

Peace Like A River

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Father, we're thankful that we can come together as a body to worship you and God. We come as weak people. We come with needs. We thank you that you are God who cares for us. You're working our life.

We thank you that we can bring our request before you and God that Jesus is interceding in our behalf. And we praise you for that, Lord. Just many requests today. I pray for Anne and possibly experience end of life issues. I know her faith is in Jesus.

She's looking forward to seeing him. But we just pray for your presence there, comforting her and working in her body and helping her deal with this sickness. I also lift up Russ as he's in the hospital waiting for the surgery tomorrow and pray that it would go well for him. And thank you. There's been no heart injury and I pray that once these arteries are replaced that he would be back to good health and have energy to do the things you want him to do.

I lift up Jason and God, just comfort him. I pray you'd bring a peace into his life that surpasses understanding. And, God, you take these thoughts away and replace them of your thoughts and be able to rejoice in them. Thank you again, Father, for loving us and for your work in our lives. In Christ's name, Amen.

Okay. Well, as I was preparing this message, a song came to my mind and I won't sing it. Okay, we will sing it at the end of the service, though. And. And the song was It Is well with My Soul.

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Everyone know the backdrop for that song? Horatio Spafford, rich industrialist in Chicago. His four daughters were traveling to Europe on a steamer across the Atlantic, and it went down. And he got a telegram telling him all four of his daughters had died. I can't imagine anything that would be harder than that in life to find out that four of your children perished in an accident on the sea.

But out of that, he wrote this song. It is well with my soul and I won't do the all of it. Like I said, we'll sing it after the service. But the first line goes. When peace like a river attendeth my way when sorrow is like sea billows roll Whatever my lot thou hast taught me to say, it is well with my soul.

It is well with my soul. It wasn't well with his body. It wasn't well in his circumstances. It was well with his soul. And I couldn't help but wonder if a disaster like this happened to me, and there's no guarantee that it wouldn't, or if it happened to you how would we handle that?

Would we be able to say, through the grief and the sorrow and the heartache, would be able to say, it is well with my soul that thought Peace like a river. And of course, a river, there's always fresh water coming and it's always new, and it doesn't dry up. As I thought about that piece like a river, it makes me think about the headwaters of the Missouri River. Anyone know where that's at?

Three Forks, Montana. And we lived about 20 miles from there, so we were familiar with that area. And three rivers come together, three tributaries. The Madison, the Jefferson and the Gallatin rivers. Jefferson was president and Madison was his secretary of defense, and Gallatin was secretary of something else.

And Lewis and Clark named those rivers after those three people. They're mountain rivers, and they come together at Three Forks. And when they come together, that's where the Missouri river starts. And I mention that because if you're going to have peace like a river, that doesn't come out of nowhere, does it? There need to be tributaries in our life that come together to bring that peace in our hearts when we experience things that are hard.

And so I was looking at these three verses as three tributaries that when they are present in our life, then the result is going to be peace. Peace with God, the peace of God. And so want to look at them again. Verse 16 through 18. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing.

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. And we all face sorrows, we are attacked by Satan, we deal with sin, self gets in the way, and we need something that overcomes that. And that's why Paul is sharing these things. He's told us about our relationship with the leaders in a church, our relationship with each other. And now he's talking about our relationship with God.

With God. When we have these things, we're going to experience the peace of God in our life. And on the surface, we would have no trouble with these verses, especially if we said, pray, rejoice, give thanks. Oh, I can do that. But he adds something to each one of them.

Rejoice always.

Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances. If we stop and think about that, we realize, wait a second, this isn't so easy after all. Always rejoice when there's problems in my life, when I'm facing the sea billows. Pray all the time, no matter what I'm going through, whether my prayers are being answered or not.

And of course, giving thanks in all circumstances and that's what makes these commands hard. And we have to ask, well, how in the world can we do this? Especially when it ends that passage that says, this is God's will for us in Christ Jesus. His will is that you rejoice, that you pray, that you give thanksgiving no matter what you are going through. And so let's look at all three of these.

We won't go into depth on them because they're pretty obvious what they mean. First of all, he says, rejoice always. And this is saying that yours and my life should be joyful always, in the good times and in the bad times. And again, that's not something we can do on our own. He's not saying be happy often.

That's the goal, isn't it? I want to be happy. But happy is based on your circumstances. If things are going well and no problems, wow, I'm happy. But being joyful is not based on circumstances.

It's based on a work that God is doing in your life. Why can we rejoice? Why can we be joyful? As reminded of Romans 8:28, where God says he works all things out for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose. And when we understand what his purpose for our life is, we understand that everything that we go through, God is using.

And he gives us the purpose in verse 29 of Romans 8, that we might be conformed to the image of Christ Jesus. God's purpose. If he has called you by name into this relationship, his purpose is that he's going to make you more and more like Jesus. And we'd like that all to be good things, wouldn't we? But often we see the most growth in our life when we've gone through hard things.

