

## The Fruit of the Spirit: Peace

3/9

Galatians 5:16-26; John 14:25-27

06 05 2011 Sam Jones Memorial UMC

### Fruit of the Spirit Series

Today we continue our summer worship series entitled **The Fruit of the Spirit**. Galatians 5:22-23 describes nine characteristics of the Christian disciple: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. When we abide in a vital relationship with God, the “*fruit of the Spirit*” grows naturally in our lives.

So far we have seen how life in the Holy Spirit produces **love** and **joy**. This morning we explore how the Spirit cultivates **peace** in our lives.

### Scripture:

### Introduction

Perhaps you have seen the forwards that feature *Church Bulletin Bloopers*. They include such classics as:

- The Low Self-Esteem support group will meet Thursday night at 7:00. Participants are asked to use the back door.
- For those of you who have children and don't know it, the nursery is downstairs.
- Remember in prayer the many that are sick of our congregation and community.
- Due to the minister's illness, Wednesday's healing services will be rescheduled.
- Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on Oct. 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in school days.
- *And my personal favorite:* Is stress killing you?—let the church help!

### Stress

Are YOU stressed out? Here's a simple **stress test**: take a deep breath—in and out. If you're breathing, then you are under stress! Tension and pressure are an integral part of life that cannot be avoided.

There are different ways to define **stress**. One author said that stress is “*the demand made on our adaptive capacities of mind and body.*” I like how this definition recognizes that stress is composed of TWO parts: the demands of life AND our ability to appropriately respond.

1) Stress can be a **positive** experience. If we have the resources to meet life's challenges, then the experience can be self-affirming. We pass a hard test, finish a difficult project, solve a perplexing problem, or meet a demanding deadline. Such success makes us feel good about ourselves. Stress can provide a creative tension that fills us with zest and vitality.

**Suspension bridges** are examples of **creative stress**. The supporting cables between the two anchorages receive the tension forces. The cables are stretched from the weight of the bridge and its traffic as they run from anchorage to anchorage. The anchorages are also under tension, but since they are held firmly to the earth, the tension is dissipated in the ground. Tension and stress actually hold the bridge up.

2) However, stress can also be a **negative** experience. If the demands of life exceed our abilities and resources to cope, then the pressure becomes overwhelming. We collapse under the heavy load.

Proverbs 12:25 says: “*Anxiety weighs down the human heart.*” However, it doesn’t stop with heart ache. We also experience stress in our stomach aches, head aches, neck aches, back aches, and soul aches.

We are all familiar with the story of Job’s trials and tribulations in the Old Testament. After a series of disasters, **Job** lamented: “*I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil.*” According to Beth Moore, “*turmoil*” means “*commotion, restlessness, excitement, rage.*” The same word is used later in Job to describe “*the raging of thunder.*” (Job 37:2) Moore writes:

*A lack of peace manifests itself in many ways: a sleepless night filled with tossing and turning, fear that lodges itself like a pine cone in your stomach, a mind and body in perpetual motion, memories that imprison you repeatedly, unending strife, hopelessness, and the general, yet horrible, sense of being out of control.* (Living Beyond Yourself, Beth Moore, pp. 96-97)

This poster shows ONE way of handling stress! The “Stress Reduction Kit” simply says, “Bang Head Here!” I think we’ve all been there before. Stress can result in numerous psychosomatic problems, including:

- Mental: Worry, anxiety, reduced mental acuity
- Emotional: Anxious, impatient, angry, depressed
- Relational: Impairs our relationships with others
- Physical: Fatigue, insomnia, headaches, blood pressure, heart disease, etc.

Our human attempts to handle worry and anxiety seldom end well. In this scene from *Seinfeld*, we see how poorly Frank Costanza handles stress.

<b>DVD</b>	<i>Seinfeld</i>	Season 9, Episode 3, # 159	<i>The Serenity Now</i>
		Begin: 00:00 (Costanzas in Car)	End: 00:48 “Serenity NOW!”

Frank:	<i>(Begins screaming)</i> “Serenity now! Serenity now!”
George:	“What is that?”
Frank:	“Doctor gave me a relaxation cassette. When my blood pressure gets too high, the man on the tape tells me to say, ‘Serenity now!’”
George:	“Are you supposed to YELL it?”
Frank:	“The man on the tape wasn’t specific!”

## Peace

Stress, anxiety, and worry in life are not a question of “if” but “when.” Here’s a tip: screaming “*Serenity NOW*” doesn’t work! So how do we cultivate peace, tranquility, and contentment in life?

The Bible promises that **peace** is a part of our birthright as God’s children. It is a grace-gift that our Heavenly Father grants to his sons and daughters. Recall Jesus’ words to the disciples: “*Peace I GIVE to you.*” (John 14:27) It is ours for the receiving.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for “peace” is “**shalom**.” The Jewish people used this term as a standard greeting. In Southern Israel, they greeted one another by saying, “*Shalom, y’all!*” The concept describes more than an absence of conflict; instead, it describes the presence of right relationship with God and others.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for “peace” is “**eirene**.” It describes a peace of mind, tranquility, safety, and security. This peace flows from the assurance that God holds our lives safely in his arms forever.

Let’s explore a series of Scripture passages that describe how we gain and maintain a spirit of peace in our spiritual lives.

