

## **Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.**

**January 7, 2024 The Serenity Prayer for a New Year. "O God and Heavenly Father, grant to us the serenity of mind."**

*"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.**

Happy New Year!! Here we go...another new year. 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 Scripture.**

As you can see, we're starting out this year unusually. In the past couple of years we've taken a 'new start', 'reboot' approach with our theme. It's always good to clear out all the old stuff from the previous year and start fresh. However, this year we wanted to give us a type of mantra to carry throughout the year. Many of you are familiar with the abbreviated version of The Serenity Prayer used in many 12 Step programs. We are going to use the original one written by the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. The purpose of this prayer is to center us in an understanding of reality. What the world is like. So, we can do the hard things and let go of the things we have no control over.

Let's start with some questions about the new year, and the first element of The Serenity Prayer.

**What are you hoping for at the start of the year?**

**Do you have any issues or regrets you may be dragging into this year from last year?**

**And...what does 'serenity of mind' look like for you?**

The scripture we used was the very familiar 23rd Psalm. Still, go ahead and read it. Possibly from several different versions. Then we'll pull out the different elements that God offers us to give us 'the serenity of mind'.

**What jumped out to you from this very familiar passage?**

**What specific elements spoke to our need for a 'serenity of mind'?**

A serene, peaceful mind is difficult for most of us. And for many of us, especially at 3:00 a.m when our brain seems to click on at full speed, there is a veritable raging flood of thoughts, concerns, unresolved issues, and general anxiety about life. As we start out this new year, I want us to look at some promises, habits, practices, in the 23rd Psalm that if we actually lived them out would bring us the serenity of mind we all crave. And it would be a great way to start off the new year.

## **A. The spiritual elements of serenity of mind.**

There's not a whole lot that needs to be said about each of these. We will walk through them to talk briefly about them. Think and imagine different ways you can incorporate these into your daily life.

**1. The Lord is my shepherd.** This means you have someone (God) in your life, who is looking out for your well-being. Not to save you from everything bad out there. But will guide you to places to be cared for. And it's God. **So, what could it mean in 2024 that God is guiding you?**

**2. Living in contentment.** I HAVE ALL I NEED. That's an easy one isn't it. **How many of you truly live in the place where you don't feel like you have ANY needs - ANY more?** We have to honestly admit this is a tough one. We often get trapped in the self-imposed prison of what we don't have rather than what we do have. This is why we often do or don't have serenity of mind. Living in contentment is learning, growing, in the ability to be okay, content ... just where we are.

**3. Finding physical places to recharge.** This is a place only you go to not be bothered. And some of you may not have this. (Want to say; *"and it shows"*, but that tired old FB trope is wearing me out). Life is demanding and tough. The thought of finding a 'get-away' place or a moment to recharge seems impossible. But you do that at your own peril. So, we have to ask; **Where are your "green pastures and peaceful streams"?** You may have to be really creative in how you find those places. But all I can say is do everything you can to find this place. Or you'll suffer from not finding them.

**4. Naming what disturbs serenity.** I would imagine we all have these experiences regularly in some form or another. **"If I have ONE MORE person, call, text, email me, ask me..."** There is an endless barrage of things that disturb our serenity. We need to name our *"darkest valleys"*, and our *"enemies"*. We need to identify and acknowledge those things that wear us down. That wakes us up at night and steals our peace. Things that may be causing strain in some of our relationships. How else will you know what you need from God if you don't name them out loud? Not that God doesn't know them. You simply won't know when you get what you need, because you don't know what you need.

**5. Daily active relationship with God.** Constant, continual, close connection with God. We allow so much input, interaction with things in the world that create discord within us, and steal our serenity. Let the majority of your relationship time and your constant internal conversation be with God.

**6. Living in continual gratitude.** People who do this are so amazing...and honestly sometimes annoying. They're thanking God for everything. The sun, wind, rain, parking spot, no aches and pains ... everything. They're not annoying because of this. They're annoying because so many of us don't do this well. True serenity comes from living in gratitude which will grow contentment also

## **III Challenge.**

As we start this year, the real challenge to developing 'serenity of mind' is accepting there is no magical formula to make it happen. Serenity is not a gift that comes as some *"Matrix"* download. But through the practicing of disciplines taught to us through scripture. Like what we found in Psalm 23. That's where this journey begins. Learning to put each one of these truths into practice...every day! **So, of the above practices from Psalm 23 can you start this new year with as we cultivate a life that can experience the 'serenity of mind'?**