

The library at the college I attended was on top of a hill and one of the more arduous climbs on campus. One day, I came out and decided to take the shortcut down. I could have walked the fifteen extra steps to take the stairs and sidewalk. But no, I was taking the dirt path immediately to the left of the library door. There was one problem though. It had been raining, hard. The conditions were not conducive to an easy walk back to the dorm. I realized this two steps in, already on the decline. I heard a small splash, looked down at my feet, and saw I was standing not on a dirt path but a mudslide. And before I knew it, my feet were above my head, my back was crashing down, and I went for the ride of my life. I got a good look at my shoes as I slid down and realized what an idiot I was. They were an old, worn out pair of tennis shoes ill-equipped for walking on anything other than pavement. The good news? I got down the hill in a hurry. The bad news? It took me out for some time as I had to go change.

That story is a picture of what can happen in our spiritual lives. We may find ourselves in some rainy, muddy conditions in life that's difficult to stand firm in if we're wearing the wrong shoes. And in those moments, the devil is eager to destabilize us, cause us to lose our footing and fall on our tail, and take us out of the battle we've been talking about for the last three weeks. Thankfully, God has a pair of shoes for us to put on and stay in the fight when the chaos comes.

**[Ephesians 6:13-15] 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.**

In a passage, and a spiritual war, where we're told to withstand, stand firm, and stand, it's vital that we have the right shoes on our feet, particularly when the rains of worry, anxiety, strife, and division come to rob us of our peace and take us out. God gives us those shoes.

Paul uses the imagery of the shoes worn by a Roman soldier. These were called *caliga* and, as you can see in the picture, were a sandal that went to mid-shin area and on the soles were what's called hobnails, like cleats on athletic shoes. These were heavy, sturdy shoes that dug into the ground, giving the Roman soldier a solid foundation to hold his ground and maintain his balance.

**For us, the gospel of peace is the sure-footed foundation from which we fight the battle.**

When we put on the gospel of peace we have balance and, as the passage says, a readiness or preparedness to engage the enemy when he attacks.

It's important we understand this word "peace". In Greek it's *eirene*, the equivalent of the Hebrew *shalom*. This word means more than an absence of conflict. Larry Richards defines it as **"Harmony, health, and wholeness that are to mark a believer's relationship with himself, with God, and with others."** It is the flourishing life God intended in the beginning and Jesus came to restore. When Satan schemes to rob us of our peace, his attacks come in one of those three areas. If he can bring chaos where God has made peace possible, he does damage to us and hinders our ability to be effective for God. So let's look at each of those areas, how the devil attacks, and how we can put on this foundational piece of armor. Start with God.

**[Romans 5:1] Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

We need to start with our relationship with God. If we have peace with him, peace is possible elsewhere. If we don't have peace with him, peace is impossible anywhere else. We will talk much more about this in the coming weeks, so some high level here. When sin entered the world, man became an enemy of God. God wasn't just a little upset, didn't say "try harder next time". He cast mankind out of his presence. **But the gospel of peace says the Prince of Peace came to make peace through his life, death, and resurrection.** Jesus took on the guilt of our sins and made us right with God, justified us. And because we are right with him, we are no longer his enemy but are, instead, at peace. When God looks at us, he sees the righteousness of his son, and says, "We're good." Not until we mess up again. Not until he changes his mind. But forever.

Rest in this. The devil is going to try to get you to doubt God's goodness, the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice in light of the enormity of your sin, and Jesus' proclamation "It is finished." Don't believe it. Jesus is enough, you are secure, and the peace with Christ can now dwell in you and dwell in your relationship with others. If you want to be at peace with God, by faith admit you are a sinner and accept Christ's death to pay for your sins. You can leave here with God looking at you and saying, "We're good."

So how does peace with God produce peace in us? We live in tumultuous, chaotic times. I get paid the big bucks to give such insightful observations! We live in a broken world ruled by an enemy of us and enemy of God and, at times, it looks like he's winning. And he wants to use these chaotic circumstances to get us off balance, afraid, and so overwhelmed with worry that we are no good for God or anyone else. If you've ever seen someone wracked with fear or anxiety, you know their helplessness and also know it can be contagious. We also have a news media that plays right into his hands. Their economic model has now connected growing profits to getting us stirred up more and more. Satan uses all that to get us to believe it's not going to be ok, there's a threat around every corner. Moms, ever feel panicky about letting your kids out into this world, the culture, the neighborhood, the internet? I know someone who just took a prayer-saturated bold step of faith in the Lord, made some serious changes, and occasionally starts to doubt if he made the right decision. Satan is trying to rob him of his peace. He wants to get us to focus on the risks and chaos and take our eyes off the Lord, because that's when we slip and fall.

Think about when Jesus called Peter out of the boat. Peter was walking on water for a bit. But when he took his eyes off Jesus and started to pay attention to the heavy waves, he began to sink. That's what Satan wants to get us to do. He knows a chaotic life is a compromised life.

So then how do we put on these shoes of peace and stand firm? **[SLIDE] Fight from your knees.**

**[Philippians 4:4-7] <sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

Just like peace with God is through Jesus Christ, so is peace within ourselves. The way we put it on is through the discipline of prayer. Rejoicing, praising, making requests, and offering thanksgiving all bring us to peace. How does prayer do that?

