

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

January 14, 2024 The Serenity Prayer for a New Year. "Accept the things I cannot change."

"O God and Heavenly Father, grant to us the serenity of mind to accept that which cannot be changed, courage to change that which can be changed, and wisdom to know the one from the other through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen." -Reinhold Niebuhr

I Intro.

It's still early into 2024, and there's lots to look forward to. So, make sure you stay connected to keep informed. We hope you are fed and ministered to by NCC, and that you can be an essential part of us moving forward. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know. This is our weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from Sunday's message. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. You can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey.

II Recap.

For this new year we're taking a slightly different approach to the new year and walking through "The Serenity Prayer". This prayer is used by many 12 Step programs in a modified form. But we're using the prayer the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr came up with. You can read it in its entirety at the top. We're breaking the prayer up into four parts, and last week we hit; *"Grant me the serenity of mind."* We looked at Psalm 23, and pulled out truths that can help us find serenity. That message and devotional are available on the app and website.

Today we hit a really tough aspect of this prayer. *"To accept that which cannot be changed"*.

III Sunday.

How do you feel about this next statement?

You have very little control over many of the events in your life.

HAPPY NEW YEAR! Even though deep down we know this...we don't always act like we know it or want to accept it. And it's smack dab in the middle of this tension, knowing we have little control (power) over our lives, and getting mad when we're reminded daily that we have little control over our lives, in which we lose serenity. No matter how much we do all the things that bring us closer to God, worship, read scripture, pray, help others, all of those things. If we can't wrap our minds around this one truth, true serenity, peace, will escape us. **So, what do we do with that?**

That's what today is about. And I'll begin by saying this.

You do have control over how you hold those events you can't control.

And it's in that place where we find serenity.

The passage we used for this part of The Serenity Prayer is a well known one from Paul. Paul wrote about half of the letters in the New Testament, and wrestled with this very topic of accepting what he

couldn't change. He struggled with what he referred to as a *"thorn in the flesh"*, that he continually begged God to take away. And God refused to. So...and you can see this coming, Paul had to learn; *"To accept that which cannot be changed"*. Read **2 Corinthians 5:5-10**, and we'll see what we can learn from Paul's acceptance of things that cannot be changed that we can apply to our own lives.

What jumped out to you from this passage?

What did you see in Paul's wrestling with this *"thorn in the flesh"* that speaks to accepting the things we cannot change?

And this. How did you understand Paul's explanation that God did this to keep him humble?

Here are some truths I think we can pull from this personal account from Paul. We can see Paul reflecting back on this process he went through that changed who he was, how he rethought his relationships and understanding of God, and how he handled these 'unchangeable things'.

1. Accepting what we cannot change begins with a position of humility. This means that we live in the tension of knowing our limitations. We cannot control everything. This is the baseline. Paul admitting his 'weakness' is not false humility, but owning his own limitations. He could not control everything around him, or even things about him. But that knowledge grew within him a humility, and a perspective, that created the opportunity for growth. And a healthier relationship with God.

2. Not being all powerful is a design of creation. Only God is God! And us not being God helps grow our dependence on God. Recognizing our own limitations (weakness) is surrendering to how the world works. **How many of you have come to the realization it's probably good you don't have a super power?** Would be zapping everyone all the time. If you haven't gotten to that understanding, you have some work to do. Some of the unhappiest, meanest, most manipulative people are the ones who have not yet realized they really don't have control. In addition, when Paul said God gave him *"a thorn in the flesh"*, we have to be careful of saying God deliberately is torturing Paul. God is not a mean kid with a magnifying glass deliberately choosing people to hurt. FOR OUR OWN GOOD. God built into creation limitations to keep us from misusing our power. In God's creation, God knew it was best to not give us the power to be God. Only God is trustworthy with ultimate power. This limitation causes us to seek something greater than ourselves. We just have to make the wiser choices.

3. We can only grow closer to God when we do the inner work of dealing honestly with our struggles. Our culture and society is unfortunately opposed to doing inner work. We don't talk about our weaknesses, limitations, in public. We go to church, put on a plastic face, pretend we're basically okay. Then go back to our lives inwardly struggling with something that we really need help with. Paul said he asked God "three times" to take away this thorn in the flesh. Paul knew there was nothing else anywhere that he could turn to to take away this thing that was stealing his serenity. He wasn't getting the answer he wanted or liked. But he knew it was the only direction he could turn. So, we learn that true serenity, that peace we're all looking for, to accept the things that cannot be changed, ONLY comes from continually turning to God.

4. It's in seeking God, his grace, his power, his guidance, his direction, that we find strength and resilience to *"accept that which cannot be changed"*. We have a culture that worships the

strong, independent person. People who claim they rose to success, popularity, by their own singular effort. **Why do we so admire that?** That's such a ridiculous value. And it's simply not true...ever! All of us are an accumulation of all of the people and influences in our life. And that's such a good thing...if we do it well. And Paul shows us how to do this well. Continually surrendering to the grace and trustworthy power of God. When we can admit there are things we simply don't have power over, God gives us EXACTLY what we need to find serenity in those times.

IV Challenge.

We need to wrestle with this.

What is/are your "thorn(s) in the flesh?"

How have you prayed, begged, pleaded for that thorn to be removed?

Let's wrestle with 'weakness' and 'humility'.

Paul said these two were essential to his movement towards accepting things he could not change.

What do each of these mean?

How do they apply, work with accepting what cannot be changed?

How can working this understanding into our lives help us this year?

The truths from this personal account from Paul is the realization this doesn't happen overnight. He went to God three times. Which may or may not have been actually three. Numbers back then weren't data, or details, but rather conveying a truth. Paul most likely was saying; *"I kept going to God, seeking relief, escape, from this thing that was stealing my serenity, until it finally sunk in that relief would come from my accepting God's grace rather than having this thing taken away"*. It's a process, a work, that takes time, effort, surrender, to even begin the process. But, it is possible, it's a promise, when we can admit our weakness, and humility yield to this greater source of power, his grace, to bring serenity.

This is true.

You have very little control over many of the events in your life.

But, so is this.

You do have control over how you hold those events you can't control.

And that's how we learn to; *"To accept that which cannot be changed"*.