

INTRODUCTION

There's a lot of uncertainty in our world today. And a lot of people are afraid. I once met a man who was so distraught about the results of the presidential election. He was in inner turmoil and said that the next four years were going to be the worst in American history. And he was so upset, so despondent, so worried. I just looked at him and I said, "I got news for you. God is still on his throne. Our God reigns, and he is in charge." And I asked if he was praying for the president, and he admitted he had not prayed for him. And I told him that I had not prayed for him either, but I started that day and hope to continue for the next four years to pray for our president every morning. And I hope that you will too. In the future, you may be afraid. I'm here to tell you, "Don't be afraid." God reigns, and he's in charge.

In his wonderful book, *Peace with God*, Billy Graham wrote these words, "The sea was beating against the rocks in huge, dashing waves. The lightning was flashing. The thunder was roaring. The wind was blowing, but a little bird was asleep in the crevice of the rock, its head serenely under its wings, sound asleep. That is peace, to be able to sleep in the storm in Christ. We are relaxed and at peace in the midst of the confusions, bewilderment, and perplexities of this life, while the storm rages. But our hearts are at rest. We have found peace at last."

Peace is not the absence of turmoil; peace is security and tranquility in the midst of turmoil. And the Bible tells us how we can have that kind of inner peace.

Philippians 4:1-7 says:

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! ²I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. ⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

I. PROBLEMS THAT DISRUPT OUR PEACE

Let's face it. If we didn't have any problems, we wouldn't have any problem having and maintaining inner peace, but we all have problems. Paul addresses two kinds of problems here that disrupt our peace.

1. Relational problems (4:2-3)

You don't have to be a cannibal to be fed up with people. People cause us problems. All of us have people we love who feed us emotionally. And we don't have any problem with them. But all of us have people we encounter from time to time that we just don't get along with. That happened in the church. There were two women in the church at Philippi who were causing a problem. Euodia means "sweet smelling." But she was not living up to her name; instead of being sweet, she was causing a stink in the church. The other woman, Syntyche, had a name that means "fortunate blessing." But she was being unfortunate, not a blessing. Paul says, "You're being a blister to the church. You two women need to get your act together and agree."

Who were these women? All we know about them is that at one time Paul says they worked with him side by side, sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. These were not evil women. These were not non-Christians. These were great women of God who got crossways with each other and were causing a problem in the church. The New Testament has much to say about wonderful women of God. I think of Dorcas. I think of Priscilla and Lydia. Many good women are mentioned in the New Testament, but also there are women who cause problems. And I wonder why it is sometimes that women cause problems in churches. Could it be that sometimes they're just more intensely emotional than we are as men? I read a saying: "There's a sadness to her sadness when she's sad, and there's a gladness to her gladness when she's glad, but the sadness of her sadness and the gladness of her gladness is nothing like her madness when she's mad." Amen to that!

These two women were highly emotional, disrupting the whole church because of a relationship problem. Now, what did Paul tell him to do? He said, "I want you two women to agree together in the Lord." But then he goes a step further in verse three. He says, "I want the loyal yokefellow (maybe the pastor) to be a referee between the two. I want you to be a mediator. You work between those two women and do everything you can to bring them together."

You may have a relationship problem with another person in the Body of Christ. The first appeal is for you to make it right with them. Try to take care of it yourself. Jesus, in Matthew 18, set out some rigid rules and a system that you're supposed to follow. If there's a problem between you and another believer, you are to go to them personally. Go one-on-one, privately and personally first—before you involve anybody else. That's the first step. And if you can't work it out, then Jesus says to take two or three brothers or sisters in Christ to talk with this person. You try to work it out. And then if that doesn't work, Jesus said, then you bring it before the church and let the church deal with it. But the ideal is for the two of you

to work it out personally and privately to begin with. And the goal of that whole process is restoration and reconciliation.

But there's another level of application here. There is also a responsibility, according to the apostle Paul, to serve as a mediator between two people having a relational problem. You go and stand between them and take them by the hand and say, "Let's work this thing out together." And that is a God-given role for many Christians. You are never more like Jesus Christ than when you are a reconciler, a mediator, a peacemaker. Isn't that what Jesus did? Jesus took mankind by one hand and the holy God by the other hand, and he reconciled us together. It could be that God's calling some of you to work between some people who have some relational problems. But the thing you need to understand is you will not have personal peace as long as you have relational problems that are not dealt with. Relational problems will disrupt your inner peace.

