

Practicing His Presence

Peace

Our heavenly Father has determined to make us more like the Son. To accomplish his transforming work, the Father often encourages spiritual practices such as prayer. In prayer we open our hearts to God so that he may give us life and hope. Prayer involves a transfer of trust from ourselves—our abilities, our resources, our knowledge, our possessions—to God. Instead of wallowing in worry and fear, we let God know what we are thinking and feeling. As we pray, we begin to change. Sometimes gradually and at other times quickly, the chaos and turmoil and confusion give way to God’s peace, a peace that is too wonderful to comprehend fully and too magnificent to achieve. In *Becoming 1* we will look at how God’s peace comes as the fruit of transformation and prayer.

There is always something to worry about. During the week I was writing this study on peace, I discovered that someone had stolen our credit card and charged over \$1,000. Would we lose the money, or would the bank reimburse us? My wife Judy had recently traveled to Louisiana with a group of students to help with disaster relief. She returned with an extremely bad case of poison ivy. Even with all the medication, the itching was painful and caused her to lose sleep. Would this stuff ever go away? During a recent fall break, one of our students had been killed in a car wreck. I did not know the student, but what could I say to those who knew him well? Recently a “friend” made some choices that were both professionally inappropriate and personally disrespectful to me. How should I respond to this situation? Sometimes when it rains, it pours. What is on your worry list?

Although we will always have opportunities to worry, God promises peace when we abide in him through prayer. Have you ever deliberately practiced God’s presence by consciously thinking about him throughout the day?

36 Life Essentials

BELIEVING

- Authority of the Bible
- Triune God
- Great and Good God
- Humanity
- Satan and Sin
- Jesus Christ
- Salvation
- Holy Spirit
- The Church
- Transformation
- Mission
- The End

BEHAVING

- Studying the Bible
- Fellowshipping
- Worshipping
- Seeking the Kingdom
- Waging Spiritual War
- Following
- Trusting and Acting
- Walking by the Spirit
- Serving
- Praying
- Engaging the World
- Persevering

BECOMING

- Truth
- Love
- Purity
- Rest
- Freedom
- New Identity in Christ
- Assurance
- Fruit of the Spirit
- Humility
- **Peace**
- Compassion
- Hope

Prayer with Thanksgiving Produces Peace

Matthew Henry is a well-known Bible commentator. One day he was robbed and that evening made the following entry in his diary:

Let me be thankful—first, because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my wallet they did not take my life; third, because although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.

—Alice Gray,
Stories for the Heart, 86

Frank Laubach (1884–1970), a missionary to the Philippines, knew what it meant to pray without ceasing.

As I analyze myself I find several things happening to me as a result of these two months of strenuous effort to keep the Lord in mind every minute. This concentration upon God is strenuous, *but everything else has ceased to be so*. I think more clearly, I forget less frequently. Things which I did with a strain before, I now do easily and with no effort whatever. I worry about nothing, and lose no sleep. I walk on air a good part of the time. Even the mirror reveals a new light in my eyes and face. I no longer feel in a hurry about anything. . . . Each minute I meet calmly as though it were not important. Nothing can go wrong excepting one thing. That is that God may slip from my mind if I do not keep on my guard. If He is there, the universe is with me. My task is simple and clear. (Laubach, *Letters*, May 24, 1930)

Whether or not you subscribe to Laubach’s approach, one thing is obvious—if we prayed more, we would worry less and experience more of God’s peace. Let’s go the Scriptures.

A Closer Look—Philippians 4:6–7

In the passage below locate any commands, contrasts, results, promises, figures of speech, descriptions (“which”), and locations (“in”).

SCRIPTURE NOTES

⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, 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.

A Blessing of Peace

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.

—Numbers 6:24–26

1. What do the words “anything” and “everything” indicate?

2. Identify the different words for prayer used in this passage.

3. What attitude should accompany our prayers? Why is this attitude important?

4. What is the major contrast in verse 6?

5. What is the promise contained in verse 7?

6. What kind of work does the “peace of God” do in our lives?

7. Read Philippians 4:1–9. How does the surrounding context help you understand 4:6–7?

THE POWER OF WORDS

“anxious”—When used positively, this word can refer to a healthy concern for people, such as Timothy’s concern for the Philippians (Phil. 2:20) or the concern Christians should have for each other (1 Cor. 12:25). Negatively, however, the word signifies fearful, unproductive worry. Jesus clearly told us not to worry (Matt. 6:25–34; Luke 12:22–34). In a similar way, Paul commands us not to be worried or anxious about anything.

“peace”—Since “peace” stands in contrast to anxiety or worry in this context, it indicates a deep sense of well-being, wholeness, and inner contentment supplied by God. The “God of peace” (Phil. 4:9) promises the “peace of God” when we choose to pray instead of worry.

“transcends all understanding”—God’s peace goes completely beyond all human ways of comprehending or understanding life. Human reasoning alone leads only to doubt and anxiety. God’s ways are higher than our ways and we can trust him and experience his peace even when we don’t fully understand everything.

“guard”—This is a military word used of soldiers standing guard over a city and protecting it (see 2 Cor. 11:32). Since a Roman garrison was stationed in Philippi, the readers could easily understand this figure of speech. The word picture shows that God’s peace will surround and protect our hearts and thoughts against destructive worry.

Coming in Out of the Wind

The real problem of the Christian life comes where people do not usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back [stop worrying]; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in [prayer]. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings, coming in out of the wind.

We can only do it for moments at first. But from those moments the new sort of life will be spreading through our system: because now we are letting Him work at the right part of us. It is the difference between paint, which is merely laid on the surface, and a dye or stain which soaks right through.

—C. S. Lewis,
Mere Christianity, 198–99

Crossing the Bridge

What timeless truths do you see in Philippians 4:6–7?

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As you looked closely at Philippians 4:6–7, did you notice that God’s peace comes when we pray, not when we get a certain answer to prayer? Long before we get the answer we want or even before we get an answer at all, peace comes through the very act of praying. In prayer we transfer our trust from ourselves and our ability to control life to God and his resources.

As we cast our cares on him, worries are replaced with a calmness of heart and mind. We are *either* worrying *or* praying; never both at the same time. In Matthew 6:25–33, Jesus puts it all in perspective by saying something like, “If you want to worry, worry about something important. Stop stressing over the little stuff like clothes and money, and seek God’s kingdom and his righteousness.”

So What?

1. From your closer look at Philippians 4:6–7, what is most encouraging and helpful to you?

2. What are the top five things you could be worried about right now in your life?

3. How does praying “with thanksgiving” change your outlook and perspective about the situation you are praying about?

4. If prayer leads to peace and we are not experiencing peace, what do we need to change about the way we pray?

Now it’s time to stop answering discussion questions and actually pray about what is making you anxious, fearful, angry, or frustrated. Don’t just think about these things; really pray about them.

Cross-References

Num. 6:24–26; Pss. 1:1–3; 23:1–6; 34:14; 46:1–11; 119:165; Prov. 14:30; Isa. 26:3; 41:10; Matt. 6:25–34; 11:28; John 14:27; 16:33; Rom. 8:6; 14:17; 15:13; Gal. 5:22; Phil. 4:8–13; Col. 3:15

For Deeper Study

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