

**LIVING BEYOND YOURSELF - Week #4**

The Fruit of the Spirit is Peace

Philippians 4:6-9

**PATTI**

We've been studying the fruit of the Holy Spirit - 9 qualities that should be growing in every person who truly believes in Jesus. According to Galatians 5:22, the fruit of the Spirit is first of all love, then joy, and thirdly, PEACE.

We all face circumstances that are unsettling and take us out of our comfort zones. Whether it's the ongoing tension surrounding the presidential election, a big decision you have to make, a tough conversation with a friend, or test results from a recent doctor's visit, a peaceful mindset can help you find the strength you need to overcome uncertainty and restlessness.

But because our old sinful nature will always pull us in the direction of fear, anxiety, strife, and enmity.

If you watch the news today, you'll get the distinct impression that peace is something that can only happen when all divisions are overcome.

But biblically, the peace of God is actually the thing that overcomes all divisions! A Hebrew word for peace that is used extensively throughout the Old Testament is **SHALOM**.

Shalom means much more than the absence of conflict. It includes WHOLENESS, HARMONY, and WELL-BEING. **SHALOM** continues to be a greeting that Jews use to this day in order to convey health, prosperity, safety and tranquility to a

person, city, or country.

Of course, the source of all shalom is God.  
As early as the first chapter of Genesis we see  
the Lord bringing order out of chaos and  
bestowing shalom on his creation...

Shalom that was broken by Adam and Eve's  
disobedience in eating from the tree  
of knowledge that the Lord had forbidden.

### **JEFF**

Yes, our forbearers, Adam and Eve, introduced  
strife and unrest into their relationship with  
God, first by listening to the serpent,  
the voice of evil, who caused them to question whether  
God's command was really in their best interest,  
and secondly, by willfully disobeying that command.

This pattern of questioning God's intentions  
and breaking God's commandments persists  
in Adam and Eve's offspring to this day... in all of us.

By the way, Adam and Eve, through their disobedience to God,  
also introduced strife into their relationship with each other.  
When God came looking for them in order to demand  
accountability for their actions, Adam said,  
**"This woman that you gave me – she gave me some fruit  
from the tree and I ate it."**

Instead of coming clean with God, Adam blames both  
the Lord and Eve for his actions. And the hiding, blaming,  
denying and excusing of sin persists in us.

Remember when Bekah was a toddler and she asked if  
she could have Oreo cookies right before supper?  
We said, "No," of course, but then I walked into the family  
room and her mouth was literally rimmed with black crumbs.

I said, "Bekah, did you eat Oreos after we told you not to?"  
In the sweetest voice she could possibly muster, she said,  
"No, Daddy." And as the words came out of her mouth I  
spotted the package of cookies sticking out from behind the TV.

But even the evidence would not change her denial.

And though our youngest daughter, Hannah wasn't born yet,  
I'm convinced that she would have been accused and blamed  
if she had been.

Sin fractures our relationships with God and each other.  
And the aspects of peace that the Bible addresses heal both.  
First, the Scriptures offer us **PEACE WITH GOD.**

### **PATTI**

Being reconciled with the Lord depends on grace,  
which has its source in the cross.

Romans 5:1 - "Therefore, being justified by faith,  
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

By taking our sin on himself at Calvary, Jesus removed  
the dividing wall of hostility that separated God and humanity.  
So when you respond to Jesus in faith,  
when you live in the covenant of your baptism,  
you experience this peace.

And the implication for this moment that  
we're living in right now is that because God has  
forgiven us and broken down the wall of hostility  
that separates us from Him, we can also have  
**PEACE WITH OTHERS.**

Christians who have been forgiven much should be  
quick to forgive those who have hurt us, and  
quick to reconcile with those who disagree with us.

Having said that, there is a statement that Jesus  
made in the Sermon on the Mount that I think we  
should clear up, because it is often misinterpreted.  
In the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:9), Jesus proclaims,  
**"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be  
called children of God."**

And there is a big difference between being  
a **peacemaker** and being a **peacekeeper**.  
Most of us loathe conflict and want to  
avoid it at all possible.