2. Emotional problems (4:6)

Verse six mentions the emotional malady called anxiety and worry. Verse six says to be anxious for nothing. The King James Bible says to "be careful for nothing." And for many years I read that I didn't quite understand it. It's not talking about being careless. Literally, it means don't worry. The Greek word there means "to have a divided mind" and to be "divided in two different directions."

On one hand, you have faith. On the other hand, you have fear. On one hand, you have hope, and you believe God's going to work it out. But on the other hand, you are unsure what's going to happen. That divided mind is worry. Our word "worry" in English comes from the German word "worgen," which means "to strangle, to choke." And those of you who are chronic worriers, you know that worry will literally strangle the life out of you. Now I want to say it again. And I want to say it loud and clear. Worry is a sin. The Bible says, "Fret not yourself about tomorrow." Jesus said, "Don't worry." There are believers who would never get drunk, would never commit adultery, would never rob a bank. But they're guilty every day they spend in faithless worry. You may feel that you don't have a lot of sin in your life, but is worry the sin that besets you? Worry basically says, "God, you can't be trusted." That's what worry says.

My mother was a great Christian, but she was the world's number one worry wart. She worried about everything. She even got other people's problems and worried about them for them. She just was a chronic worrier. For many years my parents lived in the Grand Bahama Islands. My mother hated to fly, but she didn't want to take a ship. So she had to start flying from Fort Lauderdale over to Freeport. I flew with her the first time that we flew on one of these little commuter airlines, and she was definitely afraid. She stood there, white-knuckled, holding onto the arms of the seat. She kept her eyes fixed on the engine, never taking her eyes off it. Finally, I said, "Mom, if you want to go to the bathroom, I'll watch that engine for a while." That's the way we are about problems. We look at that problem and think that the

very worst is going to happen. And God says, "I'll watch that problem for a while. If you want to go on with life, if you want to have abundant life, you go ahead. You can go to sleep and rest because I'm not going to sleep tonight."

Worry says, "God cannot be trusted." But the Bible says to cast all our care on him for he cares for us. This is what Charles Spurgeon said about worry: "Worry does not rob tomorrow of its sorrow; it empties today of its strength." Worry is interest paid on trouble before it comes due.

Dr. Mike Gorman has written a book entitled *Every Other Bed* in which he says that every other bed in our hospitals is filled by people who aren't physically ill; they are actually suffering psychosomatically from some emotional problem...worry being the number one problem. Worry will cause you to have headaches, ulcers, aches, and pains all over your body. And worry is a sin. Problems will disrupt God's perfect peace.

II. THE PRACTICE THAT DEVELOPES PEACE (4:4)

How can you find this kind of peace that passes all understanding? Verse four says to rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I say rejoice. That's one of the themes and philosophies of my life: to rejoice in the Lord always. Some people read that verse and think I must be kidding. If I knew how terrible their life was, I wouldn't be telling them to rejoice. But I have found there are different ways people react to tribulation, difficulties, and problems. I want you to think of two extremes. Some people practice what I call spineless, mindless rejoicing. They're the kind of people who put on a plastic smile when problems come and say, "Well, just praise the Lord." They're just resigned to the fact that there are problems. When a widow stood by the casket of her husband, a well-meaning Christian walked up to her and quoted this verse to her. She said, "You just need to rejoice in the Lord." But the dear Christian widow felt so guilty because she couldn't find it in herself to rejoice at that moment. The well-meaning Christian thought rejoicing means just denying the fact that there's anything bad happening. That is not biblical rejoicing.

James Dobson tells about the time a lady confessed to him that her husband was being unfaithful. "He's cheating on me, but everything's okay," she told Dr. Dobson. "He's not faithful, but my God is faithful. And I know it's all going to work out for the good." And Dr. Dobson looked at this dear lady and said, "I want you to know that it's okay to hurt. It's okay to feel so rejected and so miserable that you just fall on the floor in a pile and cry. It's okay." Somehow she thought that rejoicing in the Lord meant that you just denied that anything's bad. There are some people who have been diagnosed with cancer, and they just block it out, deny it and say, "Well, praise the Lord." That's not biblical rejoicing.

