

Abide in God's Peace

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[0 : 00] All right, thank you so much, Alex. Good morning, everyone. Good. Rambunctious folks today. I love hearing all that. Man, that community moment is one of my favorite parts of our Sunday, just hearing all you guys talk and connect and all that.

If you got your Bible, go ahead and turn to Philippians chapter 4. And we are—this is the second to last of the sermons in Philippians, so next week will be our final one.

And man, I'm going to really miss this little book. It's so good, so punchy. Last week, Elliot talked about Christian maturity and just did a fabulous job showing us what Christian maturity is and what it isn't.

And I love the Bible because it's so clear and so helpful in so many ways. And the passage I get to speak about today, I am very helped by it, even most recently as this week.

The topic was very meaningful to me. And so as I wrote this sermon, actually, there was tears flowing down my face as I was putting words to what God was doing in my heart.

[1 : 07] And really, it all started because Wednesday—up to that—up to Wednesday, things were going swimmingly, as they say. But then Wednesday, man, I got thrown a pretty big curveball.

It was one of those moments you step into, and I knew I was stepping into. I just didn't know how heavy and weighty the implications were. And it's just stuff that you get into as a leader of a church and, you know, the spiritual weight and implication of things.

It's tough. And man, on the other side of a meeting I had, my soul was just—it was full of turmoil. It's the best way I can put it. And like in the biblical word, turmoil, because like when you see turmoil or trouble in your Bibles, that Greek word behind it literally means that it's like the closest thing you can get to is having clothes in a tumble dryer just being tossed around willy-nilly and—or stormy chop waters.

And you're a little tiny vessel on stormy waters. And that's what my soul felt like, to be perfectly honest. My anxiety was high. My peace was low.

And so I did what comes natural. I didn't pray. I worked harder and harder to think and to strategize and to figure out how I can solve this problem.

[2 : 29] And it was frustrating because there was no immediate solution. And nothing that I could say, you know what, if I just do this or if I pull this trigger, if I'm able to, you know, something is that, then the problem is going to go away.

The thing is going to be fixed. So Jesus said, in this world, you will have trouble. So where do you and I go when life brings trouble?

Where do you and I go when our soul is filled with turmoil? Where do you go? Where do we go when we feel anxious, afraid, because the future is suddenly unsafe and unsecured?

I would say the last thing I felt on Wednesday was peace. And that's not what God desires for us. Peace is goodness and harmony that God created us to live within.

It is the state of life as it should be, as he intended it to be from creation. And of course, we know that it was lost through sin and continues to be frustrated because of the futility of sin.

[3 : 34] And the good news for us is that we know that, hey, Jesus, when he came, he came to bring that and restore some of that. And he did that when he arrived.

It's available to his disciples in this world that rages against peace, that is filled with sin and futility that rob peace from us. But we know that even now, even though we live in this place and live fighting and wrestling for this peace that only comes through Jesus, we know that one day he is going to return and peace will be all that we know.

But until then, we're here in the chaos, in the futility, in the turmoil, in the unpredictability of life. So then the question is, how do you and I, how do we remain?

How do we abide in God's peace? So let's find out. Philippians 4, verses 4 to 9. Rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

[4 : 46] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things. And the God of peace will be with you.

This is God's word. So we have Paul, the apostle, writing to this church, and he is doing some very good pastoral ministry here.

What's implicit from these verses is that Paul is recognizing that life can be hard. Life can be unfair. Life can be troubling, even for the believers back then, just like it is for us today.

And here's the thing. Because of that, we won't remain unaffected by those things. Just because we are Christians doesn't mean we kind of float above all the turmoil and all the trouble, and it kind of just bounces off of us.

[6 : 12] Now, there is a very normative response, right? When we enter into difficult circumstances, there's a normative response we have to all of this. We get really serious, right?

We get really stern. We get really curt. We lack in compassion and kindness. We get preoccupied with ourselves and what we need. We forget about others. My wife affectionately calls it Jesse in business mode, right?

Which is about the nicest way to call somebody out on a sin, right? And I'm like, wow. But verse 5 says, we should be known by our reasonableness.

