



TIME OF GRACE®

Help Me Have More: Peace

Study Notes

Summary

If you were unjustly accused of a crime, brutally beaten, and tossed into a prison cell, what would you do? While such things may not happen to you any time soon, you will endure plenty of unexpected losses and deeply felt pains in your life. This is why the story of Paul and Silas in prison is so powerful. These two early Christians faced their suffering with bold, peaceful faith by praying and singing to God. This detail in Acts 16 reminds us of the spiritual power of a Grow Root, that is, having a daily connection with our heavenly Father.

- **Top 5 Peace-Thieves**

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

- **2 Thessalonians 3:16a** — Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.
- Peace isn't _____.
- **John 16:33a** — I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble.
- Peace is _____.
- **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.
- **Philippians 4:5b, 7** — The Lord is near....And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- **Luke 2:14** — “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”
- **Colossians 1:20b** — ...by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.
- **John 20:19b** — “Peace be with you!”
- **Romans 5:1** — Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Points to Ponder

1. Google the lyrics to the worship song, *Christ Be Magnified*. Which phrases are your favorites? How do they increase the joy and peace you find in Jesus?
2. What is the connection between spiritual peace and a generous heart? In other words, how does having God present in your life free you to open your hands and give to others?
3. How does doing life with other Christians increase the peace you find in God?

Homework for Next Week

Read 1 Timothy 1:15-17

Time of Grace Ministry
Help Me Have More: Peace

2 Thessalonians 3:16; John 16:33; Philippians 4:5,7; Luke 2:14; Colossians 1:20; John 20:19;
Romans 5:1
August 21, 2022

Pastor Mike Novotny

The clicks, the news, the car wreck effect that you just want to watch. But I have a hunch that deep down, you're a lot like me. That at the end of the day, you don't want doom and gloom, you want peace. You want joy. In this doom-and-gloom, train-wreck kind of world; I mean, how do you find in the middle of life, you know, how would I define peace? Just the ability to take a breath, and to tell yourself that it's really going to be okay.

When you train your heart to say things like, "But God." Yeah. This is bad, it's scary, this is freaky. I don't know how this is going to turn out, but God is still on the throne. Or, like some of you say, God's got this. I don't got this. Feels like the system doesn't got this, but there is a God, he's my God, and he's got this. That's what peace looks like. But I probably don't have to tell you that peace is not simple. There are so many things you can read, there are so many things that people can do. There are so many things you can think in your own heart, that make the fruits of peace, as the Bible calls it, elusive, difficult, and rare.

In fact, the other day, I made a list of what I'm going to call my top-five peace thieves. Like, the things that steal our peace, and what was really depressing about this list was how easy it was to make. Right. I didn't have to research. I didn't have to Google it. Like, yep, yep, yep. See if you can relate to any of this.

The first peace thief that I thought of was financial. It's when you instinctively worry because even if you live in first-world America, you just, you don't have enough money. Maybe, you don't have enough money to pay the rent, to make the mortgage, to move out of mom and dad's house. Maybe, you don't have enough money to go to college without ending up with, like, six-figures of crippling student loans. Maybe, there's medical bills, or paying for your divorce, the lawyer's fees you're just not caught up on. Maybe, you know that you should be investing early, you read that all the time. But you just don't have enough, maybe you're getting older and you don't have enough to invest. Maybe, you want to retire but you're not even close. Maybe, you don't have a reliable car, good transportation, right? Maybe, you're one of those people who are just making minimum payments on a credit card that you don't even want to look at anymore, and you're just one thing -- like, one little check engine light, one little phone call from the creditors, and it would all fall apart. That's what's it like to have financial fear and worry.

Number two, there's physical. Like, how can you not worry when you are living in your body? Right? When you, or someone you really care about, has or could soon get cancer, or COVID, depression, or diabetes, anxiety, or an autoimmune disorder. I know healthy, marathon-running

people who wake up one day and the doctors find a lump, and they can't fix it. And as you get older, you know this gets worse, right? You think you're going to avoid it by eating right, and you can make things a little bit better, but eventually, the bones get brittle, and the joints get creaky, and sounds come out of you when you get up or try to sit down, the memories fade. You can't remember people's names, the Bible says that our bodies are in bondage to decay, which means you ain't getting better. And we laugh about it because it's true, but when you get up and you hurt, or you have migraines and it's not fixing it when you're on medication, and it's not getting better, that just -- it just robs you of the okay-ness that we call peace.

