

## INTRODUCTION

This is the third message in my series on “Grace-fruit: Jesus living in me.” Today, we’re going to focus on the fruit of peace. Our text is Galatians 5:22-23 which says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

People talk about world peace, and that’s a noble goal. It’s always a good answer in a beauty contest. But according to an article in *The New York Times*, out of almost 4,000 years of recorded human history, there have only been about 200 years of peace—and those years of peace are just pauses for the armies to reload!

Ron Artest, a forward for the LA Lakers, was known as one of the most aggressive and violent players in the NBA. Hoping to change his reputation, in 2011, he legally changed his name to Metta World Peace. That didn’t change his behavior, though. Just two months ago he was ejected from a game for violently elbowing James Harden in the face. You can call yourself world peace, but unless you have Jesus in your heart, you’ll never find inner peace.

Is it possible to have true inner peace? I found a quote where a woman wrote: “My therapist told me the way to achieve true inner peace is to finish what I start. So far today, I have finished 2 bags of chips and a chocolate cake. I feel better already.”

A man was leaving church one Sunday and said to his pastor, “Your message today reminded me of the peace and mercy of God.” The pastor said, “Why, thank you.” The man said, “Don’t thank me. It was like the peace of God because it passed all understanding, and it was like the mercy of God because it seemed to endure forever!”

Some people think peace is the absence of problems, but it’s not possible to go through life without trouble and adversity. Job said, “Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.” (Job 5:7) Let’s start with a working definition of peace. “Peace is not the absence of problems; Peace is God’s gift of serenity in the midst of your problems.” We’ve all known people who crumbled under the pressures of life; that would be the reaction of most people, in fact. But we’ve also known people who went through the most painful and difficult trials life could hand them, yet they never seem to lose their peace. They never lose their sense of spiritual equilibrium. These are people who have discovered what it is to have the Spiritual Fruit of Peace. It’s not *their* peace. It’s the peace of Jesus, God’s gift of serenity, abiding in their personality.

In this message I want to present a case study on personal peace. It comes from an incident in the life of Simon Peter. In the early days of the church in Jerusalem, Peter was arrested and thrown in prison. He was scheduled to be executed the next day. “That’s when King Herod got it into his head to go after some of the church members. He murdered James, John’s brother. When he saw how much it raised his popularity ratings with the Jews, he arrested Peter—and had him thrown in jail, putting four squads of four soldiers each to guard him. He was planning a public lynching after Passover... Then the time came for Herod to bring him out for the kill. That night, even though shackled to two soldiers, one on either side, Peter slept like a baby.” (Acts 12:1-6 *The Message*)

This wasn't the King Herod who was alive when Jesus was born; this was his grandson, Herod Agrippa. But like his grandfather, he was a cruel and violent man. He had James, the brother of John, beheaded. This made the Jewish leaders so happy that he decided to execute the ringleader of these Jesus-followers. He arrested Peter and threw him in prison; probably in the Roman headquarters in Jerusalem called the Citadel. He put him in chains, surrounded by sixteen soldiers. That's like being on death row in a maximum-security wing of a prison. Now, how would you or I respond if we knew we were going to die by execution in the morning? For most of us it would have been an episode of Sleepless in the Citadel. But Peter slept like a baby—now THAT'S inner peace!

The question that begs our attention from this incident is HOW could Peter possess the kind of personal peace and serenity that allowed him to SLEEP at a time like this? He knew some foundational truths about God that allowed his heart to be filled with serenity. Did Peter know something we don't know? Actually, you can find peace in the midst of your trouble if you know these three truths about God.

### **1. KNOW THAT GOD IS THERE...He sees what you're facing**

Peter realized God was with him there in the prison. I'm sure he prayed before he went to sleep. Before the cross, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter slept when he should have been praying. But now after the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, he slept *because* he prayed. When you face hard times, the first thing to do is pray, and the last thing to do is trust God. When you talk to God, you shouldn't think that He's a million miles away in heaven. He's right there where you are. He sees what you're facing.

Corrie Ten Boom, who survived the atrocities of a Nazi prison camp said: “There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still.” So when you find yourself facing a situation that would threaten to rob you of sleep remember this powerful promise from God's word. “Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7 NLT)

Just as Peter had sixteen soldiers guarding him, he had something much more powerful than soldiers guarding his heart—it was the peace of God that passes understanding. And he had it because he refused to worry. Instead, he prayed and then he slept.

