
EXPERIENCE THE PEACE OF GOD

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!
Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.
Do not be anxious for anything,
but in everything, in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving,
let your requests be made to God.
And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."
Philippians 4:4-7

What a promise, a truly amazing set of verses. If we would fully grasp the end of verse five, alone, we would know the cause for us to "Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!"

We are blessed to spend another day looking into the truths of God's word. I mentioned verse five. I truly believe that if we could understand the magnitude of those four last words it would give such security and support that we would be able to face anything this world tosses our way.

Look again at verse five. Where does the verse say that the Lord is?

He is not a God far off. He does not, as the old song suggest, watch us from a distance. He is near. The sad reality is, when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden they no longer enjoyed walking with God in the cool of the evening as they previously had. Instead, they hid. Their sin, and consequently our sin, causes a great divide between God's righteousness and our carnal life. But, praise Him, He had a plan, a plan that brought His Son, Jesus to be born in a lowly manger, to live humbly as a man (when He was in fact still God!), a man who walked in complete obedience, even obedience to death on a cross.

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^{1,3,4} Dr. Troy Welch, Spheres of Grace Ministries

² Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

It's because of Him that we have every reason to rejoice. Jesus spanned the great divide to bring us near, and now His presence in our daily lives is not only possible, when we belong to Him, Dear One, it is a fact! He is near!

The passage doesn't stop there. Perhaps writing the words for yourself will help you think more deeply about them.

Fill in the blanks of verse 7 (NASB used)-

"And the _____ of _____ that surpasses all _____ will
_____ your _____ and _____ in _____
_____."

Have you ever experienced that peace? Have you ever felt the nearness of Almighty God so close that you were able to rest in Him, to stop being anxious, and be at peace? Take a moment to describe that experience and then take the opportunity to thank Him:

Today's verses lay out three things we need in order to acquire God's peace.

Dr. Welch defines God's peace as "tranquility resulting in harmonious relationships"¹

Spiros Zodhiates defines it: Metaphorically peace of mind, tranquility, arising from reconciliation with God and a sense of a divine favor²

Reconciliation with God and a sense of divine favor. I'd say that's a relationship that is harmonious alright!

I much prefer harmonious relationships to the relationships where there is tension, division, discord, or stress. Wouldn't you agree that there are too many of those negative types of relationships in this fallen world? When God is in the middle of a relationship, a different dynamic comes alive for He is the source and supplier of peace.

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When we allow His Spirit to work in us, we are able to love as He loves, be patient as He is patient, forgive as He forgives, give grace as He gives grace. His peace permeates our relationships when He permeates our lives. Like bullets bouncing off of Superwoman we can face trials because His peace is our shield. He becomes the buffer. The result is that His grace extends right through us to help us give grace to those around us. We may not be able to control the other person involved, but we can be at peace in the situation because God is near.

Look up and write your thoughts of these verses:

Psalm 3:3

Proverbs 30:5

Ephesians 6:13-17

In human understanding this peace makes no sense, even to us as recipients it may not make sense, but a heart filled with His peace is content with whatever the Lord has planned knowing His grace will see us through. In Christ we are reconciled to God making that peace available in any situation. In my own experience none has been as profound as the time I miscarried. Hubby and I had been trying for several years to have another baby. Fertility tests, daily basal temperatures, medications, it was a difficult time, month after month to see nothing happening. But Finally! On a Christmas eve, I took a pregnancy test, it was positive. The next day at Church as we shared thanks for the "gifts" we were given, with so many of the church family praying for us, I shared our news. There was a lot of rejoicing that day. But it was a short month later that something was wrong. I can honestly say my first thoughts were, "Lord, Whatever You want, You know better than I." His peace was already there. A couple days later I lost the baby. As I lay in the emergency room I opened my Bible, and it "randomly" fell open to these words in Ecclesiastes 3 –

"There is an appointed time for everything.

And there is a time for every event under heaven -

A time to give birth and a time to die;..."

God was near. I began to praise Him for the overwhelming peace that covered me in my grief. As the days went by I was engulfed in such an unexplainable state that I found myself consoling others who were upset on our behalf. No one could understand the peace I had. In fact, they fully expected I would fall apart at any moment. But His peace was my shield; it was nothing less than His gift. The words, "Rejoice, again I say rejoice" rang true, yes, even in the sadness I rejoiced. I'm quite sure the nurses thought I had lost it as I sang praises while I waited for the doctor to confirm what I already knew. I didn't deserve God's peace, and I surely didn't earn it. God was near, and where He is, there is peace. He took a sorrowful time and gave me affirmation through His peace.

