Sermon Series: The 12 Marks of Christian Maturity
Sermon Title: You Learn to Delay Gratification

Text: Galatians 6:7-10 -- Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Opening: Delayed Gratification is the ability to say no to something now so that we can enjoy something better later on. It is a value that is not necessarily appreciated in our economy, which, of course, is predicated on a philosophy of "***spend now/pay later***" to keep the wheels turning. Yet, in these times, as instant gratification is encouraged in the financial world, it seems that an increasing number of people are beginning to see the benefits of delayed gratification in many other areas. According to the ***USA Today,*** researchers have discovered in **a study of eighth-grade students that the ability to delay gratification may well be a bigger predictor of academic gains than IQ**. In the study, each student was given the choice of either receiving $1 immediately, or getting $2 a week later. The self-disciplined youth who elected to wait an extra week for the second dollar were the ones who consistently outperformed their impulsive peers on everything from grades to standardized achievement scores. **Psychologist Angela Duckworth**, the study's co-author, affirmed the fact that children can develop self-control. By allowing them to experience the frustration of having to wait and involving them in projects that require planning, delayed gratification can become an acquired skill. Now, if this is true for 8th graders, then it's probably true for the rest of us as well. Nearly anyone can learn to delay gratification and reap greater benefits as a result.

This morning, in our fifth message in the series, "**The 12 Marks of Christian Maturity**," I invite you to join me as we look at what the Bible says about delayed gratification and how it can impact the lives of those who desire to mature in their relationship with God. Before we get to our passage, however, permit me to set the table by allowing a few other verses to speak to you on the subject: **Matthew 6:19-21 tells us to live for eternal values rather than earthly ones … "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also; Matthew 13:44 reminds us that nothing in this temporal world can compare to the treasures of the kingdom of heaven … "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field; And 2 Corinthians 4:18 admonishes us to pursue the things that we cannot see … we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.** Now turn in your Bibles to **Galatians 6:7-10** and let's see what the Bible has to say about delayed gratification.

Here is Delayed Gratification Explained (**Galatians 6:7-9 -- Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up**). Here, the Apostle Paul is acknowledging a spiritual law that is akin to the well-known ***law of the harvest***. What is it?

- ***WE REAP WHAT WE SOW***. In farming, if a man sows a kernel of corn, he can expect to reap a stalk of corn as opposed to a stalk of celery or something else. This is common sense, right? In the spiritual realm, this principle also holds true.
  - **Those who sow to the sinful nature reap destruction**. The word "***destruction***" is probably not the best translation. It more accurately means "***corruption* or *decay.***" The idea is that anyone who chooses to walk in sin may, for a moment, satisfy his desire for things of the flesh, but sooner or later, his life will come apart. That's why Paul warns, "**Do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked.**" To mock someone is to '***turn up one's nose***' or '***to treat someone with contempt***.' Those who routinely rebel against God while thinking that they are somehow immune to this spiritual law are mocking Him and headed for trouble. **In his commentary on Galatians**, **Dr. John MacArthur writes about the acclaimed author Ernest Hemingway who was known for snubbing his nose at the spiritual version of the Law of the Harvest**. Says **MacArthur,** "He declared that his own life was proof that he could do anything he wanted without paying the consequences. He considered the ideas of the Bible to be antiquated and outdated, completely useless to modern man and a hindrance to his pleasure and self-fulfillment. Moral laws were to him a religious superstition that had no relevance. In a mocking parody of the Lord's Prayer, he wrote, '***Our nada*** (Spanish for "nothing") ***who art in nada***.' But instead of proving the impunity of infidelity (i.e., *there is no negative recourse to unfaithfulness*), the end of Hemingway's life proved the folly of mocking God. His debauched life led him into such complete despair and hopelessness that he put a bullet in his head."
  - **Those who sow to please the Spirit reap eternal life**. To sow to please the Spirit is synonymous with ***living by the Spirit*** and ***being led by the Spirit*** (**See Galatians 5:16, 18**). It is a life of surrender to the will of God that we might honor Him in all we do. The product of this kind of living is eternal life. While no believer will, in this life, always sow to please the Spirit, certainly this characteristic ought to be evidenced in our lives, and when it is, it provides us with assurance of eternal life (**Romans 8:13b-14 -- if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God**).

- ***WE REAP AFTER WE SOW***. The phrase "**in due season**" in **verse nine** is important here. While it is true that it is only mentioned concerning those who do not grow weary in doing good, the Bible teaches that both those who sow to the flesh and those who sow to the Spirit will see the fruit of their labors in due time (i.e. *the time which God has ordained—referring to the end times—* **Romans 2:5-11 -- But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for**

every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality). The former group may live in denial of God's certain judgment, ***but those in the latter look forward to it*** (**See Galatians 5:5 – We eagerly await it**).