He wasn't the only one praying. The church was praying for Peter to be released. To me, what happened next is rather funny. In the middle of the night God sent an angel to rescue Peter. He was sleeping so soundly that the angel had to poke him in the ribs to wake him up. He saw that the chains had fallen off. Peter was so sleepy that the angel had to say, “Put on your clothes, now put on your coat, now follow me.” They walked right out of the prison and the guards never saw them—it was like they were invisible. When Peter arrived at the house where the prayer meeting was going on he knocked on the door. A young girl named Rhoda answered the door and couldn't believe her eyes. She just left Peter standing in the street and went in and said, “Peter's here.” And they didn't believe her. It's like they said, “That's impossible. He's in prison and

we’re praying for his release. So don’t bother us by telling us he’s here, we’ve got to pray!” Obviously, they didn’t have much faith, but it doesn’t take a lot of faith for God to move mountains—or open prison doors—or to give you a peace that passes human understanding.

When you’re going through the fire, you should pray and ask God to give you peace. There’s actually a famous prayer called “The Serenity Prayer” that many 12-step programs use. The classic form that you often read says: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; The courage to change the things I can, And the wisdom to know the difference.” That’s a great prayer. Someone created a parody called “The Senility Prayer” which says: “God, grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked anyway, The good fortune to run into the ones I do, And the eyesight to know the difference!”

Let me give you the full story about this prayer. An American pastor and theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, first wrote it. Dr. Niebuhr was born in Missouri in the late 1880s. His parents were German immigrants and German was his first language. He first published this prayer in German and here is the actual translation of it. By the way, every Monday night at Celebrate Recovery, which meets in the Student Center, we pray this full prayer, not just the short version. As I read it, will you make it your personal prayer? “God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed; Courage to change the things which should be changed; And the Wisdom to distinguish the one from the other. Living one day at a time; Enjoying one moment at a time; Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace; Taking, as Jesus did; This sinful world as it is, Not as I would have it; Trusting that You will make all things right; If I surrender to your will; So that I may be reasonably happy in this life; And supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen.”

So when you’re in pain, searching for peace, the first thing to know is that God is there – and He sees what you’re facing. Right now, I’m thinking of a great word for God that we don’t use much anymore. It is a word that so describes God’s character that our Founding Fathers often used this word for God in our founding documents. They just capitalized it and substituted it for God. It appears in our Declaration of Independence. Give up yet? Here’s a hint. It’s such a powerful word that the Baptist preacher, Roger Williams, gave it as the name of a city that is now the capital of our smallest state. It’s the word PROVIDENCE. *Pro* means “ahead.” *Videre* means, “to see.” We get our word “video” from it. When used as a title of God, it means that God not only sees what’s happening to us NOW, He sees what’s ahead. No matter what you’re going through right now, God has already seen the video of what’s going to happen. And trust me, it’s GOOD.

Sadly, there are a lot of Christians who are Sleepless in Smith County because they have forgotten that God is there with them. There’s a line from one of my favorite hymns that says, “Oh what peace we often forfeit. Oh what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.” So you can experience peace when you know that God is there and He sees what you’re facing.

## **2. KNOW THAT GOD IS AWARE...He knows what you’re fearing**

Peter was facing execution, and he knew God was aware of his situation. Are you enjoying the same kind of peace that Peter had? Can you sleep like a baby even when you are afraid of what might happen tomorrow?

In January 2005, Oklahoma Sooners lost the national championship football game to USC in the Orange Bowl. Of course, as an OU fan I must add the footnote that USC had an ineligible player, and later forfeited the game and the title. But OU lost badly; they were trounced 55-19. At the press conference the next morning Coach Bob Stoops was asked how he slept after the game. He responded that he slept like a baby. He said, “I’d sleep a few minutes, wake up and cry; then sleep a few more minutes and wake up and cry again.”

Peter could sleep soundly because he claimed the promise of God found in Psalm 4:8, “I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” God is aware of every aspect of your life. In Psalm 139 we learn that God says He knows everything about us. He knows what we’re going to say before we say it. He is aware of every situation we’re going through in life. I love the promise of Psalm 121:4, which says, “He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” You can substitute your name there and say, “He who watches over David neither slumbers nor sleeps.” How can I say that? The very next verse, Psalm 121:5 says, “The Lord watches over YOU.” God doesn’t get tired, so He doesn’t need sleep. So since He’s watching over you all night, you might as well go to sleep instead of worrying about tomorrow.