Or how about number three, relational. Having a weak heart is hard. But having a broken heart is harder. I actually think that you could be broke, and your body could be broken, but if all of your relationships were strong, you could probably get through it. But the fact is for most of us, life isn't like that. Some of you had a dad who made you, but he didn't make you a priority. He was man enough to make love to a woman, but he wasn't man enough to actually love his own children. Some of you would love to settle down and find the one. You're dating, you're trying, you're online, you're out, and you're asking friends, but it just isn't working. And some of you do have a ring on your finger, but there's some days when deep in your heart, you regret it, even if you haven't said it. Some of you would love to have children, or more children, but you can't. Some of you have children, lots of children, but they don't love you like they should. Some of you have extended family get-togethers that are more have-tos than get-tos. They're obligations instead of amazing opportunities, and when life is like that, you know, even Hollywood tells us, family is everything. Family is everything. But when your family is not great, that's hard to come home to.

And if all that wasn't enough to depress you in a sermon introduction, how about number four, the cultural. Do you ever read the news like I do, and just think, this has got to be it. Right? Y'all better get right with Jesus real fast, because he's coming back by Friday at the latest. Probably Tuesday. There's -- it's everything. There's disaster, there's natural disaster, there's people being stupid all the time. Writers and pastors will forever have a job because people are dumb, right? And they go crazy and everything is broken, no one trusts the government, no one trusts the hospitals, no one trusts the church. Everyone's doing their own thing. It's like the time of the Judges, it feels like the world is fraying, and you just got to wonder how much longer. If the people who had "The end is near," signs used to seem crazy, they used to, right? But culture's -- it's jacked up, and it just doesn't seem like we're going to turn the corner, does it?

But I saved the worst for last, the fifth peace thief is spiritual. That's like the woman who recently emailed me and said, "Before I became a Christian, I did this one thing, and I don't know if Jesus can forgive it." It's when you look in the mirror, and you see the things that other people can't. It's when you really wonder, if people knew you, like the church people, if they knew the whole story about you instead of the PG-13 version you've cut and edited just to be socially acceptable, what would they say? And if they would say that, and they're jacked-up, broken, sinful people, what would God say? Sinless, holy, pure. And when you feel distant from God, when you have that little doubt in the back of your heart that you're good with God and right with God and God is with you and God is for you, it is hard at the end of the day to have peace.

So, you put all of that together, the financial, the physical, the relational, the cultural, the spiritual, some of you have some of it. A few of you have all of it. The big question I want to try to answer with you today is, how in the world can people like us find peace? We can't fix all of that. We can't fix most of that, so how is it possible to live with peace?

Well, I want to ask that question today of the earliest Christians. Did you know that some of Jesus' first followers, guys like the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Peter, they dealt with almost everything on that list, and sometimes they dealt with all of the things on the list at the same time? The Bible says they were sometimes physically broken, financially broke, and emotionally broken-hearted over the messed-up culture they lived in. Peter and Paul in particular had huge regrets, spiritual regrets, in their past. Remember, Peter was the guy who denied that he even knew Jesus multiple times. And Paul was the guy who was murdering Jesus' friends, multiple times.

And yet, when guys like Peter and Paul picked up the pen, or spoke to their scribe, and wrote down the words that you find in this book, they spoke all the time about peace. Check out this one passage from the Apostle Paul. In 2 Thessalonians 3, he said: "Now may the Lord of Peace himself give you peace," here's the part that gets me: "at all times, and in every way." All the time, peace, Paul talked about. And Peter had a line where he said, "May grace and peace be yours in abundance." So the early Christians didn't just say, well, yeah, you know, if it happens, it happens. No, they were wishing, hoping, praying, and teaching, that people just like you could have an abundant amount of peace, all the time, and in every way.

Which begs the huge question, right? How could they feel that way, how could they think that way, given the brokenness of this world? I'm going to answer that question for you today with an open Bible, and here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to tell you what peace isn't. I'm going to tell you what peace is. And then, I'm going to tell you how to get more of it.

All right, so grab a pen if you're taking notes. Here's what peace isn't, according to the New Testament. Peace isn't a perfect life. Like, if you're thinking, I know, I know, I know. I just got to fix this. And there's this thing happening at home, and there's this bill I have to pay, and I'm -- but once I get past that, then I'll breathe. Jesus himself would say, "Not even close." Look what he said in John 16, the night before he bled. He said, "I've told you these things so that in me, you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart," he went on to say: "I have overcome the world." Jesus wasn't teaching a peace post-trouble, but a peace in the midst of trouble, which is oddly good news, because it means if you're in the midst of trouble, you're not exempt from peace.

