

Finding God's Peace in Circumstances Beyond my Control

Welcome to **the Final Week** of a **Stress Less Life**. Over the past 6 weeks we have been discovering how to obtain true freedom and peace so that the tyranny of stress doesn't dominate our daily lives. Through this series we have been learning how to abide in Christ and to change the way we view our lives so that we can claim the promise God has for us in His word. And here is that PROMISE: **John 10:10 (NIV) 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have LIFE, and have it to the FULL.**

As we have said each week, if this is God's promise to us **ARE YOU THRIVING or are you just SURVIVING?** Because if you are not THRIVING you are living below what God has promised you and you need to allow Him to make some changes in your life as you engage in a serious pursuit of trying to eliminate the things that are keeping you from doing so.

Through this series we have looked at how we can find peace in our SCHEDULE, our BUDGET our RELATIONSHIPS and when we are under SPIRITUAL ATTACK. Today we want to look at one last scenario where we tend to be stressed out and overwhelmed by life and that is when we face CIRCUMSTANCES BEYOND OUR CONTROL. There's an old saying that goes, **"If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans."**

There is nothing like the circumstances of life to remind us of how small and powerless we are. Whether we are talking about a pandemic, an economic recession, civil unrest, a terminal illness, the loss of a job, a natural disaster, or death of a loved one. We like to think that we are in control of our lives and everything around us. But then something happens to remind us that control is simply an illusion or a lie we tell ourselves to make us feel better about life and the world around us. The reality is we are not in control and when life forces us to face this reality if our focus is not in the right place we will easily become overwhelmed by our circumstances. Remember in week one how we defined stress. **Stress is "fearful concern experienced when life's demands seem greater than my ability to meet them."** And nothing brings this feeling on more than a circumstance that goes beyond our ability to control.

So, how do we maintain a stressless life when it appears as if everything around me is falling apart? Well, to begin with we need a change of FOCUS. **We need to stop looking at ourselves and start looking to God.** If the solution was in us, then we would've already found it. Let's face it, we have really only three options when it comes to overwhelming circumstances. We can look INWARD, we can look OUTWARD, or we can look UP!

To look INWARD is to focus on ourselves. What we are feeling, How we are being affected. And what are we going to do to regain control of the situation. The problem with this approach is there is nothing we can do to regain control because we never really had it to begin with.

To look OUTWARD is to focus on the circumstances that are spinning out of control around us. In this approach we simply keep our focus on the problem and never really find a solution while only becoming more overwhelmed by the magnitude of the situation.

So, this only leaves one other option, to LOOK UP! Look to GOD! You see, the answer is not to look at ourselves and it is not to look at the problem. It is to look to God. The ONE who has the necessary resources to solve the problem and the ONE who also has the ability to fill us with His peace no matter what the circumstance happens to be. We see a great picture of this in Gospel of Mark:

Mark 4:36-39 (NIV) 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. **37** 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?"

What happened to those disciples who just focused on the storm? They became only more afraid and their worry changed nothing. What happened to those who just focused on themselves? They would work tirelessly to remove water from the boat and get nowhere. They could bail out water but more would come in. They were utterly helpless against the waves that battered the boat. And the fear of their ultimate demise would eventually consume them. It wasn't until they turned to Jesus that things changed. Why? Because He holds all the power! Only he could change the situation! Do you believe He can change yours?

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.

We find a very similar passage in Psalms basically describing God's willingness to aid those who ask for it especially when they are in trouble and about to perish.

Psalms 107:28-30 (NIV) 28 Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. **29** He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. **30** They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven."

Notice what Jesus says to them. **Mark 4:40-41 (NIV) 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!"

When it comes to trusting God with our circumstances there are three realities we need to embrace about God if we are to truly find peace in circumstances that are beyond our ability to deal with.

Reality #1 - God is ACTIVE in this world

When difficulties strike and circumstances are beyond our ability to control it is really easy to wonder if God is taking a break or if He has abandoned His post as ruler of the universe. After

all, if He is King of all kings and Lord of all lords it's not hard to think to ourselves, **"Where is He?"** and **"Why isn't He doing something about my situation?"** But that was not Amos the prophet's response when Israel faced great circumstances beyond their control. In fact at the time Amos spoke to the Northern kingdom of Israel they were experiencing famine, drought, persecution and even a plague. But notice what Amos says to them:

Amos 4:13 (NIV) He who forms the mountains, who creates the wind, and who reveals his thoughts to mankind, who turns down to darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth, the LORD God Almighty is his name.

Amos reminds them that God is ACTIVE within His creation. He isn't sitting idly by watching things unfold by chance. He is actively orchestrating from within His creation. Notice the 5 actions God performs within His creation.

