

Greetings and welcome again to another edition of *Hope4HeavyHearts*. My name is Harry Metzger. I am one of the pastors of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North Hills.

*Hope4HeavyHearts* is a ministry dedicated to serving people by helping them to overcome the issues that weigh our hearts down and to foster the virtues that allow us to live in freedom, peace, and joy.

Our topic this week in *Hope4HeavyHearts* is *the Search for Peace*. Many years ago, when as a young pastor I was working to establish a new church in the suburbs of Chicago, I came across a young man who seemed to be interested in Christianity. As I was explaining to him how he could have a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, it seemed like he was not terribly interested in the topic. In the course of our conversation, I realized that he had been in contact with some Christian people sometime in the past. So, somewhat in frustration, I blurted out, "What about Christians?" His answer surprised me. He looked at me and said, "Good point!" Not knowing what he meant by this response, I asked him to explain what he meant. He said the Christians he had known in the past had a peace about them that he just could not understand.

I share this story as it points out several truths about our personal search for peace. First of all, peace is rare. My friend believed that personal peace was so rare that he was surprised when he saw it in someone's life. Secondly, personal peace is identifiable. Seeing a peaceful person was easily recognized by my friend. Thirdly, a lack of personal peace makes one envious of those who do possess it. My friend was clearly jealous of the people that did possess this personal peace.

Horatio Spafford wrote the well-known hymn *It Is Well with My Soul*. The opening stanza and chorus is this:

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

Few people realize that Spafford was not a pastor or theology professor, but a businessman who lost most of his real estate investments in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Two years later, he lost his three (some accounts say it was four) daughters in a shipwreck on the Atlantic Ocean. While traveling across the Atlantic to be with, and comfort, his wife who survived the shipwreck, he wrote the words to the hymn while in the vicinity of the shipwreck that took the lives of his children.

Do you have such a peace in your life? Do you have a calmness and tranquility even in the midst of struggle? Or, is your life characterized by worry, anxiety, or fear? God wants you to have peace. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." (See Romans 15:13.)

Francis Schaeffer, known as the Apostle to the Intellectuals, believed that the two driving convictions of Western culture would be personal peace and affluence. People in Western culture would be striving to maintain personal peace and affluence. By personal peace, Schaeffer meant that

our culture would be dominated by a desire to not have things bother us. The amount of money spent by Americans for drugs and counseling to deal with such things as stress, depression, and anxiety, show that we have not attained this personal peace that we crave. Peace, for many remains elusive.

In our presentation on Joy in our *Hope4HeavyHearts* series, I related the story of C.T. Studd. Because the story also involves peace, it deserves to be repeated here. C. T. Studd was a famous missionary to China and Africa over a hundred years ago. On one of his voyages to China, the ship upon which he was sailing was captained by a hardened man who totally disliked Christianity and Christians. He would often study the Bible simply to be able to argue with the missionaries who often traveled on the ships he captained. When he heard that Studd was on his ship, the captain attacked him and his faith. Instead of arguing with him, Studd simply put his arm around the captain's shoulders and quietly said, "But, my friend, I have peace that passes all understanding and a joy that nothing can take away." The ship's captain paused for a moment, and before walking away, looked at Studd and said, "You're a lucky dog." As the story is told, the sea captain became a rejoicing believer in Jesus Christ before their voyage was completed.

What is personal peace? As with all character issues, it is essential that we carefully define peace. Broadly speaking, the Bible speaks of peace in three different ways. It mentions the point of living in peace with God, rejoicing in closeness to Him. It also uses peace to refer to living in harmony with people. And, the Bible also speaks about the personal peace that we all crave. It is this third use of peace that will be the focus of our attention in this lecture.

In *Dictionary of Everyday Theology and Culture*, Rob Muthiah gives a picture of the beauty of peace as it is found in the Bible. Please note how comprehensive and beautiful the biblical concept of peace is. "The idea of peace as found in the Bible has a range of meanings, including well-being, abundance, the absence of war, fullness, reconciliation, and righteousness. Above all God desires that we are at peace with Him, with others, and with ourselves. *Shalom*, the Hebrew word for peace is found more than 250 times in the Old Testament. Peace in the Old Testament often carries the idea of being well, which includes having physical needs met, being in good health, having full relationships, and being connected to community. Peace can also mean prosperity and refers to a rightly ordered life."

So, what is personal peace? I define peace as the inner tranquility of the soul that has its outward manifestation in calmness, quietness, and security, despite trying circumstances.

The question then is, how can I obtain this beautiful thing of personal peace? How can I promote peace in my life? Can this really be visible in my life?

I would like to share a few very simple, practical tips that can help you promote peace in your life. Then I would like to explain how the Lord Jesus Christ, known as Prince of Peace, can bring lasting peace to you.

My first simple tip is, **strive to always tell the truth**. One of the great sources of stress in our lives is not being honest. We have stress because we are concerned that some of the half-truths or even

our outright lies will be found out. If we tell the truth, we can remove this common source of stress in our lives. Living lives of honesty and integrity can help protect us from stress, guilt, and shame.

Another tip is, **take time to laugh**. Abraham Lincoln wrote, "With the fearful strain that is on me day and night, if I did not laugh, I should die." When Norman Cousins was diagnosed with an incurable disease, he purposed to watch movie after movie of classic comedies. He described what happened in his book, *Anatomy of an Illness*. He found that his significant pain was relieved through laughter. Scientists now believe that laughter releases endorphins, a feel-good hormone, in our brains. It is believed that just laughing, even without a comedic stimulus, can release these endorphins. So, to promote peace in your life, make sure you have the last laugh, and the first laugh!