As we move on in the passage, we find His peace will "guard" or "shall keep." In verse 7 the words there refer to military protection. Paul is telling us that the peace of God provides the Lord's army in response to our need.

Picture this - you have a need, and the Lord has an army (I'm pretty sure it's the best army). They stand guard around your heart and mind, shielding you so that when a circumstance or conflict comes at you, your heart and mind (emotions, thoughts, understanding, knowledge) are surrounded and protected by prepared and trained soldiers. When they see the conflict they don't run hither and yon, bouncing off one another trying to figure out how to combat the assault, there is no chaos at all, for nothing surprises our God, His peace is in place, sufficient for every circumstance, and is able to guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. He is our place of tranquility.

There are three things mentioned in these few verses that we need to put in action to achieve the result of His peace: ~ Rejoicing ~ Forbearance, or gentleness ~ Prayer. When we apply these things to our lives a unique transaction takes place. Let's look.

REJOICE - To rejoice means to have joy again. Joy upon joy. It's a command, and is a very important word as it identifies the basis for true and lasting joy. The Greek word 'agal-li-ah-oh' is used for outward rejoicing as in worship. But, this word here focuses on the idea of one's existence and results in an inner joy marked more by inner peace than by outward expression. It's that deep seated state of being that "all is well with my soul" because we know our God has everything handled.

The stem of the word used here actually comes from the same root as the Greek word 'charis' which means grace. So "Chairete" is a command to have an attitude of inner joy as a result of understanding that your existence - who you are, and what your circumstances are - is because of, and dependent upon, God's grace, not because of or dependent upon yourself. ³ A command to rejoice is an admonition to have continual faith in God's grace to be sufficient. It is a relaxed mental attitude that knows and claims the promises of God with confidence. We may not understand the "why" of our situation, but we can know and trust that God's grace will see us through. And for that, Girlfriend, we can rejoice IN THE LORD, always!

Secondly, Paul says, we are to FORBEAR, or live in gentleness. The word used is a compound composed of the preposition "epi," which adds intensity, and the adjective "eikos" which means reasonable. Together they form, "an intensive reasonableness." The word "epieikes" is used in a variety of ways but is most frequently translated gentle.

In Christ, and through His grace, we are able to be intensively reasonable. I know, some may argue that we are not always the most reasonable beings, but we can, and should, live in gentleness toward others. That means our reaction should never be to reply with a harsh word because we have been empowered to respond in the gentleness of His Spirit.

Look at Christ's example that we see in the book of Philippians. He walked in humility, putting others welfare above His own, unconditionally loving others. He extended grace to us when we were so very undeserving. It is only right that we who are in Christ, also, extend grace to others. That means we assume all the responsibility and cost for a relationship. ⁴ It's not our expectations that are the standard. They don't even enter into the equation, because grace is never earned. Grace is given because its needed!

The good news is that we don't have to pray for the patience to accomplish it. Having His Spirit indwelling us, the patience is already there, we just have to draw on it. It is totally possible to give grace to others because it's not dependent on us to produce it, it's simply dependent upon us surrendering our control to the Holy Spirit and then let His grace be poured out through us. When we determine to live in that mindset it makes forbearing a whole lot simpler.

PHILIPPIANS - Week 9, Day 2 ~ Tammy

The last aspect of seeking God's peace is that PRAYER must be part of our daily walk with Him and we will look at that tomorrow.

As we close today may our prayer be that we grasp the grace of God in our own life so that we are then able to release grace to those around us. It will be a lot easier if we remember that grace is not earned, it's given because it's needed, and it's possible because God is near!

REVIEW

~ God is near (v 5)

~ His peace surpasses all understanding and results in harmonious relationships both with Him and with others (v 7)

~ We are to rejoice, forbear and pray (v 4-7)

~ Follow Christ's example (Philippians 2:5-6)

~ Grace others as He graces us - undeserved, assuming the responsibility and the cost of the relationship.

~ And, Rejoice, again I say rejoice!