

This morning, I am in the fourth week of a sermon series that I've entitled "The Spirit-Formed Life." During this series, I will be looking at what is known as the fruit of the Spirit, a phrase Paul uses in Galatians 5:22 to describe the kind of character that is formed in the person who lives under the influence of the Holy Spirit, walking not according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit of God. In case you're unfamiliar with the concept of the fruit of the Spirit, it comes from Paul's words in Galatians 5:

Galatians 5:22-23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.

This, Paul says, is what the Spirit produces in the life of the person who walks in step with God's Holy Spirit. People marked by love, not hatred, hostility or indifference. Joy, not despair or cheap thrill-seeking. Peace, not anxiety or conflict. Forbearance or patience, not anger, irritability, or impatience. Kindness instead of meanness, callousness or cruelty. Goodness instead of selfishness, corruption, or perpetrating evil. Faithfulness instead of faithlessness, unreliability, or a lack of integrity. Gentleness instead of harshness, abusiveness, or aggression. And self-control instead of living a chaotic, out of control life enslaved to desires. And Paul tells us that these qualities will be ours in increasing measure as we learn to walk with the Holy Spirit of God and to yield ourselves in obedience to His fruit-producing work in our lives. That is the Spirit-formed life.

This morning, we will be looking at the third characteristic on the list: peace.

Last week we talked about joy, and I began by talking about the elusiveness of joy, how hard it is to hang on to any sort of happiness in this world that is so full of sorrows and loss. Well as elusive as joy is, peace is just as elusive, if not more so. A quick google search reveals that there are currently over 130 active armed conflicts and major wars going on around the world. Then of course there is criminal violence, drug and human trafficking, and political instability all over the world. But most of us are too overwhelmed by our own relational conflicts or internal anxiety to even seriously concern ourselves with the war in the Middle East or between Russia and the Ukraine. Peace in this world is indeed a very elusive thing. But the fruit of the Spirit, thank God, is peace. There is a peace that is available to each and every follower of Jesus.

The Hebrew word for peace is the word shalom. It has the connotation of all around well-being and wholeness, including peace with God, peace internally, peace with others, and peace with creation. For our sake, we are going to focus on

the three main dimensions to the peace that the Spirit gives. Peace with God, peace within, and peace with other people. Or, eternal peace, internal peace, and external peace.

1) Peace with God

Would you say that your relationship with God is marked by peace? Or by anxiety or an unhealthy fear? Any true peace that we are going to have in life has to begin here, with peace between us and God. In fact, peace is one way of summing up the gospel, the heart of the story of Christianity. In the beginning, we are told that there was peace, harmony between God and humanity and creation. But our sin, our rebellion against God, broke that peace and brought discord all around, between us and creation, between us and other people, between us and ourselves, and most importantly, between us and God. But the good news is that God did not leave us alone in this state. God sent the prince of peace, as Isaiah 9:6 calls the Messiah, Jesus, the Son of God, to make peace between us and God by His perfect life and sacrificial death on the cross.

Colossians 1:21–22 - Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation

You once were an enemy of God, but Jesus' death has made a way for you to be reconciled, to have peace with God.

Romans 5:1–2 - Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

We are justified, declared not guilty, through faith in Jesus, and because He took our sin on the cross, we are at peace with God. We stand in grace, a state of undeserved favor with God. And this is available not just to Jews but to Gentiles, non-Jews as well:

Ephesians 2:11–18 - Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)—¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the

covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near **by the blood of Christ**. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Christ is our peace, he made peace, and he preached peace. This is not the fruit of the Spirit, but the work of God.

I go back to the question I asked in the beginning: Would you say you're your relationship with God is marked by peace? Or by anxiety or an unhealthy fear? Do you fear the judgment of God? Do you wonder if you have done enough to merit heaven? Do you project your earthly father's attitude onto God, or see God as an angry judge in the sky? The great news is that in Christ's death, we find peace with God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Romans 8:1–2 - Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

1 John 4:18 - There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

If we are afraid, we have yet to truly trust in His perfect love for us. And now we can come boldly to God.

Hebrews 4:14–16 - Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

All true peace begins here, with peace with God.

2) Peace within ourselves

This is where the real lack of peace is felt by many people. Rising anxiety rates, fear of the future, true gripping fears about harm coming to those we love. How are we to handle it? The world can only give techniques: identify your triggers, use mindfulness, control your breathing, reframe negative thoughts, try yoga, get good sleep and exercise.