It tells about Jesus in Hebrews 2:10, that the founder of our salvation, Jesus, was made perfect through suffering. Made perfect through suffering. And if that was true of our Savior, it is also true of you and I. Our goal should not to be happy. Yeah, I want to be happy.

And we're thankful for when we are. But the goal is I need to be more like Jesus in my life. And he uses everything that we go through to accomplish that purposes for you and I. We've been going down to Portland to my doctor's visits. And we do.

We try to visit with Dennis and Misty Griffin. They used to attend church here. Few of you may remember them. Wonderful couple in the Lord. While they were here, they adopted a little baby, a little boy named Cyrus.

And he came out of a Drug family, and he was addicted to drugs, and he was crying all the time, and he was just really hard to handle. But they kept praying, they kept working. And Cyrus is now 16 or 17, and he is a wonderful young man. And the joy of the Lord is life. But I was reminded of an experience that Cyrus had.

We were camping with them over on Lake Roosevelt, the Columbia River. Cyrus was about 5 or 6, and he was misbehaving like a lot of Billy's will. And Dennis said, cyrus, come here. And he took him into their camper and he applied the board of education to his rear end. And when they came out, Cyrus was crying, and Dennis said, are you a happy boy, Cyrus?

And Cyrus goes, happy boy, happy boy. And he is, because he had parents who were willing to invest in his life, even discipline. And often when we're going through hard times, that is discipline in our lives.

That leads to the second thing we're to do. We're told to pray without ceasing. And this doesn't mean that we're constantly praying all of the time. I don't know about you, but sometimes I'm around people that can't quit talking, you know, and talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. And it gets a little annoying.

And I don't know if God feels that way if we're always talking, but we are to pray without ceasing. And what that means is he's always there with us. He's our companion, his presence that we can go to him at any time. And whether it's giving thanks for something, and I'm trying to develop in my own life this spirit of thankfulness to the Lord that if something good happens, I want him to know, thank you, God, for allowing this in my life, or if something hard is happening, that I can go to him. And, man, I'm struggling, God, I need help.

And we're to do that ceasingly. At our talk the other night, one of the things that Sandra shared that helps with success in marriage was communication and being able to share what's going on in our life with our partner, making them aware of what we're doing or not doing. One of the things we've enjoyed over the years is road trips. And the longest one was in Washington, D.C. to Florida to Southern California, up here, almost 5,000 miles.

We were spending a lot of time in the car together on that road trip, and we weren't talking all the time, but we'd see something and, oh, do you see that? You Know we would communicate with each other and just being with each other. In the same way,

praying without ceasing is acknowledging God's presence in your life. And when something happens, good or bad, talking to him. And he loves to hear from us.

And so in talking, we can ask him for wisdom and what we're going through, for strength, for understanding and power in every situation we face. So we're to pray without ceasing. Third, he says, we're told to give thanks in all circumstances. And I need to point out he's not saying, I'm thankful for every circumstance. There's things we're not thankful for.

They're hard, but we can be thankful in them. We can believe that God is working through them. And the example of Horatio Spafford, when he lost his four daughters, he wasn't thankful that they died. He was thankful that God had given him peace in the midst of a horrible tragedy. And he was believing that God could bring something good out of that.

And I'm sure there were many things, but one of the things that came out of that was, it is well with my soul that ministers to our hearts in the same way, when we go through hard things and God works in them for our good, we can give thanks that he was working. I experienced this with my first wife, Jan. We were married 32 years, and she suffered through cancer. 16 of those years. Half of our married life together.

It wasn't all painful, but there were many times it was really painful, a painful trial. It was really hard to watch and to go with that through her. And of course, for her, it was really hard.

But after she died, I went to spend some time with Jeremy and Stacy down in Los Angeles. And then we took some cars out to Lake Charles, Louisiana, And I was on a boat there that Janet and I had been on. And I got this vision of her and some others were there. And I got really excited. It seemed so real.

And then the vision just faded away. And I started to cry because she wasn't there. And then I reminded myself, I said, I'm not going to cry. I'm going to worship you, Lord. And I actually lifted my hands to the Louisiana sky.

It was a beautiful night. Stars were out. And I started praising the Lord and thanking him for his goodness. The 32 years that he'd given us together, and the fact that he cared for me. And I felt that I heard the voice of God.

He said to me, you love your wife. You did everything you could for her, but she's not coming back. And all of a sudden, a peace just flooded my soul. To this day, I can hardly describe what it meant to me. I was so excited that I went back to my room and I scheduled a flight back home.

I've been gone a month and a half dealing with my grief over my wife dying. I came back excited to be in the ministry and to see what God had in store for me. And one of the things he had in store for me was Sandra. We talked about that on Friday night. But it wasn't the fact that she died.

I'm thankful for that. It was the fact that in the midst of that, that God was working in my life and teaching me things that I couldn't have learned otherwise. And so he says, rejoice always. Pray without ceasing, Give thanks in all circumstances. I mentioned the headwaters of the Missouri river and that we live real close to there.

