive list, but these qualities reflect a life apart from God. This is the problem that was being faced by the church in Galatia. Greek people had come to Christ. They had been steeped in pagan practices that were culturally acceptable but out of line for those who belong to Christ. Jewish Christians were convinced that the gospel was only valid if these new Christians became Jews—if they were circumcised and lived under the Jewish law.

But Paul says, No, no, no. You don't understand salvation. "For Freedom Christ has set you free." Salvation means we are free from our sins not so we can do whatever we want (life in the flesh) or become outwardly religious people (life under the law). People who live according to the flesh are trying to find something out there to control or use or abuse to satisfy to their inner longing. Our natural, human tendency is to follow our desires and look for something outside of ourselves to quell the inner restlessness of our souls in a way that will never work. The extreme form of this is addiction, whether it be addiction to alcohol, drugs, sex, work, shopping or TV. As Augustine said, “Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in thee (God).”

On the other hand, many people seek to quell the inner anxiety by trying to conform to the outward expectations of the law. This, too, is a mistake, because we can never make ourselves good enough for God by our own human strivings. Both of these options—life in the flesh and life under the law—reflect a life apart from God. Salvation means we are free from our sins to be restored to an interactive relationship with God and to be connected to the supernatural power and resources of God to live the lives we always wanted (life in the Spirit).

To trust in Christ means we get connected to God and plugged into the power source of the Holy Spirit, who will change our lives—not from the outside in but from the inside out. The Holy Spirit who is with us and in us is transforming, healing, guiding and empowering us to live the lives we have always wanted.

I want to go back to the modern analogy I have been using of electricity. In his book The Divine Conspiracy, Dallas Willard shares about his own life experience of living without electricity as a young boy and how life changed when electricity became available to the rural community in which he lived.
“Our relationships to fundamental aspects of life—daylight and dark, hot and cold, clean and dirty, work and leisure, preparing food and preserving it—could then be vastly changed for the better. But we still had to believe in electricity and its arrangements, understand them, and take the practical steps involved in relying on it.

[To take advantage of the power of electricity, the farmers] “had to repent, or turn from their kerosene lamps and lanterns, and their iceboxes and cellars, their scrub boards and rug beaters, their woman-powered sewing machines and their radios with dry-cell batteries.

“The power that could make their lives far better was right there near them where, by making relatively simple arrangements, they could utilize it. Strangely, a few did not accept it. They did not ‘enter the kingdom of electricity.’ Some just didn’t want to change. Others could not afford it, or so they thought.”

Having lived through our recent power outage, we better understand the way of life without electricity. And we know the freedom of having that electricity restored to our lives. This is a beautiful picture of our lives in God. In Christ, we are reconciled to God—brought back into relationship with God. So Life in the Spirit is an interactive relationship with God that is meant to impact every area and every relationship in our lives.

So, what does life in the Spirit look like? What does getting plugged into God’s supernatural resources look like? Paul gives nine qualities that give us a picture. Again, this is not a comprehensive list but illustrative of an eternal kind of life. He uses an organic metaphor that Jesus himself used to help his disciples understand how they would relate to him after he had ascended to the Father. He told them. “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

What Jesus wants to make clear through this analogy is that the very life and love of God are in the vine, in Christ. Unless a branch is connected to the vine, it will die. Unless a person is connected to Christ, he or she will not have the source of life that they were created for; they cannot experience the life they always wanted.

Trust in God leads to life in the Spirit, which bears fruit. Fruit wells up effortlessly from a healthy plant. It is the natural consequence of life, growth and maturity. This is a description of a different
Life in the Spirit means that we fix our hope not on ourselves or circumstance but on God....

kind of life from the life in the flesh. This life radiates and exudes a quality of life that is not possible by human effort or power.

Using our electricity metaphor, we see that life in the Spirit is a life that glows as the total person—heart, mind, soul and body—is turned to God. This glowing life is the normal consequence of a life lived in connection to God. It is the work of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. This kind of life does not come from trying harder but from trusting more.

My husband is always trying to get the rest of us in our family to turn off the lights when we are not using them, which is the right thing to do. But in the spiritual life, we want to be examining our lives to make sure the light switch is always turned on—that we are trusting God and His supernatural resources in every area of our lives. As we trust God, we will see a life that glows.

The experience of love, joy and peace are foundational to a glowing life in the Spirit. Dallas Willard gives these helpful definitions in his book Renovation of the Heart: “Love is engagement of the will for what is good.” It’s not a feeling; it is a way of being. 1 John 4 says, We love because he first loved us. God has engaged His will to love us in Jesus Christ. Many of us know that intellectually, but the experience of that love has not seeped into our hearts and souls in such a way that it has so changed us so that we are becoming like Jesus—becoming loving people.