- ***WE REAP MORE THAN WE SOW***. Paul continues by saying that as believers sow to please the Spirit, we can be confident in knowing that we will "**reap a harvest**" (*the words **'a harvest'** are not found in the original language but are included because they are implied*)." In keeping with the law of the harvest, ***the more seed we scatter, the more crop we gather***. This reminds me of the story of a father who was trying to teach this principle to his 4-year-old daughter, so he enlisted her help planting a garden. As they planted seed in the soil, he commented, "***From these few beans, we will probably reap dozens***." The next day it was a bit cool, so the young girl's mother sent her out to play wearing a pair of mittens. When the little came back inside an hour later, they were gone. She asked her daughter, "***Honey, where are your mittens***?" "***Oh***," she replied, "***I planted them in the garden so that when they come up, I'll have a lot of mittens to share with others***." **Right principle…wrong application**. (**Review: Delayed Gratification Explained – We reap what we sow, after we sow and more than we sow**.)

Here is Delayed Gratification Applied (**Galatians 6:10 -- So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith). Senator John Ashcroft**, in his book "***Lessons of a Father to His Son***," says that ***delayed gratification necessitates displaced gratification***. "What is that?" you ask. It is the practice of ***putting off something now so that someone else may receive the immediate blessing, while we wait for the eternal one***. This is the idea behind what Paul is saying here in **verse 10**. Instead of always using our material blessings to make a better life for ourselves, sometimes we are called to use them for the benefit of others in need.

- **SOW WHILE YOU CAN** (i.e., **as we have opportunity**). As God reveals to us ways to bless others, we're expected to obey, knowing that one day we will no longer be able to when Christ returns or calls us home. That's why Paul tells us in **Ephesians 5:16** to '**make the best use of our time**' by walking in the Spirit instead of the flesh and serving our Lord and others as a result. **Most people do not think about the fact that they have limited time on this earth, but if I were to tell you that you had just one year to live, what would be in your bucket list? *You can learn a lot about yourself by how you answer that question. Would you spend your remaining time on this earth pleasing yourself or looking after the needs of others?*** Certainly, this is worth thinking about as we don't know for sure if we even have tomorrow (**See James 4:13-14**).

- **SOW WHAT YOU CAN**. We're supposed to do things that benefit others. This may take place by providing financial help (*which is the context of these verses*—**Galatians 6:6 -- One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches**), but it also could be applied in a variety of other ways, as long as the end product is good. The Bible teaches that we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works (**Ephesians 2:10**). We will always find the greatest sense of fulfillment in living out our purpose.

- **SOW WHERE YOU CAN**. We're to do good to all men, especially to those of the household of God. **Christians** should help people **because they have value as image-bearers of God**

(**See Genesis 1:27**); **because in doing so we silence critics of Christianity** (**1 Peter 2:15 -- For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people**); **and because it brings glory to God (Matthew 5:16 -- In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven**).

Here is Some Delayed Gratification Advice:

- **THE DEGREE TO WHICH YOU DELAY GRATIFICATION IS A SPIRITUAL MATTER.** Therefore, if you're going to make the right choices when it comes to instant or delayed gratification, you must utilize spiritual resources.
  - ***The Word of God***. The Bible is inspired by God and profitable for, among other things, teaching us to do what is right that we might be thoroughly equipped for every good work (**See 2 Timothy 3:16-17**).
  - ***The Spirit of God***. There are two pieces of evidence, according to **1 John 3:23-24,** that indicate the Spirit of God indwells us. ***First,*** we believe in Jesus, and ***second***, we love one another.
  - ***The People of God***. Paul told his son in the faith, Timothy, to command believers to do good, to be rich in good deeds and to be generous and willing to share (**See 1 Timothy 6:18**). This is a message that we must share with each other over and over again, particularly during times of prosperity.
- **THE DEGREE TO WHICH YOU DELAY GRATIFICATION IS A PERSONAL MATTER**. It is between you and the Lord. No one can determine for you what this should look like and no one is accountable but you for your choices (**Romans 14:10 -- Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God**). Having said this, I would encourage you to give this matter some real thought and prayer. Most of the time, when it comes to delayed gratification, we error not by deferring reward until we meet the Lord but by attempting to gain our treasures now. **For those who choose the latter course, the results are not always what they might expect.**

Closing: In his autobiography, ***Just as I Am***, **Billy Graham** recalls a story that is very apropos given our subject for this morning: Some years ago, Ruth and I had an eye-opening experience) on an island in the Caribbean. One of the wealthiest men in the world had asked us to come to his lavish home for lunch. He was 75 years old and throughout the entire meal, he seemed close to tears. ***"I am the most miserable man in the world,"*** he said. ***"Out there is my yacht. I can go anywhere I want to. I have my private plane, my helicopters. I have everything I want to make my life happy, yet I am miserable…"*** We talked to him and prayed with him, trying to point him to Christ, who alone gives lasting meaning to life. Then we went down the hill to a small cottage where we were staying. That afternoon the pastor of the local Baptist church came to call. He was an Englishman, and he too was 75—a widower who spent most of his time taking care of his two invalid sisters. He was full of enthusiasm and love for Christ and others. ***"I don't have two pounds to my name,"*** he said with a smile, ***"but I am the happiest man on this island."*** Later as Billy Graham reflected with his wife on the events of the day, he asked, ***"Who do you think is the richer man?***" Ruth, of course, did not reply as they both already knew the answer.