He FORMS, He CREATES, He REVEALS(DECLARES), He TURNS (MAKES), He TREADS. It is also important to note that the action being performed is an ONGOING action. It isn't just describing something God does or did. It is being described as something that is continuously taking place!! Jesus alludes to this when He says this in **John 5:17 (NIV)****"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."**

As we take a closer look at these 5 actions we see God's activity as POWERFUL, exercised in WISDOM, and ever PRESENT! The word FORMS and CREATES are translated from the same Hebrew terms used to describe God's power in creation in both Genesis 1 and 2. The word REVEALS speaks to that which is unknown and being made known. God reveals things that we would not know otherwise. Therefore, we refer to God as all knowing and all wise. Finally, when Amos uses the phrase "TREADS on the heights of the earth," he is referring to the fact that God is omnipresent - everywhere at all times. That's why the Psalmist can say with great confidence when he is faced with great difficulties: **Psalm 46:1 (NIV)** **God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.**

No matter what you and I are facing at the moment, we can have confidence that God is at work in our lives and He is at work all around us. When circumstances are spinning out of control we can find peace in knowing that God is at work even in this. **1st Reality - God is ACTIVE in this world**

Reality #2 - God is SOVEREIGN

When we say SOVEREIGN what does that mean? It means one who exercises supreme authority over all things. When we say God is sovereign we are saying that everything is under His control and authority.

Amos reveals God's sovereignty in two ways when He says, **He who forms the mountains, who creates the wind.** It is in these two images that Amos highlights two aspects of God's sovereignty. First let's start with the image of the MOUNTAINS. Mountains are a symbol of great stability. And if God made the mountains how stable is He. All else can come and go. Trees and

vegetation come and go. The soil shifts and moves around. But a MOUNTAIN has staying power. It holds its place and it is steady! It is immovable! If this is true of the mountain that God created then what is there in my life or your life that is going to move God or throw Him off. Then there is the image of the WIND. Who knows where it goes or where it comes from. It is unpredictable, mysterious and hard to pinpoint. But it is a power that God created and if He controls the wind what is there in my life or your life that He cannot control no matter how out of control it may get.

Amos wants us to know that even when circumstances want to shake us like an earthquake or swirl around us like a tornado out of control, there is nothing that can hinder the one who made both the stable mountain and the wind that blows on this earth. He is in complete control and there are no circumstances that will ever be able to exhaust His resources. **Don't let your circumstances shape the way you view God. Instead, let your God shape the way you view your circumstances.**

Colossians 1:17 (NIV) He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

1st Reality - God is ACTIVE in our world. 2nd Reality - God is SOVEREIGN over our world

Reality #3 - God is PERSONAL in our lives

I want to call your attention back to the last part of **Amos 4:13 (NIV)** He who forms the mountains, who creates the wind, and who reveals his thoughts to mankind, who turns dawn to darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth, the LORD God Almighty is his name.

In this verse Amos is pointing out that our ACTIVE, SOVEREIGN GOD has a NAME. A name you and I can know and call on. And do you know why He has a name? Because He is a person. He is not just some force or elite power in the universe. He is our GOD and He is personal. He sees you! He hears you! He loves you!

John 3:16 (NIV) "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

He is personally involved not only in our world but more specifically in my life and yours. So much so, that his very name is a place we can find refuge in from the storms of life.

Proverbs 18:10 (NIV) The name of the LORD is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.

In fact, if you've never met Jesus in a personal way, you have the opportunity to do so at any time, even right now at this moment for it is in the name of Jesus we have salvation.

Romans 10:13 (NIV) for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

All throughout this series we have seen that life is a stress test. Whether it is our schedule, our finances, our relationships, temptations, or circumstances beyond our control. All of it is a test to

see if we will press into God's peace or we are going to try and go it alone in our own power and strength. Every test is an opportunity to say, **"What am I going to do about this?"** or to say, **"Lord, what are you going to do about this?"** If we want to eliminate stress from our life and experience the peace and abundant life promised to us by God, then we need to reprogram our heart, call upon the name of our God and find refuge in Him. And the beautiful part is, when we find victory over our stress then we can share it with others and help them do the same.

Invitation:

Do we allow our circumstances to shape the way we view God? or Do we allow God to shape the way we view our circumstances?

Are you trying to use God as a means to achieve peace or is God your peace?

Remember if you are a follower of Jesus you are on mission for Christ. That mission includes following Jesus and helping others follow Him. To love God and love people. To live and walk in the abundant life that Jesus wants us to have. How can we accomplish our mission if we are caught up in stress rather than God's peace?

Would you let go of your worry, your stress, your anxiety, your fear and will you trust Him today? Trusting Him with your SCHEDULE, with your FINANCES, with your RELATIONSHIPS, with your TEMPTATIONS and with your CIRCUMSTANCES!

Remember He is immovable like the mountains He created. If He can contain and control the wind, then my circumstances and your circumstances are nothing for Him. Would you enter into His rest and abide in His peace?