This is a process that happens over time, but it involves our choice to spend time with God in silence and solitude, listening to God through scripture and talking with God in prayer. These are not things we do to change ourselves but ways we offer ourselves to God as an expression of our desire to stay connected to God. The natural fruit of doing so will be a greater ability to engage our will to love God and to love others as He has loved us.

“Joy is a pervasive sense of well-being.” It's not the same as pleasure, but it is pleasant. And it’s not the same as happiness, which is dependent on circumstances. Life in the Spirit means that we fix our hope not on ourselves or circumstance but on God—who He is, what He has done for us, and the promises of what He will yet do for us. And the resulting condition, not feeling, is joy—a pervasive and firmly established sense
This fruit of our lives in the Spirit will bear even more fruit, enabling us to love our neighbors as Jesus has loved us....

of well-being. That is why the Apostle Paul could rejoice even while in chains in a prison cell.

“Peace is rest in or enjoyment of goodness.” Many of us live with a knot in our guts that literally keeps us anxious and awake at night. I recently learned that a new sleeping pill is about to come out that will have fewer of the side effects and addictive tendencies that some now have. And while that may be helpful to some, I really don’t believe that drugs are the answer for most of us. While peace may be beyond what we can achieve by our own efforts, trusting God leads to peace—rest in and enjoyment of His goodness.

The remaining six elements or fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 are essential consequences of these three, but they all are supported by each other. As we are abandoned in trust to God, we will experience an overall sense of well-being, of love, joy and peace. This fruit of our lives in the Spirit will bear even more fruit, enabling us to love our neighbors as Jesus has loved us—with a love characterized by patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. Again, the issue is who is in control of our lives? Who are we trusting? What power source are we relying on—ourselves or God? A life of faith is life in the Spirit—a life that glows.

This week, while working on my sermon, I remembered an experience I had over five years ago. It was during the period just before moving to Vienna. It was a very stressful time of transition for our family.

During that period, Stuart and I decided that I should take the boys to see my parent in Nevada while Stuart did some work to get the house ready to sell. I was rather nervous about flying by myself with the boys, who were only four and barely one at the time. So I went to great lengths to pack a huge backpack bag of bottles, food and toys, and CDs—everything I might need to keep my boys happy for the long plane ride.

Stuart dropped us off at the airport, and shortly after checking the bags I realized I had left my backpack in the car. Stuart did not have a cell phone, so I could not call him. Let’s just say, I was not happy—or joyful. I did not have a pervasive sense of well-being. I was not resting in goodness. More than that, I was really anxious and very angry at myself. I had done so much to prepare for this flight. How was I going to make it without my bag and all the stuff I had packed? After my breakdown and before takeoff, I called several friends and asked them...
But as we learn to let go and trust God, we also discover the supernatural resources God has for us.

to pray for us—particularly that the boys would travel well.

Well, let me tell you about the trip. It was unbelievably serene. My boys were very happy and content. Ian played with a plastic cup and peanut wrapper for hours. A kind man sitting next to us let Nate use his headphones to listen to music, and both boys slept a lot. As I later reflected on that experience, I knew there was more to it than a plane trip to Nevada. It was a metaphor for my life.

God helped me to recognize the ways I tend to live life in the flesh thinking it’s all up to me and that I have to control my life, prepare for outcomes and make things happen. I was counting on my stuff to make my experience what I thought it needed to be. I was trusting my human resources, but when they were left behind, I discovered there were supernatural resources beyond my imagination to help me have the life I wanted to have on that airplane.

That lesson was very significant for me in the middle of a difficult transition in which I was leaving behind and grieving significant relationships, places and experiences that meant so much to us to go to a place that was utterly unknown. I really needed to learn at an even deeper level not to trust my stuff but to trust Him.

Now listen carefully. We all have stuff. It’s not the same stuff and it’s not all material. But we have stuff that we trust in for our lives. And I have learned over and over again in my experience and in ministry with others that it is in difficult times of life that we often discover the stuff we are clinging to in order to make our lives what we want them to be. But as we learn to let go and trust God, we also discover the supernatural resources God has for us.

I do not know what your stuff is, and I don’t know what circumstances you are in, but what I do know is that God wants you to have a life that glows—the life that you have always wanted. The way to that life is to trust God.

Some of you may have never trusted in Christ. You are like a dead lightbulb that has never been plugged into the socket. I urge you today to talk to me or someone else about what it means to have an interactive relationship with God. Today is the day. Not tomorrow. Today.

Others of us may have a relationship with God, but we’re living with the light switch turned off. We need to turn the light switch on and learn to trust God every moment and every day, filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit for all the moments of all our days.

Each one of us needs to arrange our lives to rely on trust in God and to find the ways that cultivate an ever
Take time in the month ahead to spend time with God and to discern how you can do that.

Jesus has already made possible the life we always wanted—the life that glows. Now it’s our choice how we shall live. Let’s live a life of faith as we live in the Spirit.