

### **What is Peace?**

- This week, we continue our celebration of Advent, a time of anticipation for the arrival of Christ. Our focus will be on Peace. For many, the holiday season can feel anything but peaceful, as it is often filled with gift shopping, decorating, events, and family gatherings. This period can quickly turn into a whirlwind of stress, fatigue, and chaos.
- What brings you peace and comfort during challenging times? We all seek different sources of solace. The things we rely on for peace are typically temporary and situational – whether it's shopping, food, alcohol, television, work, exercise, social media, relationships, sexual gratification, etc. These momentary pleasures seldom provide lasting satisfaction, often leaving us feeling worse afterward and transforming into idols.
- So, what is peace? How do we define it?
  - a state of tranquility or quiet (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)
  - a state in which there is no war or fighting (Cambridge English Dictionary)
  - the state of not being interrupted or annoyed by worry, problems, noise, or unwanted actions (Cambridge English Dictionary)

How often do we truly experience any of these states? ALMOST NEVER!

- What is biblical peace?
  - 3 words for peace in the bible: Shalom (root of shalom)/ Shalom/ Eiréné (i-ray'-nay)
    - well-being; to restore or reconcile; completeness, wholeness; peace
- Jews expected the Messiah to bring peace as a warrior coming with swords and to overturn the Romans. They expected worldly peace – no more oppression or struggle. God's answer to the threats and bullies of the world was a baby born in Bethlehem who was and is the Prince of Peace.
  - Isaiah 9:6 ~ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (NIV)
- Biblical peace is more than just the temporary absence of conflict or a state of rest. In fact, far more often than not, it does not even include those. It points to the presence of something else. It embodies a state of inner peace and serenity that is divinely inspired and not of this world. Through Jesus, we can attain peace with God, experience inner tranquility, and foster harmony with others.

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### **Peace with God**

- When we are out of alignment or a part of us is missing, we do not experience "Shalom." Biblical peace involves mending what is fractured and bringing it back to a state of wholeness. Our sin broke the relationship with God, created a separation, and made us His enemy. Jesus restored the broken relationship between humans and God and brought Shalom.

- Romans 5:10 ~ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (NIV)
  - Ephesians 2:13 ~ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (ESV)
  - Romans 5:1 ~ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (ESV)
  - Jesus Christ is the only path to Shalom with God.
    - John 14:6 ~ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (NIV)
  - He took on the curse of sin so that all who are united to Him by faith receive His blessing of peace. He experienced unimaginable pain so that we can know endless peace. Only through Christ and His blood can our relationship with God be restored. Only through a restored relationship with God can we experience His peace.
    - Psalms 29:11 ~ The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace. (NIV)
  - You **must** have the spirit of God in you to have a chance at peace. That only comes through surrender and salvation. His presence brings peace.
    - John 14:25-27 "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (NIV)
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### **Inner Peace**

- As mentioned earlier, inner peace starts with a relationship with Christ. We gain immediate access when we surrender and receive the Holy Spirit. This peace flourishes and continues as we seek Him and deepen our relationship with Him. The tranquility that God offers enables us to trust in Him, even as we navigate a world that is broken, chaotic, and often frightening.
- True peace is an attitude of tranquility despite adversity. The Bible does not guarantee that hardships will vanish or that conflicts will end for believers. In fact, quite the contrary is true. Scripture assures us that we WILL encounter difficulties, and we will be hard-pressed.
  - John 16:33 ~ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. (ESV)
  - 2 Cor. 4:8-9 ~ We may be hard pressed on all sides, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. (NIV)

Matthew 24:6-8 says there will be future wars. However, in both Hebrews and Deuteronomy, we are told He will never leave us or forsake us. The promise that God makes is His

unwavering presence, which allows us to experience an unexplainable peace that transcends our circumstances.