All right, so, if peace isn't a perfect life, you want to say, okay, then what is it? Let me show you two passages from Paul. Back to 2 Thessalonians 3. He said: "Now may the Lord of Peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way." Period. Next sentence, would you read it with me? "The Lord be with all of you." Now, that is shocking if you know the context of this book of the Bible. You long-time Christian, church-going, Bible-reading people might know that the apostle Paul was writing to Christians in the Greek city of Thessalonica. It's why we call it

Thessalonians. And he had actually started their church years before. You can read about it in the Book of Acts, Acts 17. And Thessalonica was really unique, because it was one of the hardest places where the Apostle Paul pastored. In fact, do you know how long the Apostle Paul lasted in Thessalonica? Three weeks. The opposition to Christianity was so intense in that city that even Paul, who was ready to die for Jesus, had to bolt out of town before he was murdered. Can you imagine? Pastor starts a church, grand-opening Sunday, bring your friends next week. Hey, we did. Third week. Things are going great. Fourth week. Pastor's gone. And yet, Paul writes back to these Christians and he says, "Oh, yeah. Do you know what I want for you? Peace. At all times." And before the Thessalonians could say, "You know the guys you ran from? Yeah, they're still my neighbors, Paul." He said, "Oh, yeah, and the Lord be with all of you."

It's pretty similar to what he said to the Philippians. Have you heard this passage before from Philippians 4? He said: "The Lord is near, and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Like, there's this kind of peace that transcends understanding. It means your friends will look at you and they'll say, why aren't you worrying? Why aren't you freaking out? Did you hear what happened? Did you hear what the government did? How can you feel that way? And you can quote Paul's words, who by the way, was in jail when he wrote these words, he says, "But don't forget, the Lord is near." So, write this down. Peace in the Bible is not a perfect life, peace is a person. Peace is knowing that God himself is here, that the Lord is near. That the Lord is with all of you. That is how Peter and Paul and Jesus encouraged us to find supernatural peace.

Kind of reminds me of the woman who worked at the credit card calling center. There's this woman who had that tough job of answering phone calls from people who were really mad because their credit cards won't work, and after being on hold for 32 minutes on average. But one day before her shift, she had scheduled a doctor's appointment, and at the doctor's appointment, she got some really hard news, and that peace thief just robbed her of feeling okay. There was a bad diagnosis, she didn't see it coming. She's super shaken, and she gets in the car. She's got to get to work, and on the way, she dials up her husband, and he doesn't answer. And so, she quickly dials her only son, and he doesn't pick up. And she gets to work and she's panicking, but she wants to be professional, so she just pushes down all the emotions, she puts on the headset, clicks the button for the first call, and she says, "Hello, sir. Thanks for waiting. What's your name?" And the guy on the other end of the line says, "Max." "Oh, hi, Max, what's your last name?" "Lucado." "Wait. Max Lucado?" "Yep." "The Max Lucado, like, author of a billion Christian books? Max Lucado?" And he blushed on the other end of the line, "Yep."

Now, by coincidence, this particular woman had read many of Max Lucado's inspirational Christian books. In fact, she had a Max Lucado book sitting on her nightstand when she left her home that very morning. And after she fan-girled for a little bit, Max asked her, "How are you today?" And as he tells the story in one of his books, there was 60 seconds of nothing on the other end of the line. Until all of her worry and all of her fear came spilling out, and Max, being Max, he responded with grace, and with presence. He was quick to listen, he was filled with compassion. He talked her off that ledge. He restored to her, her peace. He didn't cure her physical problem. He was just a person.

Now, no offense to Max Lucado, Max, if you're watching -- you're not watching. But the God that you worship, the God who's going to go home with you in the car today, the God who is in this space, in this moment, is so much better than some Christian author. Max has compassion, but God is the Father of all compassion. Max has wisdom that he learned from the Bible, God is the source of wisdom and he wrote the Bible. Max can quote a few verses he remembers from the Holy Scriptures, but the Holy Spirit is the one who inspired all of the scriptures. And this is why the Bible says if you have God in your heart, if God is in the room, you're going to be okay. A God of power and of grace, a God of wisdom and of compassion. He knows about the whole list, and he says, "Be still. I got it."