Well, there's a park there, Three Waters State Park. Real popular park with vacationers. In 1974, a family from Michigan was camping. Their parents had a camper, and they had some daughters that they set up a tent for them. They got up in the morning, and someone had cut a slit in the side of the tent, and their daughter was missing.

It took almost a year and a half for them to solve that crime. And it was a local man named David Meyerhofer. And after they caught him, he confessed to three other kidnappings and killings. And one of those that happened in 1974 was a girl named Sandy Dyke. Sandy Dykwin, 19 years old.

He had sexually abused her. He killed her. He cut up her parts. Some he put in the freezer. And some believe that he actually fed some of that to some neighbors, and he burnt the rest.

I went to Pony, Montana again, about 20 miles from Three Forks. The pastor in 1990, two years before I came here, and one of the couples in in that church were John and Betty Dyckman, the parents of Sandy. And it was quite a few years before they found out what had happened to her. She just disappeared. And once they caught this David Meyerhofer on another murder, he confessed to the killing of that.

And it was really hard for them not only to lose their daughter, but to find out what had happened to her. And they never really got over the grief. But I can testify that they had peace, that God was working in their lives, and they experienced a new compassion for other people going through things. They still hurt, but they were able to go on and experience peace because they knew God had a purpose for them. And so the key to this, he says, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

You and I have to understand and believe that God has a will for you. And what that's saying is, is God is sovereign. He is in control of all situations. If he is not in control of that situation, how could we trust Him? Oh, the devil might get me, or, you know, my neighbor might get me.

And we live in fear. But God allows things to happen. We were listening to a podcast the other day, actually two, and it was talking about a movement that's happening today called the New Apostolic Reformation. Anyone heard of it? Nar nar.

And it's sweeping through a lot of churches. It's primarily coming out of Bethel Church in Redding, Montana. A lot of the people that you would watch on tv, Kenneth Copeland, Dutch Sheets, Jesse Duplantis, Kansas City, ihop, they teach that. And they're saying that God today is raising up new apostles and that he can't do anything without our working through it, that he's dependent on us to accomplish his will. And it's a heresy.

It's focused on man instead of God. God is sovereign. Peter warns us about things like this. Over in chapter two, verse one, he says, but false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them. I always

struggle with that because you listen to them and they talk about Jesus a lot about Jesus.

And so how do they deny him? It says they deny the sovereign Lord Jesus the sovereignty of God. That New Apostolic Reformation hates Reformed doctrine because it doesn't fit in with man, has to do it. God is dependent on you. And I.

I heard one example of this once. Jesse Duplantis was sharing an experience he had, and he shared that, that he went to heaven and he met Jesus. And while he was there, Jesus took them all around and showed him what heaven was like.

And Jesse was so excited. But finally Jesus said, well, it's time for you to go back. And Jesse, I don't want to go back. Well, it's time for you to go back. But then Jesse noticed that Jesus was crying, and he asked, what's the matter?

And he said, Jesus was worried that things weren't going to work out down here. And he actually said that he put his arm around Jesus and comforted him. And people go crazy over that story about people, not about God. God is sovereign. He is working everything out for his own will and for our good, and we can trust him.

And so when we incorporate these three commands into our life, rejoicing always doesn't mean you feel good about something, but you consciously rejoice. God, I know you're working. I can trust you when you pray without ceasing, even when it seems like your prayers are not being answered. I keep going before my God and asking him to work in this situation and then giving thanks in all situations. The only way we can do that is to believe that God is in control and that he is working things out for his own glory and for our good.

Ultimately, we are here for the glory of God, to exalt his name. And we do that when things go well, don't we? Praise God, I got healed. Or praise God, I got that job. Or praise God, my wife and I are doing well and that's good.

But what about when things are not going well? Are we able to praise God then, too? And often he gets more glory out of the hard things we went through and the good

things we do. And so he's not saying, this is a feeling. It's not.

It is a conscious choice that we make. I'm going to rejoice. I'm going to pray, I'm going to give thanks. That's God's will for me in Christ Jesus. I have to emphasize it's only for those that are in Christ Jesus.

If you're not in Christ Jesus, you can't claim these promises. And when we're in him, we have the guarantee that he's working in our life and he's preparing us to spend eternity with Him. And we can rejoice, we can pray, we can give thanks. Let's pray.

Father, we acknowledge that you are the Almighty God. There's nothing that happens in this universe that you have not willed. Lord, that's hard for us to if accept. Sometimes when bad things happen and we wonder, how could you be working in that? But it takes faith to believe that you are.

And I just pray that you would make us men and women of faith who will trust you in all circumstances, believing all things work together for good. Because we love you and have been called according to your purpose. And we understand that your purpose for us is that we would be made in the image of Christ, becoming more and more like Him. Help us to understand that that's what you're doing when you're working in our life. In Christ's name, Amen.