And actually, what that word means, it means we should be known by our gentleness. We should be known by our kindness. And here's the thing. Abiding in God's peace does that.

It makes us pleasant to be around. No matter what we're facing, it makes us pleasant to be around. Is your life, is my life, a trail of tears of broken relationships?

[7 : 15] Can we get along with people very different to us? Are you more a teddy bear or more a porcupine? Especially when things aren't going well for you.

And those things matter. It matters how people experience us. It matters how we are living our life. It matters how we are to others. And God is telling us here that we must let our reasonableness, aka gentleness, kindness, because of the peace we have in Him, that should be known to others. We should be known for those things. And so what are you known for by your friends and family? What are you known for at your workplace? Here's a great idea to make this the worst week of your life.

Ask your family and friends how they experience you. I want to throw myself under the bus. My kids will sometimes say they have two dads. The good-natured one, the fun one, who's nice to be around.

And then they're like, oh, dad's in that mood right now. We know what we're getting right now. And that's not easy to hear. But it is good for me to know and face up to how I'm making myself known to those close to me, to my family and my friends so why so that I can say, you know what, this isn't okay.

[8 : 31] I can turn from it. I can repent of it. Avoidance isn't reality. Like we can decide like, I don't want to know what people think about me.

Well, that's not your reality. You can't be healed of what you don't know you have. It's like saying, I don't have cancer, but you've never been screened for it. So how do you really know? Right? But when you know you got cancer, then you can go to the doctors and you can get the help that you need to fight the cancer.

And here's the thing. We all got this cancer called sin and it robs us of peace and it robs others of peace as well. It makes us less gentle and kind and compassionate.

It makes us more worried and anxious and afraid. But you know what, friends, we have this incredible doctor that we get to go to. And he gives us all we need to fight for his peace.

And it is a fight, but it's just not with people. And holding fast to God's peace is spiritual warfare. We see that in verses six and seven. Paul says in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God and his peace will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[9 : 50] Revisiting the story I told you earlier about my Wednesday and what I was going through. Eventually, I went out to walk and pray and I began laying my requests before God.

I was unloading to him all my fears and my worries and my troubles. And I got to be honest, my requests were being made, but it was low on the Thanksgiving side. Okay, I got room to grow in this.

But in my conversation with God and my making my requests with God, God began to speak to me. He began to lead me back into truths about him. He said, Jesse, remember what I said to in Matthew six, be anxious for nothing.

God knows what you need. He knows what you need. Look at the lilies of the field. They're everywhere. They're in plentiful supply. Look at the little sparrows that flit around.

God takes care of all of them. He cares for all of them. And you know what? I'm saying, Jesus is saying to us, you are much more important to the father than those lilies in the field and those birds.

[10 : 53] Now, I want to say this isn't a joke. As I'm pondering these things, right? I look over as I'm walking down the street right here in a field. There's this little bird eating on the grass.

And I just begin to weep. I can't imagine what I look like. But God knew I needed to see that in that moment.

He knew that I needed that truth to hit me so deeply. I need to be reminded of who he is, what kind of God he is, which is an important practice to cultivate peace.

Practice expanding your focus beyond the problem to behold goodness and beauty, right? And this isn't saying like, just ignore it and it'll just go away. There's a big difference between putting your head in the sand and popping your head up into heaven.

It's a big difference. Paul says in verses eight to nine, and let me just summarize it for you.

Whatever is true, friends, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable.

[11 : 57] Think about those things. Focus on those things. Put yourself back into beholding goodness and beauty. So in that moment on this little street, North Craven, looking at that little bird eating God's provision, I was beholding the beauty and the goodness of God's providence.

My heart was being reminded of my heavenly father who loves and sustains even that little bird that's of no account to us. We walk by them all the time. We don't think twice about them, but you know what?

He holds them in such high regard. They are so precious to him. And he says, you know what? I love you even more than that. I hold you in a higher esteem than even those things. We have a closer place in his heart.

And as the song says, his eye is on the sparrow. And so I know he's watching me. That little bird was eating, but my heart was feasting on the father's goodness, on the father's beauty, on the father's peace.

