

Let God's Peace Rule in Your Heart
Philippians 4:4-7
May 30, 2021

Stress, depression, loneliness, and anxiety are common to all people. We experience these often enough that we cannot imagine human life without them. These are the reasons why we are drawn to inner peace. Life without inner peace is something we find everywhere.

Inner peace isn't something you can turn on with a switch and have, or something you can buy, or something you can will. Inner peace is a state to be achieved and to be improved. It is a lifelong journey that requires lifelong practice.

We are living in a postmodern world. What I mean by that is we are living in a time when many people reject the idea of the existence of objective and universal truth. In a postmodern society, the "anything goes" mentality is the dominant philosophy. Your behaviors, ideas, views, preferences, values, and morals – whatever you believe is what is true to you. It is very subjective, and that is the only thing that is important. This applies to every single person. The individual is supreme and the only standard is personal preference and personal conscience.

According to postmodernism, truth is subjective; and it is relative to each individual's or community's viewpoints, beliefs, and values. Truth can vary from person to person or society to society. A Christian message or any religious teaching, for example, is seen as being true only for those who would accept it. There is no such thing as a universal or absolute truth. As each person makes their own truths, truth cannot be absolute, or objective, or universal. It can only be subjective and relative. People rely on their own ideas or conscience to determine what is right or wrong, true or false.

In other words, the individual is sovereign and the only standard is personal preference.

In this world, with this kind of mindset, how do we deal with our own stress, depression, loneliness and anxiety? Perhaps this is one of the reasons why "self-help" books are so popular. These books, or similar articles make suggestions, many of them are good, and you choose whatever you think may work for you. That could be one way to find peace and serenity.

But I want to suggest a better way. I realize that not everyone is living with the postmodern philosophy. Not everyone believes that we are the Lord of our lives and we have to deal with all our concerns by ourselves.

A couple of Sundays ago, I mentioned that we are not in control of our lives. We may think we are; but we are not! What we can control in our lives is very limited. Actually, we have never been in control of our lives and we will never be. We know that we cannot predict what will happen in our future. We have absolutely no idea what will happen to us, what will happen in our lives.

This is why trusting God with our lives is so important. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." My peace is not like that of the world. My peace is a divine peace. "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."¹ The assurance of God's control in our lives is what gives us true peace. Knowing that God is in control over our lives is what gives us unshakable peace.

In Isaiah 26, we find these words:

"You (the Lord) will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD...is the Rock eternal."² This is what the Bible says.

One of the greatest Christians in our time was Corrie ten Boom (1892-1983). She was a Dutch Christian whose entire family was arrested and sent to a concentration camp, because they hid Jewish people in their home during the World War II. Corrie once said, "When I look at the world, I get distressed. When I look at myself, I get depressed. But when I look at Jesus, I am at rest."³ Why would she find peace when she looked at Jesus? Because she knew that God was in control of her life no matter what she faced.

Peace is not the absence of problems. Peace is the presence of the Lord in the midst of your problems.

Peace is a matter of faith.

St. Paul said to the Philippians in his letter, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be

¹ John 14:27

² Isaiah 26:3-4.

³ Quoted by James Merritt in his sermon "*How to Keep Your Head When Others Lose Theirs*", www.esermons.com.

known to God.” Notice his attitude in prayer. “Be anxious for nothing.” Peace and worry cannot co-exist. When you worry, you are not at peace. When you are at peace, you don't worry.

When we worry, are we distrusting God? Every time you worry, aren't you saying to the Lord, “God, I am not sure if you can handle my problem” or “God, I am not sure if you love me enough to take care of me”? Isn't that what we are saying?

Worrying is a denial of God's promise. When you worry, you are literally doubting that God would keep his promises. Romans 8:28 says, “God causes all things to work together for good for those who love him.” 1 Peter 5:7 says, “Cast all your worries upon him, for he cares for you.” When we worry, we basically deny his promises.

If anything is worth worrying about, it is worth praying about. If it is not worth praying about, it is not worth worrying about.

Is it possible that one of the reasons why we are burdened with cares and worries and have no peace is because we do not take everything to God in prayer?

An Irish poet, Joseph M. Scriven (1819-1886) wrote a beautiful hymn in 1855 which is known as “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” This hymn bears these words:

O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.

One of the ingredients we need to have in our prayers is the attitude of gratitude. Paul tells us that we should bring all our concerns and requests to God in thanksgiving. That is the attitude we need to have in our prayers no matter what we are facing.

Having a thankful attitude is so important, because when you know God is in control, and when you know he leads you and guides you, you are always thankful. When you know God is in control and you take all your concerns to the Lord in prayer, “then” Paul says, “the peace of God...will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Horatio Spafford (1828-1888) was a very successful lawyer in Chicago. He was a very wealthy man. During the Chicago fire that took place in 1871, he lost his business and also his only son.

This horrific incident put his wife, Anna, under a tremendous stress. So, he sent her and their four daughters to England for a vacation. England was Anna's home country. He thought she would find some comfort there. He couldn't join them because of an important business meeting and a few things he needed to take care of. But he was planning to join them in two weeks. He put them on a luxurious ship to send them across the ocean.

Unfortunately, there was a terrible storm and the ship collided with an iron clipper and sunk very quickly. It only took 12 minutes to disappear from the surface. Out of 313 passengers 226 people died. That included all Spafford's daughters. His wife survived.

When Spafford received a telegram from his wife that said, "Saved alone. What shall I do?", he left Chicago immediately to bring his wife home. When the ship reached the place where the accident happened, the captain informed Spafford that that was the spot where his daughters perished.

Can you imagine the pain he must have endured? But you know what? Surprisingly, it was on that voyage, he composed one of the most beloved hymns, "*It Is Well with My Soul*." That hymn includes these words:

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.⁴

He was able to write that song, because he knew that not only his life, but also his children's lives belonged to the Lord. His heart was filled with gratitude no matter what happened in his life. He knew God's faithfulness. He knew God's grace, and because he knew that, he was always thankful. And he remained calm and peaceful.

May the peace of God rule in your hearts as well!

⁴ The United Methodist Hymnal #377.