So where there is disagreement, tension or an argument, many of us run in the opposite direction.

But this is where we often confuse peacemaking with peacekeeping.

A peacemaker is someone who is willing to resolve both outer and inner turmoil in order to establish peace with others and within themselves. Inevitably, peacemaking **will** require engaging in conflict and tension to help bring the situation to a solid place.

Think of Jesus, confronting Pharisees, turning over the tables of tax collectors, confronting those who were about to stone the woman caught in adultery with their own sin.

### **JEFF**

Peacekeepers (like me) tend to avoid outer conflict in order to keep others happy. They don't like rocking the boat; and for that reason, they will often sacrifice their own inner peace in order to maintain the "façade" of peace with others.

According to Isaiah 9:6, when the prophet foretold the birth of the messiah, he said that Christ would be called, "**the Prince of Peace.**"

By being willing to tell the truth and confront evil, and engage with tension, Jesus was able to set people free and give them real, lasting peace.

What remains true for us today is that disciples of Jesus cannot be peacemakers by avoiding conflict, honesty, and tense situations. Instead, we must refute the lies we've learned about conflict and learn how to **MAKE** peace instead of just **KEEP** it.

Here are 3 key truths peacekeepers must realize:

#### **1. Honesty Breeds Harmony**

Let's face it, honesty is hard for a peacekeeper.  
 Not because they don't have opinions or feelings,  
 but because they don't know how other people will *receive* them.  
 Out of fear of someone disagreeing or getting offended,  
 peacekeepers will disregard their own thoughts  
 and go along with someone else's.

There will always be a risk of disagreement or offense.  
 when you share your thoughts, ideas, and feelings.  
 But there is also the chance that your honesty with  
 someone else will be encourage, challenge, or give  
 valuable insight to them.  
 Honesty helps us learn from one another.

Suppose a friend is in a rough situation.  
 You can see the problem but you're afraid they might  
 get offended if you tell them. You can either pat them  
 on the back and commiserate by not being honest with them,  
 or you could let them know what you see and how it's affecting them  
 In the first case you would be acting out of fear, and in  
 the second scenario you would be acting out of genuine  
 concern for their freedom and well-being.

## **PATTI**

### **2. Disagreement Doesn't Have to Be Disrespectful**

We all know those people who will argue about *anything*.  
 Hop on Facebook for five minutes and you'll be sure to  
 find a degrading argument happening on someone's page.  
 Believe it or not, there **IS** a way to confront or disagree with  
 someone without the conversation getting ugly.

First of all, social media is a horrible platform for real conversation.  
 And secondly, for Christians there is a special tension to be held  
 in the midst of disagreement that we've mentioned before -  
the tension of truth and love.

This tension involves speaking honestly about what you believe  
 to be true while still giving value to the other person AND  
 to what they are saying. Often this can be accomplished by  
 listening to understand rather than listening to respond.  
 When people first feel understood and therefore loved,  
 they are typically much more open to hear a differing opinion.

In Ephesians 4:15, Paul says this to the believers in Ephesus:  
**“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become  
 in every respect the mature body of him who is the head,  
 that is, Christ.”**

Oftentimes, we want to operate from either truth OR love, but the power is in the tension. We must have the boldness to be honest about the truth and the maturity to be *attentive* instead of *defensive*.

### **3. Peacekeeping is Passive - Peacemaking is Proactive**

Keeping the peace tends to look like letting things slide and turning a blind eye for the sake of avoiding confrontation. While this may seem harmless, this type of passivity can eventually become a breeding ground for injustice, festering wounds of bitterness, and relational breakdown. There's a time to let things go, but there is also a time to speak up and take action.

Making peace looks like actively listening, talking, reconciling, and struggling with oneself or another to reach peace. It's working through conflict to come to TRUE resolve. While not every conflict results in both parties agreeing, most of the time, two parties can peacefully agree to disagree while still respecting each other.