The Lord is at hand. He is near, and **proximity produces peace**. Don't believe me? If you are here with your mother, turn to her right now and say, "thank you". I want us to do that because somewhere between 200-500 times in your life you were scared, nervous, afraid, worried, and you ran to your momma and once you were with her, it was all ok. Mom was at hand.

If you are a follower of Jesus, God's Spirit dwells within you and it's through prayer where we experience his presence. Additionally, prayer reminds us who God is. If he is worthy of our prayer, he is bigger than anything we are facing. That's comforting. Jesus tells us to cast our anxieties on him. Prayer is the way we stop trying to carry our burdens on our own. Thanksgiving reminds us of how he has poured out his grace and power on us in the past and how we be assured he'll do it again.

A few nights ago I was up at 3:00 AM lacking peace. Several car issues, a need to get surgery on my sinuses, and a fresh termite infestation, so grand that the exterminators first comment was "whoa!" Not to mention all things Fellowship...I think about you all in the middle of the night! And I was stirred up. But guess what I was preparing for? This message. Guess what passage I had looked at earlier that day? Philippians 4. So I tried it. I praised God. I thanked him for his goodness. I remembered how he has shown up time and again in the past. And the more I prayed, the more I was putting on the shoes of peace. And I fell back asleep and did ok. NOT TODAY, SATAN!

What really stirs you up? What knocks you off your feet? What do you do when that happens? What are you worried about right now? Your kids? Finances? Health? This mess of a world? Satan wants you to be overwhelmed by that. He wants to steal your peace. He wants you to feel like you've got to bear a burden yourself. But know this. **[SLIDE: Isaiah 26:3]** <sup>3</sup> **You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.** God is waving his hands inviting you to exchange your anxiety for his peace. The Lord is at hand.

Satan also knows if you lack inner peace, you'll struggle to have peace with others. If his goal is to divide people, doesn't it look like he's having a field day? He not only wants to separate us from God, he wants to separate us from each other. He sows division, encourages strife, puts our focus on our differences instead of what unites us. He tells us we are entitled, he rehearses the hurt for us (anyone else a card-carrying member of the Grudge Holders Anonymous?), he tells us we're the victims, and he's happy to suggest accusations of others to us. Devil means accuser, and he's got plenty.

Go back to the Garden. What happens when God finds Adam and Eve hiding from him after they've sinned. Adam says, "This woman that you gave me." Kids/students, the devil loves when you all fight with one another and your house descends into chaos. Married couples, when you start accusing your spouse in your head and heart, Satan may be up to something. Fellowship, our church has been under attack the last few years as we've gone through changes and pursued deeper discipleship and greater Kingdom impact. **In relationships, where chaos exists, love is**

**stified.** And when relational harmony is shattered, the result is broken homes, broken friendships, isolation, and divided churches.

Let's not lose sight of the fact that Paul is using a soldier as his illustration. We battle not on our own but with one another, in formation. And if he can break our ranks, we're exposed and vulnerable, the glory of our God is diminished and the great witness we are called to is compromised. Romans quotes Isaiah when it says, "**How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!**" A runner would return home from battle and let everyone know how it went. We are sent to run to a broken world with the good news of the Gospel and the victory of Jesus. If we are divided from one another, we'll never be effective in that. So, how do we put on peace?

**Run to the cross.** Like peace with God and peace within ourselves, peace between us is also through Jesus. If you go back a few chapters to Ephesians 2, Paul lays out the power of the cross in human relationships. Before Jesus, Jews and Gentiles were separate and enemies. They were like Cardi B and Nikki Minaj. But through Jesus, what was broken is now reconciled.

**[Ephesians 2:13-15] <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> ...that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.**

Jesus' work on the cross defuses and defeats anything that might come between us. When we go there, we begin to put on these shoes. Why? The ground is level at the cross. We are all sinners in desperate need for a Savior. No one is better than the other. The cross reminds us we are all forgiven. If our holy God is willing to forgive, who are we to withhold forgiveness from anyone else? The cross reminds us sin will be punished. That means we don't have to. Vengeance belongs to God. We can let go. And the cross reminds us how far our Savior came to make peace between us and God. He asks us to follow his example.

**[2 Corinthians 13:11] <sup>11</sup> Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.**

The distance between us and someone else is nothing compared to the distance between heaven and earth. The cost to forgive someone is nothing compared to the cost Jesus paid to win our forgiveness. The cross makes us eager to put on these shoes, combat the accusations of the enemy, and pursue peace with one another. Who are you thinking about right now? There's a relationship in your life right now that you would not characterize as peaceful. Are you going to go first? I have a couple I need to pray about because they are not right. I want to know what God will ask of me. Will you do the same? You have everything you need to make that right.

There is so much to knock us off our feet these days. It can be overwhelming, it can crush us and our relationships. So I close with the words of Jesus. Hours before he went to the cross, he said to his disciples [**John 14:27**] **“<sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”** And three days later, the resurrected Jesus appeared to that same set of disciples, and you know the first thing he said to them? It wasn't “How are you?” “I'm back.” “Romans...” It was “Peace be with you.” And in case they didn't hear it the first time, he said it again.

Jesus doesn't ignore or deny the chaos in this world. He came to fix it and pour out his grace so we can have peace in the midst of it all. Whatever you've got going on, he knows it, the Lord is at hand, and his peace is available. Let us put it on so that we can stand firm.