I've walked through very dark seasons of life, very long, dark seasons. It's very easy to get fixated on the problems when you're in them.

[13 : 07] And it's good to lament them. It's good to go to God and complain and grieve and get angry. But you know what? You can do all that, but it doesn't fix the problem. Jesus said all our anxiety, all our concern, all our worry, God wants to bring those to him.

But just know that like, it's not going to change anything. So instead of getting myopic and seeking first the solution to your problem, do what Jesus said to do.

The better thing is to seek first the kingdom of God. Do the practices to behold goodness and beauty that never changes. And when you and I, when we expand our focus to behold that goodness and beauty, your problem may not go away, okay, but I can guarantee you what will happen, it will return to its proper size and perspective.

And the reason for that is when you expand your focus, you realize how close God really is. Verse five, the second part of verse five, Paul says, disciples of Jesus, Philippian church, city grace church, the Lord is at hand.

He's near. Do not be anxious about anything. And again, at the end of verse nine, he says, practice these things, beholding goodness and beauty, practice these things.

[14:31] And you know what? The God of peace will be with you. Not maybe with you. He will be with you. That little bird brought me into the reality of how small my problem was in relationship to the power of my heavenly father who loves me.

It opened my eyes to see and remember that, oh, God is actually, he is really near. He has not forgotten me. He has not abandoned me. He is right here in the problem with me in it.

And it kept happening the rest of the day because you know what? I wish I could say after that little moment, I was just free as a bird. No pun intended. But I wasn't.

I still wrestled. I still wavered. I still had moments of doubt where I said like, God, I know you're for us, but are you going to abandon us? Are you going to leave me high and dry?

And that bird, it was a comforting moment. And I needed that. I needed to know and I needed to be reminded the father's eye is on me. But yet I still wrestled. And then God kept giving me good thing after good thing.

[15:35] I arrived at community group that day a little bit early and Philip Davis, he's in my community group. He looked up and I'm going to weep here. He just looked at me and he saw and he knew what was going on.

He didn't have to say anything. He didn't say anything. He just moved towards me and he gave me a hug unsolicited. And it was a hug that said, hey, I get it, bro.

I get it, brother. I understand. I know what you're going through. It was recognition. Knowing what I was facing, the father knew what I needed. That was a gift from the father.

More than my problem being solved, as nice as that would have been, I needed comfort in my distress. God solving our problems, friends, is nice, but receiving God's comfort in our problems is a necessity.

Paul, the guy who wrote Philippians, he knew how crucial the father's comfort was in his own life. And he experienced it.

[16:39] Even though the most darkest of dark times, he writes about this and he says in 2 Corinthians, blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

And then he goes on to say how him and his team that was with them, how they were afflicted and persecuted and were so under trial that, man, they thought they were going to die.

They didn't know if they were going to come out of it, but they set their hope on God, he goes on to say. We set our hope on him that he had delivered them before and he would do it again.

It's the life that Paul lived. He says, I go through the city and in the country, I face hunger and danger and hardships and persecutions and beatings and all kinds of crazy things.

And yet in all of it, he knew God to be near. He knew the father's comfort. All his problems didn't go away. That was a nice to have.

[17:51] He talked about having this thorn in the flesh. He prayed, Lord, that can that go away? I do not like this. That would be a nice to have. But you know what he did have?

He had the father's comfort. We need that. And so he could say to the Philippians with confidence, you know what, friends?

The Lord is at hand. He is. Do not be anxious for anything. And in one sense, Paul is saying, hey, the Lord is at hand.

The Lord is near. He is not far from any of us ever. But also, there is this reference to Jesus's imminent return. That is the other implication of this.

And believing every problem will come to an end one day kills anxiety and cultivates peace. Paul is reminding the Philippian church what is true.

[18:48] Now, whatever they're facing, remember this. Jesus is returning soon, and he's going to set everything right. All your pain, all your suffering, all your frustrations, it will come to an end.