To me, that is such insanely good news. If you came to church today, if you're watching on TV or online today, and I told you, "You could have peace, all you have to do is pay off all your debt, lose 25 pounds, fix that thing with your mom, and here's this dating app I found." Like, for many of you, you'd say, I can't. If this was some self-help, seven-step thing, many of you would never find peace. But if it is true that peace is a person, then peace is always possible. Then your life could be a total train-wreck, then you could go home with a tan-line of the wedding ring you no longer wear, eating a Salisbury steak Hungry Man dinner, watching mindless television, dealing with the burdens of life, and in the midst of it, but God. But God is right here with me. And God is for me, and God knows how to work out all things for my eternal good.

When we use big words like Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, or he has justified us. These are all just fancy ways of saying, he makes us good enough to be in the same place as the right person. And maybe that's why it's not shocking that when I studied the word peace in the Bible, what came up again and again and again was the story of Jesus. I'll keep this part quick, but did you know, if you would read the New Testament and look at the birth of Jesus, the death of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus, the meaning of Jesus, a word that runs like a thread through all of it is the word peace.

Let me show it to you lightning fast. When Jesus was born, an angel told a bunch of shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Years later, the Apostle Paul talked about the cross of Jesus Christ, and he said that God was, "Making peace through Jesus' blood shed on the Cross." A few days later on Easter Sunday, when Jesus arose from the dead, he crashed his friend's pity party, and the first thing that he said when he smiled in the upper-room was? Peace. Peace be with you, he said. And then he said it again, and later, when the early Christians thought about what it meant to be a Christian, here's how they put it. They said, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God." We have a God who is near. We have a God who is right here.

So, let me ask you one last time. What are you afraid of? Are your fears financial? I know a person. I know a person who controls the global economy. I know a person who can use the craziness of pandemics to put extra checks in your bank account. I know a person who can get you a job that you never thought was possible. I know a person who can put a new career path in front of you, and best of all, I know a person who can make you content with your life, even if you never make a dollar more.

Are your fears cultural, or relational? I know a person. I know a person who, for the last thousands of years, has flipped marriages that seemed like they were over, and restored them to be stronger than they ever were before. I know a person who used the madness and injustice of the Roman empire to bring about your forgiveness. I know a person who takes what the enemy meant for evil, and he turns it for good. I know a person who's like the Judo Jesus, who thinks that he's losing, and then he flips it, and you find out, it was actually a blessing. I know a person.

Are your fears spiritual? Do you carry secrets, darkness, guilt, shame? I know a person who says he already forgave you. I know a person who hung on a cross 2,000 years ago and said, "It's finished." I know a person who said that he forgives you so completely that God's face shines upon you, and if you magnify this person, friends, you will find peace.

And that's why I'm glad you're here. You could be watching pre-season football right now. You could be doom scrolling on your phone right now. And I hope, in some small or big way, you have more peace right now, because for the past few minutes I've been talking about a person. I hope you sign up for a Bible reading plan, so God every day can remind you of a person. I hope you join a group and do life together with other Christians, so you're constantly reminded of this person. I hope you come to church every single Sunday, watch online, on TV, week after week, so in this crazy, broken world, that we can't control or change, there is someone reminding you that there is a person, his name is Jesus, and he is for you, and best of all, he is with you. Because friends, if you have roots like that, maybe not today, and maybe not tomorrow, but in time, guess what else you'll get? The fruit of peace. Let's pray.

Dear God, thank you. Thank you for being right here. Collectively, in this room, people watching through a screen, there are billions of sins represented that would give you every reason to turn your back, but you don't. Instead, you turn toward us, just like you sent your son for us. And because of faith in Jesus, we have you, and because of you, we can have peace. I pray especially for all my tender-hearted brothers and sisters who are here today, for those who are prone to worry, who get anxious very easily. Send your Holy Spirit, God, to do in them what they cannot do for themselves. To remember this truth, that you are God, and you are not a small God. You're God.

I pray, Heavenly Father, for a kind of peace that goes beyond understanding. It might possibly be our greatest witness in this dark world. When everyone's panicking, when everyone's angry, when everyone leaves that caps-lock on and needs to throw in their two cents in the comment's section, we can be the kind of people who are okay. Because we know it's going to be okay, because you've told us just that much.

Thank you, Jesus, for working in all things for the good of your church. Thank you for promising that you would never leave us and never forsake us, and I pray that today, in just a small way, we'd walk out these doors and be filled with that great gift, the fruit of peace. We want it, we need it, and because of you, we can have it. We pray this, Jesus, in your beautiful name, and all God's people said, amen.