- Philippians 4:6-7 ~ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (ESV)
  - Experiencing the peace of God is like sitting in the eye of the storm. The storm may be raging around me, but it's not overwhelming me. I don't feel the weight of its wrath and strength. It is only through faith in God that I can discover a serene and tranquil center within.
    - Psalm 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (ESV)
  - God will allow and use adversity to grow our faith and show us that He is trustworthy, and He is sufficient. In Matthew 14, Jesus had the power to calm the storm. He had done it in the past. He could have crushed Rome. In our lives, Jesus could change the diagnosis, pay the bill, heal our loved one, prevent the job loss. Yet, at times, He invites us to walk toward Him and focus on Him, even amidst the rising waves, so He can demonstrate that He is Lord over ALL the storms. We must stop focusing on the storm and start focusing on the Savior.
  - Inner peace is there for the choosing. It is not merely a theoretical concept; it is real and fully possible. The trials will inevitably come, but where do we place our gaze and our thoughts? We have to choose to trust God within the trials and keep our focus on Him.
    - Psalm 34:4-8 ~ I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. (NIV)
  - Do you fight to keep your eyes and mind focused on God?
  - Are you making choices in your life that bring peace or chaos?
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### **Peace with Others**

- Jesus empowers us through His Spirit to become peacemakers in our interactions with our friends, neighbors, and even our enemies. In Him, we can foster fellowship, achieve reconciliation, and coexist in harmony with one another.
- Until we have peace within ourselves and walk in that peace, peace with others is nearly impossible. Peace with others requires humility, patience, forgiveness, self-control, and bearing with others in love.
  - Colossians 3:13-15 ~ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule

in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. (NIV)

- Matthew 5:9 ~ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (NIV)
  - Romans 12:18 ~ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (NIV)
  - Romans 14:19 ~ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. (NIV)
  - Ephesians 4:1-3 ~ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (ESV)
  - 2 Corinthians 13:11 ~ Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. (NIV)
  - Hebrews 12:14a ~ Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; (NIV)
  - This matters because as believers we are representatives of Christ and because He told us to be peacemakers. This does not imply that we need to maintain close or intimate relationships with everyone. For some individuals, God has led us to distance ourselves from relationships that are unhealthy or do not honor Him. However, we are still called to strive and make every effort be a peacemaker while still honoring and obeying God and not compromising our testimony or faith. Through Christ this is possible!
  - Is there somewhere in your own world that you can be a peacemaker this Christmas?
  - Is there a fractured relationship that you can repair? An apology you need to make?
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### **Fostering Peace in Our Lives**

1. We must have the spirit of God in us to have a chance at peace.
2. Worship the Lord- Turn your heart Godward - in rejoicing and in lament.
  - Philippians 4:4-5 ~ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. (NIV)
3. We need to 'feed' our spirit, which produces peace. Our roots grow deeper by getting into His Word, the Bible, and in prayer, and simply spending time with the Lord. Which dog are we feeding? What are we watching and listening to? Who are we spending time with? Are these things that feed our spirit or our flesh? What we put in our mind and heart is what comes out. If we are not continually filling our minds and hearts with things of God, then things of God will not be what pours out of us onto others.

- Galatians 5:22-23a ~ But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; (ESV)
4. We must fight for peace by taking our thoughts captive and choosing to dwell only on those things that are of God. We have to truly fix our mind and eyes on Him. There is no way to have peace or spread peace when we are focusing on the details of life or the chaos.
- 2 Corinthians 10:5 ~ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. (ESV)
  - Romans 8:6 ~ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. (NIV)
  - 1 Peter 3:11 ~ They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. (NIV)
  - Philippians 4:8 ~ 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. (NIV)
  - Isaiah 26:3 ~ You keep Him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because He trusts in You. (ESV)
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- We are living in challenging times, surrounded by a culture of revenge and retribution. However, the peace of God transcends our circumstances and the world around us. We can find comfort in the assurance that He will return to restore all things. Our sense of peace should not be confined to ourselves. The peace of God residing within us has the potential to spark curiosity in those who do not yet believe in Christ. They will see us exercise a spirit of tranquility and faith, and they will want to know the reason for our faith in shaky times. When they ask, we can have a reason at the ready. “I am not afraid because I have the peace of Christ.”
  - 1 Peter 3:15 ~ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (NIV)
- Do you have the peace that passes all understanding living within you? That can’t happen without you giving your life to Christ and allowing Him to rule and His Holy Spirit to dwell within you.
- If you do have the Holy Spirit within you, are you listening? Are you keeping your eyes and ears focused on Christ or are you distracted by the world? Are you a peacemaker?

We as Christians shouldn’t be saying in fear and stress “what has the world come to?” We should be saying in peace and confidence, “Now, look what has come to the world!!”

2 Thessalonians 3:16 ~ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. (NIV)