

**WITH PEACE**  
**Live Fully**  
**Dr. George O. Wood**

Our scripture today is once more from Galatians 5:22 as we explore the fruit of the Spirit in this summer series. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.” That’s where we are today – the third fruit of the Spirit is peace.

In a very few words I seek to share with us how we may have peace. That’s a tall order for 20-25 minutes. I realize that finding peace, if you do not have peace in your life, may involve a period of time. A process of working things out. Peace is both instantaneous and a process. At the same time I realize there are some principles about coming to peace in your life that can be said in 20-25 minutes with the recognition that it takes a lifetime to live them out. If you’ll let me take a stab at this subject with the understanding that we need to work these things out in our life.

How do you go about gaining peace? Everything I do I have to have a series of steps.

The first thing important in gaining peace is to know what the scriptures mean by peace. In our use of the word “peace” it frequently means simply the cessation or the non-existence of hostility. Peace is when you’re not at odds with anyone. When you’re not engaged in conflict. When you’re not having a spat or argument. When you’re not in war. But this is an incomplete understanding of peace. We have on epitaphs on graveyards “Rest in Peace.” The person that is resting in peace has no conflict, has no spats, has no war. But that’s not the kind of peace that I want to rest in. At least not right now. I want a peace that comes to me right now while I’m living. Not the cessation of activity.

The biblical notion of peace carried a far more active and dynamic understanding of the English concept of peace. The Hebrew and the Greek words for peace connote a sense of well being, a sense of wholeness, soundness. Psychologists might call it the self-actualizing person. The person who lives at the optimum. The person who is fully developing their potential. The person who lives by a tranquility of order in their life.

A fascinating insight into the biblical meaning of *shalom* is found in 2 Samuel 11:7. Uriah has returned home from the front and he is to report to the king who ultimately is going to do him in. But David asks him this question in that verse: “How is the *shalom* of Joab? How is the *shalom* of the soldiers? How is the *shalom* of the war?” We wouldn’t think to ask a person how the peace of the war was going. But the biblical writer and the biblical king would find no contradiction at all in posing that question because peace did not mean the absence of conflict. It meant the presence of well being. Therefore when David is asking about the *shalom* of the war he’s really asking is the war going well? Are we achieving our purposes? Are we in harmony with our intentions?

Knowing this biblical understanding of peace keeps us away from the notion that peace can be gotten if we just rearrange the circumstances of our life. A lot of people say, “If I could just change my job! If I could just change the group of people I’m with! If I could just change my spouse! If I could change the size of my bank account with somebody else I would be at peace!”

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That's the concept that many people have about peace. But the biblical concept of peace is not that at all.

Peace is not rearranging the circumstances of your life. We must come to the understanding that peace can be in you even if everything about you is not at peace.

That's what Paul says when he writes the Philippians from a prison experience. "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." I have learned to be in *shalom*. I have learned to have soundness and completeness no matter what the circumstances. The road to peace is first of all understanding the definition of peace.

A second step in attaining peace is to realize that grace must always come before peace. Paul wrote thirteen letters. Everyone of those letters somewhere in the first paragraph he begins with a word of greeting which will read something like this "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

In a couple of the letters he will insert the word "mercy" between grace and peace, so it will be grace, mercy and peace. But he never inverts the order. He never says "Peace to you and grace." He always says Grace to you and peace. It is not accidental that he uses that formula. You will never know peace until you know and experience God's grace.

This is where the Christian approaches peace with a far different perspective from the world. The world looks for peace. The Christian knows you will never find peace until you have experienced and know God's grace and his acceptance.

On this July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend and we think of our country and think of our nation's search for peace I was intrigued with a report I recently read put out by the Center for Defense Information which is a group headed by retired U.S. senior military officers. They tabulate that currently in this year – 1983 – there are 45 nations or one fourth of the world's nations are currently involved in wars. Over four million soldiers will be involved in conflict, in nations that have conflict this year. Between one and five million people will lose their lives as a result of war. The world looks for peace.

The Christian knows you will never ever find peace apart from the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the cross of Jesus Christ God has already paid for our sins. We may disregard the charges against us. When I come to God in repentance and faith he receives me. Grace is the entry moment in the Christian's life. It's when we become a Christian we realize that salvation is a free gift. But grace is not something that's once for all experience and never is repetitive. But grace is a process we're called upon in the scriptures to grow in grace. Sometimes we do not have peace as believers because we are somehow not able to sufficiently bring our understanding of God in line with God's own teaching of himself. God is graceful.

