

The Fruit of Peace

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The dictionary defines peace as “a state of tranquility or quiet; freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts; and harmony in personal relations.” But is that what Paul was referring to in Galatians when he listed the fruit of the Spirit? What does peace, as an outpouring of the Spirit’s presence in our lives really look like?

When I think of peace, the first thing that comes to my mind is of something at rest, without disturbance; like a newborn sound asleep, or a placid lake. But that is all external. More often than not, the most profound presence – or absence of peace is in our minds, not just in our surroundings.

I wish I could say that peace comes naturally, but it doesn’t. I think we all desire it – in relationships, in family life, in work settings – but our sin nature leads us to attempt to create it on our own. I’m a detailed person by nature and love to create order out of chaos. I see it as a gift that I can use in a variety of ways at home, in the church and in my work. But for many years, I found myself striving for order and peace by controlling what and how things happened. I was often frustrated at events that were beyond my control, disappointed at things that didn’t go as planned and angry because of unmet expectations. I always wanted peace, but I failed miserably at creating it on my own.

However, the Lord used that time to deal with pride and help me realize that the peace that I was seeking wasn’t dependent upon external situations, like whether the laundry was done and all the kids were behaving as I thought they should. I began to understand that the completed ‘to do’ list wasn’t going to bring about any greater sense of peace. What did make a difference was training my mind to focus on Him, his character, acknowledging the many ways I saw him at work in my life and around me each day.

Peace begins to emerge when we refuse to dwell on our circumstances, on what is not going well, and choose to focus on the One who makes all things right, who has proven his faithfulness through all of history. Just as we see David doing throughout the Psalms, we need to remind ourselves of who God is and how his character has triumphed in every situation. Isaiah 26:3 has become one of my favorite verses and a wonderful reminder for me to dwell on. “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.” What does it mean to have a steadfast mind? To have our thoughts fixed on Him.

While I still appreciate and often work to create a peaceful, organized home and planned-out schedule, I can say with certainty that the times in my life when I've experienced and walked in peace most deeply have been when life was incredibly challenging, troubling events were happening around me, and the future looked very uncertain. How is it possible to experience peace in such a setting? Because "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7)

The promise of God's peace that Paul explains in Philippians 4 comes with some prerequisites and follow-up instructions: choose joy; be considerate; don't worry; pray about everything; thank God for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. Paul goes on to clarify, "one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all that you have learned and received ... Then the God of peace will be with you."

I still experience frustration, anger and disappointment at many circumstances in life, but I can choose to graciously let go of what doesn't happen in the manner or timing that I had hoped, move forward in obedience and keep my focus on the Lord. Whether He leads me beside the still waters, or through a raging sea, I can experience peace, because I am walking with Him and He alone is my peace. Jesus promised us, "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give." (John 14:27) May the Lord of peace himself give you his peace at all times and in every situation!