In **Romans 12:18** , Paul urges believers to adopt such a peacemaking lifestyle when he says, **“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”**

### **JEFF**

So far we've talked about what I would call the vertical and horizontal aspects of peace - shalom with God and with our neighbors.

But there is a third aspect that we could call “**INNER PEACE**.” This is the one that our reading from Philippians addresses most clearly.

And a word that expresses this best in the New Testament is the Greek word **EIRIENEI**.

*Eirenei* refers to a mental attitude of tranquility

based on one's relationship with God.

It is a word which describes the result of  
a person's proper response to God's Grace.

This is the peace that is available to us,  
not because our circumstances are so great,  
but because God and His promises are greater!

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2 Tim. 1:7 describes this peace well without actually using  
the word. It says, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear;  
but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

Isaiah 26:3-4 shows us how to experience the kind of  
tranquil confidence that Paul is describing.

The prophet declares of God, "You will keep in perfect peace  
those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you."

Perfect peace roughly translates here to something like,  
"peace peace." Perfect peace that comes from God  
that nothing can take from us.

Our dilemma whenever we face something threatening,  
whether the threat is physical, emotional, financial,  
relational, or something else, is that all of our attention  
and focus tends to go to the threat itself.

And when we do that, the threat tends to become  
larger, scarier, and seemingly insurmountable.

But when we keep our eyes on Jesus instead, His  
authority and power become greater in our minds.  
Our confidence in His promises expands, and our  
assurance of victory over whatever  
we are facing multiplies exponentially.

### **PATTI**

So how does one "keep their eyes on Jesus" then?  
We nurture our relationship with Him by praising and  
worshiping him, both weekly and daily.  
We de-clutter our hearts and our bond with  
Christ by confessing our sins and receiving  
forgiveness; we listen to God and share our

deepest thoughts and desires with Him in prayer.

These and other spiritual practices reinforce our confidence in who God is for us and His plan for those who love Him.

It's interesting that Paul writes to the Philippians from a jail cell where he is guarded twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week by a young elite Roman soldiers who are literally chained to him in three-hour shifts.

It is interesting that while chained to one of these young guards, Paul writes, that prayer is the antidote for anxiety and says that when you make your requests to God, **"the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."**

In the same way that Roman soldier is standing guard over Paul, the peace of God will stand guard over our hearts and minds when we pray, allowing into our spirits only that which will encourage and build us up, and keeping out that which will distract or threaten to harm us in any way.

And it seems that, as always, we are able to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in this process by filling our minds with positive things - **whatever is noble, right, pure, lovely, excellent, or praiseworthy** (Phil. 4:8).

### **JEFF**

This promised peace is not only the opposite of fear and anxiety, but also the prerequisite for enjoying abundance or prosperity.

If we are always looking to money, possessions, and things to give us comfort, then we won't really enjoy them. And we will never have enough. Because things can't really give us what they promise,

we will always be chasing more, and it will never be enough.

But those who have the peace of God  
are not possessed by their possessions.  
They understand both the beauty and  
the limitations of the good gifts that God gives,  
and are free to both enjoy them deeply and  
share them open-handedly with others.

In this time that we are living through,  
the peace that is ours in Christ may be  
one of the most powerful testimonies to  
our unbelieving or unchurched neighbors.

### **PATTI**

One of our colleagues put it this way in Sunday's sermon:

**"A conflicted world needs a confessing church."**

A church that confesses its need of grace and  
is quick to forgive;  
a church that confesses it's confidence in God's plan  
and is anxious for nothing.

Let's pray that we will be that church:

Father, we confess that only when we die to self can we fully be at peace with you and with one another. Only when we die to the works of the flesh – especially hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, and factions - will your peace rule in our hearts. Fill us so full of your Holy Spirit that there is no room for fear or strife, and make us instruments of your peace in the lives of others this week. In Jesus' name. Amen.