I visualize the need in my own life for understanding my security in the Lord. I think of several visual images that help me realize the grace in which I stand. One is the fact that God puts the floor beneath my feet and that floor keeps me from the free fall of life where I disappear down a tunnel of doom and emptiness. God has a floor underneath my feet.

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Not only that but God is my heavenly father who has his arms about me like the father has his arms embracing a son. I am in God's embrace. Another visual image I have – one of my favorites from Revelation 1 – where the Lord holds in his right hand the pastors, the angels, the messengers of the churches in his hand. I've said this a number of times before. I have never been impressed so much with my grip on God but I am tremendously impressed with his grip on me. I may not have the strongest grip but he has a grip that holds me. I must realize that I am in God's grace and my peace and well being flows out of that position of grace.

A third step in gaining peace is to resolve hostility in our life. There is really two kinds of hostility. There's what might be called free-floating hostility or anger in a generalized sense. A person just seems to be angry all the time. Always ticked off. Anything that is displeasing them brings some kind of eruption of violent force. He's angry, mad and it just takes a little thing to totally set him off.

If you have free floating anger you need to find where the source is coming from. Begin putting a process of forgiveness into your life that will begin to expel the anger. Look to a cleansing of the Holy Spirit to forgive us through the blood of Christ. Develop a different perspective on life and upon people.

Most of us more commonly wrestle with the second type of hostility – that which is directed against specific persons or situations. Paul says in Romans 12:18 "If it is possible, as far as it depends upon you live at peace with everyone." That's our goal living at peace with everyone. Paul is a practical person and realized that there are some people no matter how hard you try to please them and be at peace with them, they're not making peace. No way! Some of you know somebody like that. So Paul simply says, As far as is within you live at peace.

We may face the possibility that in spite of our best efforts we will still face an enemy. All the water in the world cannot sink a boat unless it gets inside of the boat. And all the anger of another person cannot hurt you unless it gets inside of you. We must keep that hostility outside. Jesus in fact, as well as Paul in Ephesians gives us some steps of dealing with that hostility against another person. We are to do good to that person. We are to bless them rather than curse them. Bless means to speak well of them rather than to down them. We are to pray for them. We are to forgive them. And we are to resolve our anger on the day that it flares so that it does not become a deep seated root of bitterness or hostility.

All this I easier said than done but do it we must. These are steps to attaining peace. Steps to actualizing, realizing the peace of God in our life as we deal with hostility.

A fourth approach to living in peace involves the successful handling of stress. There are a few people here under stress. An inability to cope with stress produces a lot of things we don't like. Illness and depression and break down and burnout and all kinds of grievous results.

When you come under stress you sometimes think your stress is more than other people. But we all have stress. I've had to resolve how I'm going to live with the stress. I have found some principles in God's word. I've found these principles to be very helpful to me in coping with stress that comes against me.

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The first principle I've found that brings peace in the midst of stress is just set back and realize that the Lord is in control. I'm called upon to assurance – the Lord is in control. The situation may seem out of control at this moment but the Lord is really in control.

I don't like the word "still" when people pray "Lord, we know that you are still on the throne." It infers that he may not always keep his seat. It also infers that there have been a lot of attacks lodged against him and he's had to go in retreat and he is barely hanging on to his seat. And any day now he might get dislodged. But right now he's still on the throne!

My God is not *still* on the throne. He is *on* the throne. He's been on the throne, always will be on the throne, there's never been a serious effort to dislodge him and there never will be. He's King of kings and Lord of lords. He's on the throne. I must take that into my own personal experience. God is on the throne of my life. When I have done my best, when I have asked for forgiveness and help, when I've given my life anew to God, I ultimately have to come to a point of rest and acceptance and say, Lord it doesn't half depend upon me. It all depends upon you. Like a salesman in a car shop, there comes a moment when if you can't close the deal you turn it over to somebody who can. When I can't close my deal. I must turn it over to God and let him close it. I must live with the assurance of God.

It is as a worship, as I pray, as I meditate upon God's word that I become totally aware that he reigns. Trusting him with all of our heart, leaning not to our own understanding, acknowledging him in all of our ways, knowing that he directs our path.

My second response to stress is to live with dreams and goals. In the last days the Spirit will come upon all flesh. Your young men will dream dreams and see visions. Having dreams and having goals enliven me, quicken me. Dreams are meant to lift and to inspire. I may not attain of everything my heart dreams in God to be accomplished. If I don't attain it the Lord will say to me what he said to David when he refused him his dream of building the temple he will say "But it was good that it was in your heart."

I will burn out if I don't have dreams. Dreams do not burn me out. They keep me fired up. I want to resist the whole thing called the midlife crisis burnout sort of a thing. I decided I wasn't going to accept that psychologically. Instead of burning out I was going to refire. Fire up! Why burn out when you can fire up! Dreams and visions and hearing God say again to you, This is the way! Go for it! Those are ways to handling that stress. Not becoming encumbered with the difficulties but being enlivened by the possibilities.