### Galatians 5:22

Galatians 5:22-23 forms the core Scripture passage for *The Fruit of the Spirit* worship series. Paul described nine attributes of “walking/living in the Spirit.” He began by writing: “*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace . . .*”

If we want peace in our lives, then start with a vital relationship with God. Walking and living by the Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit, including peace. This **organic image** is a critical point in cultivating the fruit of the Spirit. Those who abide in Christ naturally (and supernaturally) **bear the fruit** of Christian living. An ongoing relationship with the Holy Spirit cultivates holiness in our lives. Abiding in Christ makes us more like the Prince of Peace. Paul wrote in Romans 5:1-2:

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of glory of God.*

Peace is not an external absence of conflict; instead, it is an internal relationship with God. Worldly circumstances change just like THAT—we cannot depend upon the world to give us peace. However, the relationship with our Savior and Lord is eternal. We serve the one who is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the first and the last. Everything in life takes place within the context of God’s grace and love.

Just as Jesus calmed the wild wind and waves, our Lord speaks the same words to our troubled and tumultuous souls: “*Peace, be still!*”

In devotional prayer, the Psalmist heard God say, “*Be still, and know that I am God.*” (Psalm 46:10) David later wrote: “*I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.*” (Psalm 131:2)

### **John 14: 27**

The next verse is John 14:27. On his final night with the disciples, Jesus spoke to them words of comfort and consolation. Christ promised: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

This verse is one of the traditional Gospel readings included in a Methodist funeral service. However, it has application not only in the face of death but also in the living of life. Listen to the promises that Jesus makes.

First and foremost, Jesus tells us that we have received the gift of peace—it has been given to us. We only need claim it as our own.

Secondly, the Lord said that he does not give to us as the world gives. The things of this earth cannot give us peace because they are transitory and passing. The circumstances of the world cannot give us peace—but the world also cannot take away our peace. No matter what storms rage on the outside, we can still experience peace within. We do not have to be afraid.

### **Philippians 4:4-7**

The next passage is Philippians 4:4-7. Those who were here last week will recall that this was the Scripture lesson for joy. Paul wrote: *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say: Rejoice!”* In your personal Bible study, note how often joy and peace accompany one another in Scripture. One Christian author referred to joy and peace as *“spiritual twins.”* (Interpreters Bible). Those who experience one will typically discover the other in their lives.

Paul wrote: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

Let’s unpack this passage which is rich with meaning. The natural human response to stress is anxiety, worry, confusion, and fear. The spiritual Christian response to stress is **prayer!** Don’t be anxious—pray! Prayer banishes anxiety like light dispels darkness.

Note that Paul did NOT say that peace comes when our prayers are answered. Instead, he said that peace occurs when we pray—regardless of how the prayers are answered. Remember that peace is ultimately not dependent upon outward circumstances but an inward relationship. Prayer strengthens our relationship with God.

Then Paul wrote that this divine peace *“transcends all understanding.”* Many of us grew up singing a children’s song that declares: *“I’ve got that peace that passeth understanding down in my soul!”* Divine peace exceeds all human imagination.

Paul then described how God’s peace *“will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* This image portrays divine peace standing watch over the portals of our emotions and thoughts, protecting them from the persistent turmoil of the world.

## **1 Corinthians 7:15**

We experience peace through Jesus Christ. This internal relationship with God then transforms our external **relationships with others**. You see this time and again in Scripture. Our vertical relationship with God always informs our horizontal relationships with others. Jesus said the two great commands are to love God and to love neighbor. To do one is to do the other. To neglect one is to neglect the other.

In 1 Corinthians 7:15, Paul wrote: “*God has called us to live in peace.*” This is the mark of the Christian community. Jesus told his disciples that others would know them by how they loved one another.

In *The Beatitudes*, Jesus said, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*” (Matthew 5:9) We resemble our heavenly Father when we promote peace with others.

Some years ago there was a popular bumper sticker which made the lofty declaration: “*Envision World Peace*” In response, someone else printed a bumper sticker which said: “*Forget World Peace—Envision Using Your Turn Signal!*”

World peace is certainly an admirable goal towards which we should all work. However, we need to begin with our family members, friends, neighbors, and others we encounter in our daily lives. Living as a peace maker becomes as personal as your toothbrush.

Prayerfully consider the relationships in your life. Where do you need to make peace with someone else?

## **Snapshots of Peace**

The story is told of an art patron who commissioned two people to **paint pictures** that portrayed peace. After the work was complete, each unveiled his work. The first artist had painted a beautiful, idyllic scene of meadows decorated with wildflowers under a cloudless blue sky with majestic mountains in the background. It inspired a sense of tranquility, harmony, and serenity.

The second artist’s painting stood in stark contrast. It showed a raging river overflowing its banks, the dangerous waters threatening to overwhelm all in its path. In a high branch of a sturdy tree above the waters, however, the artist depicted a mother bird caring for her young in a nest with no concern about the turmoil below.

When we pray for peace, we often imagine places of tranquility and safety where nothing disrupts our world. Occasionally we are blessed by such times and places; but true peace is not the absence of stress—it is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Divine peace can only be found when we walk and live by the Spirit.

## **Conclusion**

Is stress killing you? Let the church help! Better yet, call upon the Prince of Peace to provide what the world cannot. The fruit of the Spirit is peace. Jesus said, “*Peace I give to you.*” When we bring our anxiety and stress to God in prayer, the Lord grants us “*a peace that transcends all understanding*” that will guard our hearts and minds. Then we are enabled to become peacemakers with others.

Many here grew up singing the children's song:

*I've got peace like a river, I've got peace like a river,  
I've got peace like a river in my soul.*

Today we are invited to allow God's peace to flow like waters of life through our lives, washing away the stress, worry, and anxiety of the world. Even in the midst of turmoil, we can experience a peace that passes all understanding. For those who walk and live in the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit is peace.

### **Prayer**

O God and Heavenly Father, Grant to us the serenity of mind to accept that which cannot be changed; courage to change that which can be changed, and wisdom to know the one from the other, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. (*The Serenity Prayer* by Reinhold Niebuhr)