So just hold on a little longer. This kind of hope, it creates an uncommon resilience. If you read church history, those who were holding on to that hope that did not count this life precious, but were living towards that day, that one day, this great inheritance, this eternal life, the things that they were able to suffer for the name of Jesus, was such a witness and so incredible to non-believers that sometimes in their martyrdom, it caused those people, the very persecutors who were killing

them, to say, like, they must have something.

And people would convert because of that. Uncommon resilience. We need that today. We need this uncommon resilience.

It is something that is true for all of us as human beings. There's this guy named Viktor Frankl, and he was a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps.

And afterwards, he became a psychiatrist and a bit of a philosopher. And he told some stories in his book, *The Man's Search for Meaning*, which is a great book, a great read.

[20 : 12] He wrote in there some of the experiences in those death camps. And some of those experiences, he goes on to demonstrate the power of hope and its ability to carry people through the most difficult of circumstances.

And just think about this. He and his fellow Jews were treated with contempt for a prolonged period of time in those places. They were being abused simply for the pleasure of their captors.

They were underfed, underclothed, overworked. Someone you prayed with or sang with the day before could suddenly disappear, never to see them again. And you would be left wondering, am I next?

And in his book, he writes about this doctor friend of his. They were in the camp together, and his doctor friend one day came to him and shared a dream. And he said, Victor, in this dream, I had this dream, and a voice told me.

He told me, your rescue is imminent. All your sufferings will come to an end. And this voice said, it's going to happen on March 30th. You will be set free.

[21 : 17] And this doctor friend of his is telling him this. It's February at the time. And in Victor's actual words, he goes on to say this.

On March 30th, the day his prophecy had told him that the war and suffering would be over, he became delirious and lost consciousness. On March 31st, he was dead.

To all outward appearances, he had died of typhus. Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man, his courage and hope or lack of them, and the state of immunity of his body will understand that the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect.

The ultimate cause of my friend's death was that the expected liberation did not come, and he was severely disappointed. His faith in the future and his will to live had become paralyzed, and his body fell victim to illness, and thus the voice of his dream was right after all.

This was just one story that Victor tells. He goes on to say how often that happened. And then he makes this point. He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how.

[22 : 35] Woe to him who has no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. And Frankl's right.

But I don't think he goes far enough. Anyone can find a why to live for. The question is, is that why worthy of your hope? Peace is all about where your hope is placed.

Think about the various whys that people live for. Think about all the things that people put their hope in, right? It could be things like the rights that they're fighting for, their politics, economics, justice, foreign affairs, those type of things.

Their why could be more domestic, like marriage, or kids, or secured retirement, or their career, their hobbies, or their sports. And it's not that any of those things are meaningless.

They have their place. But if that is where our hope is placed, if that is your why of your life, what you've done is you've put your hope, you've placed that in what history would say it will inevitably change.

[23 : 44] None of those things are going to be secured and could be held onto. Anytime our why is dependent upon man rather than God, we are committing ourselves to losing peace.

Because our hearts and our minds aren't being guarded in Christ, like Paul says. We are handing them over to be guarded by the structures, strategies, and strengths of man.

And we do that, if we're honest, because that makes sense. It's easy to wrap our minds around those things. At least with man, we have some sort of control.

We can vote them in or we can vote them out. We can manipulate or we can litigate or we can demonstrate to get people to do what we want them to do. Or we can just pull the ripcord and peace out.

We can switch jobs or homes or spouses or hobbies. But all those things, they have one common thing. All those things are in our power. It's what man can control. It's what we can do. But God says you're not going to find peace that way.

[24 : 45] Jeremiah 17, 5 to 6 says, Thus says the Lord, cursed is the man who trusts in man, who makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord.

He is like a shrub in the desert and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

Okay, well, what's the alternative? Well, God says there is one. Verse 7, Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream and does not fear when heat comes.

It doesn't fear when the trouble in the trial comes. For its leaves remain green. That man is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease.

He does not cease to bear fruit. Here's what God is telling us. The greater peace is one you can't control because the peace of God only comes by trusting the God of peace.