A third response to stress – not all that spiritual but I think it's true. Get the right rest and relaxation. For me getting out on a golf course is more than a game. It keeps me alive. Daily exercise is a tremendous way of reducing stress. Just plain common sense.

And the fourth response to stress is also not very spiritual but I think it's very true – keeping a sense of humor. God keep us from being such sober faced people that we're doom and gloom walking around in human form.

We need to remember what Proverbs 15:15 says about life "The cheerful heart has a continual feast." The Lord help us be a people that can keep a sense of humor even when we face serious responsibilities.

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A fifth way of looking at peace is in terms of emergency crises. Here we go beyond the definition of peace, beyond the aspect of grace and peace, beyond peace in hostility and stress to look at the fact that sometimes dire events happen to us that threaten to overwhelm us. A serious and even perhaps fatal illness. A death. A divorce or breakup in family, loss of a job, loss of needed financial resources. A stunning setback of some kind. How can you have peace in moments like this?

From the scripture and from personal experience there's only one way to have peace and that is for the Lord Jesus to move his peace into your heart. One of my favorite scriptures is in Mark 4 beginning in verse 35 when the disciples are on the lake of Galilee in the storm and they become frightened. The crisis is such to overwhelm them. All peace is robbed from their life. They think they're going down. They wake the Lord I think to help bail water. They're upset that he could be sleeping while they're bailing water.

I think too the solutions of the problems that we give to the Lord under-rate his ability of what he might really want to do.

They initially waken him and when he awakens he says, "Peace be still." Had they remembered the word, which the Lord had said to them at the beginning, I doubt they would have become frightened. He had said to them as they set across that lake, "Let us go across to the other side." They forgot that word of assurance that the Lord indeed was going with them and that they would go across to the other side. In our moments of danger and vulnerability and crisis I'd remind you that the Lord says to you that he is in you and that he is going with you to the other side. He speaks to you a word of peace. It is a word, which will come to you as you wait upon him, as you pray, as you fall upon your knees before him. As you find that moment of rest in him. Peace, I live with you.

Paul tells us from a prison cell that there is a peace that transcends all understanding which will guard our hearts and minds in Christ, Philippians 4:7. The non-Christian sees the peace of a Christian in the midst of tremendous adversity and does not understand how can you have peace like that when you're going through what you're going through. It doesn't mean we don't have grief or our bad moments. But there is something different. It is this difference we're talking about – that peace that passes understanding. The nearer you come to the Lord, the nearer you will have that peace in your heart.

Peace. How does it come in our life? It begins as we know the meaning of peace. God is not so much at times interested in changing our outward circumstances as he is in changing our inward response to those circumstances. Moving his well being into our life.

Secondly grace comes before peace. We must step inside of God's grace.

Third, God calls us to look at the hostility and begin resolving hostilities that his peace might move into us. He calls us to look at our stresses and begin employing principles to deal with the stress. He calls us to his peace in the midst of storms. His peace in the midst of crises.

The Lord may move peace immediately into our life as a spontaneous gift, as a spontaneous act. That's what he does in the storm at Galilee, Mark 4. He moves peace in instantly. Other times he

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has us put into operation a series of life changing principles that show peace building in our life and peace becomes process, a habit, an attitude development in which the peace of God rules in our life.

I pray that these words have pointed you to Jesus. Pointed you to the scripture. And pointed you to the way of peace.

Our Father, we ask that the peace of Christ will rule in our hearts. We realize that all peace begins at the cross where the blood of Jesus Christ became our peace. There's a separation that alienated us from you that in the blood of Christ and in the cross of Christ we have been reconciled to you. You came to us preaching peace. You said to us, my peace I leave unto you. Not as the world gives, give I to you. My peace I leave with you. God, we ask your peace for every life here. For those who do not have peace in their life maybe the reason is that they have never asked you to come in and be the Lord of their life. We pray that they will open their hearts to you in this service today and come to know you as their Lord and giver of peace. We ask for others, Lord, who are going through stress and hostility and grave crises. We pray Lord that they will experience in this moment in their life your life in a very new way. We know that we grow when we are tested, when we are stretched to the limit great growth can occur in us. God, move your peace to lives here that have not had a great measure of that peace. We realize that words cannot adequately express how urgent is the need within some hearts here for peace. We cannot even adequately Lord tell you how to do it. We just ask Lord, bring your peace. To that special person who is here by your will today because you wanted them to come to this service that they might experience