But then there's the other extreme where people do just the opposite. They rebel against God when problems come, and they sink into despair. They're the kind of people who want to shake their fist at God and say, "God, I'm a pretty good person.

How in the world could my child be sick? God, how could you let this happen to me or to my family?" A supposedly Christian chaplain told one of our church members who had leukemia, "Life is just one big dirt sandwich." Except the chaplain didn't use the word "dirt." He used another word that I will not use. He said you've just got to eat it one bite after another. That's so awful and discouraging that a counselor would give that advice. But that was his attitude. Life is terrible. You just going to have to deal with it.

That's not rejoicing in the Lord. The ability for us to understand truly what rejoicing in the Lord is boils down to a decision. We choose to rejoice in the Lord. You don't deny what's going on, and you don't sink into despair. You make the choice to rejoice. There is a difference between happiness and joy. There is the synthetic cheerleader kind of happiness that people are always trying to whip up and place a smile on their faces. And that is not Christian joy. Happiness is dependent upon happenings. Joy is dependent on Jesus, even though you'll see your happenings rise and fall. Happiness comes and goes, but Jesus stays the same. Let me compare it to another way. Happiness is like a thermometer. It measures temperature. Joy is like a thermostat. It determines and regulates temperature. You understand happiness rises and falls. Joy is constant in Jesus when you understand what true joy is all about.

If you have problems, how in the world can someone tell you to rejoice in the Lord? It's not me telling you. This is the word of God. And it's the apostle Paul, who, if you remember, was in prison. The fresh lacerations on his back were still stinging. And the only infirmary that he would be admitted to was a rat-infested, dark dungeon that smelled of human excrement and corpses. He was chained to a soldier, expecting at any moment to die. He writes a letter where he says, "By the way, rejoice in the Lord. I'll say again, rejoice." That is the one who's telling us to rejoice. Paul was not denying that he had problems. It is not blind rejoicing. He says, "I know I've got problems, and I'm aware of them. But I want to tell you, I'm putting my gaze and my focus on God, rather than my problems." That is rejoicing. Habakkuk chapter three, verses 17-18 is the "rejoice in the Lord" verse of the Old Testament. Habakkuk was a prophet with all kinds of trouble. His nation has had all kinds of trouble. They're being overrun by the Assyrians. And yet in midst of all this trouble and affliction, Habakkuk says, "I'm still rejoicing in the Lord." He writes, "Though the fig tree does not bud...and there is no fruit for my preserves, nothing sweet in life. And there are no grapes on the vines, and nothing to drink. Though the olive crop fails...a cash crop...and there's no money in the bank. And though the fields produce no food, and there is no sheep in the pen, and no clothes to wear, and no cattle in the stalls. There are no more T-bones and life is bad...but yet I will rejoice in the Lord. Did you catch that word "yet...I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God. My Savior."

Here's a modern paraphrase of that passage: "Although my spouse is in the hospital having our seventh child and my teenager just wrecked our car, which still has three years of payments. And although there's no money in the bank and I just lost my job and my best friend just moved away...yet, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God, my Savior." The way you find inner peace is to rejoice in the midst of adversity. And you say, "I don't feel like rejoicing." May I remind you that rejoicing has nothing to do with feelings? It's not happiness. It's joy that's based only in Jesus. When you discover that your joy is based only in Jesus, you'll find that nothing in this world can rob you of your joy in the Lord. The Bible doesn't say, "Rejoice, always." It doesn't say that. It says to rejoice in the Lord, always. And that is the key. The only way you can rejoice is in Jesus.

III. PRAYER THAT DEEPENS OUR PEACE (4:5-7)

If you want to know six words that will change your philosophy of life, here they are: Worry about nothing. Pray about everything. worry about nothing. What does prayer do? When you are praying, it allows you to focus on God's power, rather than your problem. You're focusing on God, rather than your little bitty problem. There are three different kinds of prayer here in this verse:

1. By prayer

Number one, Paul says "by prayer." That is a word that means to "lean toward and worship in prayer." And so the first thing you do is praise God. You praise him. Now, what is praise? Praise is simply recounting the greatness and the majesty, and the character of God. And the more you praise God, the bigger he gets. That's what it means to magnify God. The bigger he gets, the more you realize that he can handle your problems. Do you remember when David went out to face Goliath of the Philistines? All of the other soldiers of the Israelites said, "Look how big Goliath is." But when David went out, he wasn't looking at the giant. He was looking at God and said, "Look how big my God is. My God is so much bigger than my problem." Prayer allows you to focus on the greatness of God, rather than your problem. So you praise him.