Thirdly, **meditate on lovely things**. In the Bible, Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." We can choose the things upon which we meditate. If we think about stressful things, or depressing things, then likely we will become uptight and anxious. But if we meditate on beautiful things, we can promote peace in our lives. Personally, I think it is important to meditate upon the character of God, upon His marvelous works, and upon the promises that are given to us from Him in the Bible. If you would like some assistance on learning how to meditate on these beautiful things, please contact us. We would be very happy to help you. You can contact us through our e-mail address, [H4HH@rpcnh.org](mailto:H4HH@rpcnh.org).

Fourthly, **realize there are others who can help you with your burdens**. Galatians 6:2 says: "Bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ." An important lesson that I have learned is that I was never meant to carry my burdens alone.

In addition, **realize that God wants to carry your burdens as well**. In 1 Peter 5:7, we are told that we are "to cast all of our burdens upon Jesus because He cares for us." There was a time when I was especially burdened about things in my life. For a time these burdens almost seemed paralyzing to me. I remember taking time consciously to hand those burdens over to Jesus. I was filled with such a peace almost at once. And, I totally forgot my burdens to such an extent that, a little while later, I had to stop what I was doing to try to remember the things that had been so burdening me just a short time earlier. "Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7)."

Let me close by saying a few more things about Jesus and the peace He brings. There are three main things you need to know about Jesus and peace: 1) Jesus is the ruler of peace; 2) Jesus possesses peace and wants to give it to His followers, and 3) Jesus wants His peace to dominate in your life.

As already noted, Jesus is the Prince of Peace. (See Isaiah 9:6.) This means that He rules and governs peace. He is free to give it as He desires.

The fact that Jesus possesses peace, and shares His peace, is clearly seen in John 14:27. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled nor let it be fearful." If Jesus possesses peace and wants to share His peace, then it only makes sense that I should ask Him to give me His peace. "For the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him" (Romans 10:12).

That Jesus wants His peace to dominate in your life is taught in Colossians 3:15. "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful." Please note that it is Christ's peace that is to rule in your hearts, not some peace that you manufacture yourself. In the original Greek language, the word translated "rule" literally means "to be an umpire or arbiter" or "to decide" or "to control". Also, in the original language, "rule" is an imperative or a command, and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person. A literal translation would be "The peace of Christ rule in your hearts." Because the English language does not have commands in the third person (he, she, it), but only in the second person (you), our English translations of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person command usually adds the word "Let."

So, what is ruling and making the decisions in your heart? Is it the peace of Christ, or circumstances, or bitterness, or jealousy, or temporal values? I like to illustrate with this sentence: "The sun is shining; open the blinds and let it in your room." The peace of Jesus is there; let it rule in your heart. You can decide what will rule, or control, or make decisions in your heart. It is wise to allow the peace of Christ to rule.

I began the topic by stating that the Bible uses peace in three broad ways – internal tranquility (which is the focus of the presentation), harmony with others (in Romans 12:18 it says, "So far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."), and the absence of conflict. I need to share a few thoughts on this last usage.

The Bible teaches that there is a living God who made all things and created people to have a close relationship with Him. That relationship has been broken by people choosing to do things that displease God. But, God has provided a way for that close relationship to be restored through the life, death, and Resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Doing the things that displease God is known in the Bible as sin. It is this sin that has separated us all from the close relationship with God. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Because all people have sinned, we are separated from God and are under His displeasure because sin must be punished. (No parent would allow their child to do whatever he or she wanted without being upset at wrong or hurtful behavior.) Because of this rebellion, the Bible says we are enemies of God. (See Romans 5:10.)

This is where the death and Resurrection come in for all who would trust Jesus. God allowed the rightful punishment for people's sin to fall on Jesus. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). By believing in Jesus and receiving Him, you can have a meaningful and close relationship with God restored.

To **believe in Jesus** means to trust in his life, death, and Resurrection. Jesus lived a sinless life, one in perfect harmony with His heavenly Father. Romans 6:23 states that "the wages of sin is death."

It is our rebellion, our sin that broke the close relationship with God. Because He did not commit any sin, He did not deserve the penalty of death. Therefore, His death on the Cross is to pay for the sins and rebellion for all those who place their trust in Him. God “made Him who knew no sin to become sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). So, we must believe in Jesus, in His sinless life, His death on the Cross for a payment for the sins of people, and in His Resurrection.

But, you must also receive Jesus. To **receive Jesus** means to ask Him into your life, your heart. “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

You receive Jesus through a simple act of faith – a prayer to invite the living Jesus into your heart. Here is a prayer that you can use to invite Jesus into your life.

*“Dear God, I believe that You made all things and created me to have a close relationship with You. I realize my sin has separated me from You. I now turn from my sin and ask for Your forgiveness. Thank You for sending Jesus Christ to die on the Cross for my sin and for raising Him from the dead so that I might have eternal life. I open my heart to You and ask You into my life. I also recognize my need for You and commit my life to You. With Your help, I now promise to obey You and choose to follow You. Jesus, thank You for dying for me, for Your free pardon, for Your gift of eternal life, and for hearing my prayer and coming into my life. Amen.”*

If you have prayed that prayer, and by faith received Jesus into your life, please contact us. We will be happy to provide you with materials and help that can assist you in understanding all that Jesus can mean to you. Again, please let us know if you have any requests and questions through our e-mail address, [H4HH@rpcnb.org](mailto:H4HH@rpcnb.org).

Thank you for joining us!

May you know the God of Peace and the Peace of God!