[25 : 52] The guy who wrote Philippians is Paul guy. He had a very high view of God's sovereignty, friends. He believed and had faith and trusted that God has a plan and a purpose.

He is carrying it out and he doesn't bring us into it as a consultant. We are brought into it as a participant of what already he has already determined.

He is sovereign. We are not. He is in control. We are not. And friends, this is either good news to you or it's bad news to you. It all depends on who you believe God to be.

My Wednesday rocked my world. My Wednesday robbed me of peace. Why? Because I was trusting in man, myself and others.

And not in God who was father, who is my Lord Jesus Christ, who loved me, who loves me and gave himself up unto death to redeem me and to adopt me and to give me inheritance and a place in his redemptive purposes.

[26 : 54] But I got back to that piece. I got back to remembering, no, no, there is a sovereign king on the throne and his name is Jesus Christ.

There is a God in heaven, a good father who rules over the affairs of everything and everything is subject unto him. And he will do what he wants to do. He will accomplish what he wants to accomplish.

Everything that comes forth from his mouth, every decree, every word does not return back to him void. It will accomplish the purpose it was set out to do.

And so God does not make his plans willy-nilly, friends. He does not make his plans over your life willy-nilly and take them back. They are secured in him and in his goodness.

He is a God of beauty and goodness and grace and love and justice and righteousness. He is worthy of our trust.

[27 : 50] I got back to that place. Here's what I wrote in my backyard, looking out at my backyard yesterday morning in my kitchen, watching 20 little birds feeding their bellies, feasting.

I was feasting again on the truth of God's sovereignty. Just a little excerpt from my journal. Father, you feed the sparrows. Your eye is on them.

Therefore, I know that you watch over me. Yet, I feel anxious because of the unresolved circumstance. Will there be enough?

Will you come through? I am tempted to look to man for my salvation. If they fix it, we're saved. Seems very obvious.

But faith is not pragmatic like that always. You turn the hearts of men to your will. You can provoke every heart involved as you desire.

[28 : 50] Can you rest my soul in the sovereign Lord? Can I stand and see him deliver and rescue yet again?

Help my faith to rise. My God and King, help my faith to rise. Trust in the Lord, oh my soul, for your salvation. Rest in his sovereign plan.

For what can I do to change what he has determined? What can any of us do? Pray? Yes. Pray. But always with trust and request and not demand.

The good and perfect will of Father is set. His plans are good. Peace is only where there is total surrender. That you have prepared our steps.

That you are good. Wherever you lead, we will go. Friends, to abide in God's peace.

[29 : 54] We must abide in him. We must abide in his sovereignty. As the band comes up. In a moment, we're going to take communion.

But first, I just want to say to you, if you're here and you're not yet a follower of Jesus, his peace only comes when you totally surrender.

When you give up trusting in your strength and your ability. You have to surrender to his perfect will, which has been revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who came and died for you, who died for your sin.

And the peace of God only comes through faith and belief in that, through total surrender to those truths. In a moment, there's going to be an opportunity for you to respond.

Come to him and pray the prayer that is going to be up on the screen. If you're here and already a follower of Jesus, we're going to take communion. And just remember, the peace of God only comes through surrender for us too.

[30 : 58] It really does. Total surrender. Jesus totally surrendered to the Father's will, which meant dying on a cross for our peace.

Christ is our peace. Communion reminds us of this. And by taking it, what you and I are doing, we are going and declaring, I am in Christ as Christ is in me.

The God of peace is with me. The God of peace is with you. And so let me pray. And as we come to the table, remember that.

Take the bread and the cup and dwell on that as you come back to your seat. And then receive and drink and eat of his body broken, his blood shed for you with gratitude.

That in him, he is our peace. Lord, we come to you today. We come to you right now. And for whatever we're facing, you know.

[32 : 07] For whatever we're facing, you're with us. For whatever you're facing, you want to bring your comfort. Lord, we thank you, Lord, that we can come to your table today and feast on you.

Feast on your provision that brought us peace. For my friends in the room that are wrestling with this idea of, man, should I totally surrender to this God?

Show them your goodness and your love and your beauty. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.