2. Ask him

Number two, Paul says to "ask him." That's the second word that he uses for prayer in verse six. It's the word "petition," which means to ask God. What are you asking for? You ask him for strength. You ask him for security. You ask him to help you make it through this next minute. I talked with a lady one time who was going through a very difficult time in her life. It seemed at one moment that she was hanging by a thin thread. But she said that's when she prayed and asked God to give her strength. And she said that thin thread became a steel cable. Ask God to give you strength, and he will supply it.

3. With thanksgiving

The third word for prayer here is “with thanksgiving,” which means to “thank him.” Make your request be made known unto God. It's tough to thank God when you're going through a tough time, but that's when it really requires faith to thank him.

I want you to take these principles and apply them to your life for just a moment. Ask yourself the question, “Am I really rejoicing in the Lord?” If you don't know whether you are or not, ask your spouse or a good friend the question. Ask them, “Am I rejoicing? Do I rejoice in the Lord very much?” They'll tell you. Spouses can be brutally honest. Amen? Some of you parents need to ask your kids. You need to say, “Do I ever rejoice in the Lord that you can tell?” They'll tell you the truth. Kids, ask your parents, “Am I rejoicing in the Lord?”

How in the world can you rejoice in the Lord in the midst of difficulties? Some people say you can do anything in moderation. You can drink in moderation. You can cuss in moderation. That's not what this says. Rejoicing is a sweet spirit of gentleness. That's what rejoicing is. How can you do that? Keep reading in verse five: “The Lord is at hand. The Lord is near.” In the midst of your trouble, look around. God is near.

CONCLUSION

Ron Dunn used to be the pastor of MacArthur Boulevard Baptist church in Dallas. He now has a conference ministry where he goes around preaching. On Thanksgiving Day, several years ago, their 18-year-old-son, Ronnie, took a gun, pointed it to his head, and then took his life. Of course, it just destroyed that family, as suicides generally do. But Ron Dunn said that during that time of darkness, he was able to come to the place where he could thank God...not for what had happened, but he could thank God for being God. And thank God for being good.

He said, “I buried all my easy answers the day I buried Ronnie.” There are some problems to which there are no easy answers. I'm not here to throw out easy answers to you but to give you what the word of God says that we should do in the midst of difficulty. Life is not fair, but God is good. Did you know that? Life isn't fair and don't expect it to be, but God is good. That's the only way you can thank him. And if you want to have peace and victory over worry, practice rejoicing in the Lord. Seek God in prayer. When my mother was dying of cancer, she was living with us. We discovered that she was going to lose her health insurance after a year of being on disability. But she had already accumulated thousands and thousands of dollars of medical expenses. And I said, “This isn't fair. Here's a woman who's worked for all these years, and she's not going to have insurance?” So I wrote to the insurance commissioner for the State of Alabama. I talked to insurance agents I knew. I talked to attorneys. Everywhere I turned, it just seemed like it on December the 31st, she was going to lose her insurance.” I worried big time. You talk about being anxious? I was anxious. My mother, who was a worry

wart anyway, was more anxious than the rest of us. The biggest fear of people who are suffering is being a burden on those that are alive. But God just gave me a peace about the situation a month before it was going to happen. That's all I can tell you. He gave me a peace about it. Immediately, I went from anxiety to tranquility. God just seemed to say, "It's going to be okay."

The world doesn't understand that kind of peace, do they? That's why the Bible says it's a peace that "passes" all understanding. I even told my mom, "God has told me it's going to be okay, whatever happens. It's going to be okay." And she even came to the point where she could say, "All right, I believe it's going to be okay."

She lost her hospitalization insurance. And rather than accumulating thousands of dollars' worth of bills, she had gone on to be with the Lord in February, leaving only a very few minor bills. It was so unlike the previous 12 months, it was unbelievable. The money that my father had left from his insurance was more than adequate to pay for her bills. In October and November, I was just worrying and straining. But then God told me it was going to be okay and just to trust him. And that worry was transferred to peace. What are you struggling with today? Seek the face of God. Praise him. Ask him. Thank him. And see what happens.

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