Do you have trouble sleeping at night? Over 70 million Americans suffer from some form of insomnia. Women are more likely as men to struggle with sleep deficit than men. Some of you ladies may say, “That’s because there’s not much going on in men’s brains to start with.”

Someone said the human brain is an amazing instrument. It starts working the moment you’re born and doesn’t stop until you stand up in front of a crowd to speak! Actually, your brain never stops. And that’s one of the reasons why people have trouble sleeping at night. Their brain just keeps on working, bringing up what happened, or what might happen tomorrow. Even when you go to sleep your brain keeps working—that’s why we dream. Wouldn’t it be great if our brains had an on/off switch? At night you could just get into bed and switch it off and set it to come back on the next morning? Unfortunately, you can’t switch off your brain, but you can change the channel! One of my favorite verses is Isaiah 26:3. In fact, I include it at the end of every email I send. It says, “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.” When I wake up in the middle of the night, I put my brain on the Jesus channel. I start praying, and I often fall back asleep within a few minutes. So trying switching your brain to the Jesus channel.

A lady wrote me saying she had trouble sleeping after her husband died. Then she memorized the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm and would recite it at night. She would emphasize the personal pronouns and envision the setting as she silently quoted it. “The Lord is MY shepherd, I shall not want. He makes ME lie down in green pastures, He leads ME beside the still waters.” She said she was usually asleep before she got to the part that says, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow ME all the days of MY life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Try it!

### **3. KNOW THAT GOD CARES...He shares how you’re feeling**

Peter could sleep not only because he knew God was there, and that God was aware of His situation. He also knew God cared. Jesus had been in the same Citadel where he was imprisoned just a few weeks earlier. He had been beaten and tortured by Roman soldiers—perhaps these were some of the same ones guarding Peter.

The writer of Hebrews says Jesus, our High Priest, knows our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way we are tempted, yet He never sinned. Worry is a sin, and we know Jesus was tempted to worry. Fear is a sin, and we know Jesus was tempted to be afraid. You should know Jesus knows EXACTLY how you’re feeling when you are afraid. He shares the feelings of our weaknesses. And more importantly, in our weakest times, God cares.

Once Jesus and the disciples were in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. They panicked and this is what they asked Jesus. They cried out, “Don’t you care if we drown?” (Mark 4:38) That’s a good question. If you’re honest, you might admit you’ve wanted to ask God the same thing. “God, I’m hurting, don’t you care?” “God, I’ve lost my job, don’t you care?” “God, I’ve got cancer, don’t you care?” “God, I’m all alone, don’t you care?” “God, I’m in prison, and I’m scheduled to be executed tomorrow morning...oops, I guess you DO care because you calmed the storm that night.”

He DOES care. Sometimes Jesus calms the storms of life, but most often He calms our hearts in the midst of life’s storms. We all know that a hurricane is a devastating force of nature. But at the center of every hurricane there’s an eye, where it’s calm and peaceful. The sun is shining, the air is still, and even birds fly around in the eye of the storm. Peter was in the eye of the hurricane that night in prison. And when you know that God cares for you, you can be in the peaceful eye of the storm while all around you the storm rages.

How much does God care for you? Listen to His words. “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.” (Isaiah 49:15-16) In the original Hebrew it says, “I have engraved YOU on the palm of my hands.” It’s more than just your name. The great British pastor Charles Spurgeon pointed this out: “God says, ‘I have engraved YOU.’ He didn’t say, ‘your name.’ The name is there, but that is not all. God says, ‘I have engraved your person, your image, your circumstances, your sins, your temptations, your weaknesses, your wants, your works, everything about you, all that concerns you; I have put all of this together here.’ Will you ever say again that your God has forsaken you when He has engraved you on His own palms?”

We’ve all known people who take a pen and write something on their hand when they wanted to remember it. Last evening I performed a wedding where the bride and groom read their own vows they had written to each other. The bride’s dad is a pastor and he told me about a wedding he performed where the bride and groom had written their own vows, and they were going to recite them from memory. The groom was afraid he would forget the vow, so he wrote his vow on the palm of his hand. The only trouble is that grooms are usually nervous and they sweat a lot. (I never say, “Wilt thou” to the groom because he’s usually already wilted!) In this wedding when it came time to read his vows his opened his hand and there was just a blue blob of

smear ink. He was so flustered that when he and the bride saw it he just blurted out, “All I can say is ‘I love you!’” That was enough.