But the truth is that there are plenty of legitimate reasons to be anxious and afraid. Tomorrow is guaranteed to no one. Costs are rising, and it is hard to earn enough to pay bills. Relationships are hard, and a lot of it is out of your control and in the hands of others, who don't always do what is right. Things don't always work out. And yeah, physical decline and death are getting closer every day if they aren't already here. Is box breathing and hot yoga really going to address these realities? Just put those realities out of your mind and go for a run or go to the beach? Or is that like trying to put a band aid on a massive head wound? Isn't there a better way to deal with the heart of anxiety?

How do we find this peace in the midst of such an unstable world? Philippians 4 gives us the answer:

Philippians 4:4–9 - Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, **whatever is admirable**—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

- Pray your anxieties and fears to God with thanksgiving and leave them there

Philippians 4:6 - Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Rejoice. God is near. Tell God what you are anxious about. Leave it in his capable hands. He knows what is best for you. Thank Him because He is sovereign and loves you and will do what is best for you or the ones you love. Now, notice that God does not promise deliverance. He does not promise that He will answer your requests by immediately taking away the thing that makes you anxious. He promises His peace with guard you and His presence will be with you.

1 Peter 5:7–9 - Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Listen to Jesus:

John 16:33 - “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

You will have trouble. But you can also have peace in the midst of trouble because he has overcome the world. Mark 4:37-41 gives us a great picture of what this looks like:

Mark 4:37–41 - A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. ³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” ³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “**Quiet! Be still!**” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. ⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, “**Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?**” ⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

- **Remember that the Lord is near**

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heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. **And the God of peace will be with you.**

Jesus is on the throne. The world is not out of His control. Ray Labbe – “Is Jesus still on the throne? Then I must be okay.” He can give a peace that is free from anxiety and panic. It is a settled trust in God’s Fatherly care and a steady refusal to give in to anxieties.

I go back to this often, but **consider the disciples at the cross.** This looks awful, God looks unloving and uncaring, what will the future hold for us if our leader is being crucified? And yet the truth is that God was never more present and loving than He was on that day. Look to the cross and trust that the Lord is near. He has not abandoned you. He is still at work for your good. He is with you in the storm.

Hebrews 13:5 - Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

Romans 8:28–29 - And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

- **Think about what is good and true**

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Think about what is good. Think about the truth. **Think about what His Word says, who He is, what He has done, what He has promised.** He will not leave you. His Spirit is with you. He has overcome the world. He is always working for good. Death is not the end. Pray about everything, and come with thanksgiving for who

He is and what He has done and what He has promised, remembering that the Lord is near. And He will be with you, and His peace will guard your heart and mind. The promise is not that all will go well and be easy for you; in this world you will have trouble. The promise is that He is present in the storm and His Spirit can give you peace as you remember His sovereign love and care for you.

Matthew 10:29–31 – “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

- Following Jesus, making Him your first love

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Paul ends this section by exhorting them to actually put into practice what he has taught them. Don’t just be hearers of the word and forget what has been told to you. Do what it says! Listen to how Jesus put it:

Matthew 6:25–34 - “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? ²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. **They do not labor or spin.** ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that

you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

It is not just an exhortation to not worry. It is a call to seek Him first, and He will take care of your needs. The truth is that if you love anything or anyone more than Him, you will have anxiety, because those people or things or relationships are where your heart truly is. But if you love Jesus preeminently, then you can have peace, because nothing can take Him away from you. As Tim Keller put it:

“If your ultimate love and joy is found in the treasures of this world, then suffering will rob you of your joy and make you sadder and madder. But if your ultimate love and joy is found in God, then suffering will drive you deeper into the source of that joy.”

3) Peace with others

Finally, how do we live at peace with others? We can have peace with God and peace internally, but that certainly does not guarantee peace with others. And as those who have been reconciled to God by Jesus’ sacrificial death, we are called by Him to emulate Him by being peacemakers, to be agents of reconciliation.

Matthew 5:9 - Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Romans 14:19 - Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Hebrews 12:14 - Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

1 Peter 3:10–11 - For, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. ¹¹ They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.”

Colossians 3:15 - Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Pursue peace. We are fellow members of the same body. How can the body be at war with itself? And it is Christ's body! His honor is at stake when the body is in mutiny against each other.

The challenge that Jesus gives us is that we are to take the initiative no matter who is at fault. If we have offended someone else:

Matthew 5:23–24 - “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

And if we have been offended:

Matthew 18:15 - “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.”

Jesus does not let us off the hook but calls us to search our hearts for where there is discord in relationships, and to take the first step towards peace, recognizing of course that it takes two to make peace. But as long as it depends upon us, we are to work for peace. Jesus even calls us to love our enemies

Romans 12:17–21 - Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Who is God putting on your heart today, and what steps can you make to pursue peace?

Let us close by praying together the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.*

*Where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.*