If you doubt how much God cares for you, I invite you to do what Thomas did. Look at the hands of God. You’ll see the nail-scarred hands of Jesus. There were red stains there, but now they are just scars. But you’re there as well. Jesus says, “I care for you so much that I took the nails in my hands for you. I have you engraved on my hands.”

Since God cares for you, He can give you peace in spite of your pain. I love to tell the true story behind the hymn, “It is well with my soul.” You’ve heard parts of it, but here’s the full story. Horatio Spafford was a wealthy lawyer from Chicago and a Presbyterian elder. He was also a close friend of the evangelist, Dwight L. Moody. Spafford’s life was filled with tragedy. First, his only son died at age four from scarlet fever. Then, he lost most of his wealth when the Great Chicago Fire wiped out real estate he had bought on Lake Michigan. But he refused to become bitter. He scraped together what money he had left and planned to take his wife and four remaining daughters to England to help with an evangelistic Crusade Moody was leading. At the last minute, business kept him in Chicago, so he put his daughters and wife on the ship for England and he planned to sail a few days later and join them.

The ship his wife and daughters were on collided with another ship and sank. All four of his daughters died, but his wife was rescued. We have a copy of the telegram she sent to her husband. It simply says, “Saved Alone. What shall I do?” And she gave her contact information. He immediately boarded a ship to join his wife. Now imagine a man in his shoes. His son has died. He has lost most of his wealth, and now his four daughters have drowned. Yet while he was on the ship, gazing out at the rolling waves, he wrote the words to a song that has given hope to many of us. “When Peace like a river attendeth my way; When sorrows like sea billows roll. Whatever my lot, Thy hast taught me to say; “It is well. It is well with my soul.”

## CONCLUSION

Pastor, how could Horatio Spafford find such peace? Jesus was in him. Pastor, how could Peter sleep when he faced death? Jesus lived in him. Pastor, how can I have peace like a river in my soul? Jesus lives in you. It wasn’t the peace of Simon Peter that enabled him to sleep that night. It was the peace of Jesus.

Let’s go back to that storm on the Sea of Galilee. Do you recall what Jesus was doing while the storm was raging? He was sleeping. He’s the only One who can sleep in a storm, so the only way Peter could sleep in his storm was to let Jesus in Him sleep during the storm. The only way we can sleep during the storms of life is to allow Jesus to give us His peace.

Jesus is your source of serenity. He said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) Did you notice Jesus didn’t say, “WITH ME you’ll have peace.” He said, “IN ME, you may have peace.” When Christ is in you, and you are in Christ, you can have His peace.

How are you sleeping at night? When most of us were kids we learned a little bedside prayer that

said, “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake. I pray the Lord my soul to take.” That prayer is a little creepy because it plants the thought in a child’s mind, “Oh, no, I may die in my sleep! I don’t know if I want to go to sleep!”

I recently read a revised expanded version of the prayer that focuses more on God’s care. It says: “Now I lay me down to sleep. My faith in God, it runs so deep. That if I should die, before I wake, I trust my Lord my soul to take. Until that time, till death does come, He’ll wake me with the morning sun. The birds will sing, and I will cheer, That God is good, and I’m still here!” Amen!

Do you need peace? Do you need serenity? Just remember that in spite of whatever crisis you may be facing: God is there. God is aware. And God cares!

## OUTLINE

A Case Study in Personal Peace:

“That’s when King Herod got it into his head to go after some of the church members. He murdered James, John’s brother. When he saw how much it raised his popularity ratings with the Jews, he arrested Peter—and had him thrown in jail, putting four squads of four soldiers each to guard him. He was planning a public lynching after Passover...Then the time came for Herod to bring him out for the kill. That night, even though shackled to two soldiers, one on either side, Peter slept like a baby.” *Acts 12:1-6 The Message*

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“I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” *Psalms 4:8*

### 3. KNOW THAT GOD CARES...He shares how you’re feeling

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Jesus is your source for serenity!

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” *John 16:33*



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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes