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The Path To Personal Peace
How God Meets Our Greatest Needs (Part 6)
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When I was in high school I had the opportunity to meet an up and coming theologian by the name of Francis Schaeffer. Francis Schaeffer was a profoundly deep thinker. His passion was to help the next generation know Christ and live out their faith in all the arenas of life. To this end he wrote volumes of books and articles. He toured colleges across the country lecturing on philosophy and truth, the Bible as truth, the church and secular culture. He eventually moved to Switzerland where he established a study center called La Brie. During the late sixties, seventies and early eighties thousands of college students from around the world journeyed to La Brie to ask their questions about God and faith and life. As Schaffer got to know these students, he noticed something many of them had in common. They had parents who were so caught up in pursuing **personal peace and materialism** that they had neglected their own faith and as a result, they had neglected the responsibility of passing their faith on to their children.

If that was true in the sixties, seventies and eighties, it is all the more true today. For the first time in the history of our nation, we have an entire generation of children being raise completely outside the church, by parents who are Biblically ignorant. They are guilty of putting personal peace and materialism before their faith and the responsibility to pass that faith on to their children. But I wonder, are we guilty of putting personal peace and materialism before our faith and our responsibility to pass that faith on to our children?

To a large degree we Christians have lost the culture war in our nation because we have put personal peace and materialism before our faith and our responsibility to pass that faith on to the next generation. For the most part, Christians today have chosen to hide from the controversial issues in society. We have chosen to hide from controversy and conflict. We want our personal peace at all cost so we have ceased to be the salt of the earth. We have ceased to be those who influence the culture and the community around us.

Despite all the things for sale, legal and illegal, designed to give us personal peace – crystals, palm reading, massages, music, special diets, exercise programs, drugs, alcohol, still there are very few people who have a sense of peace about themselves and life. Most people carry a high degree of stress, anxiety, and tension around with them. We seem to have a personal peace crisis in our nation. Today

we are going to look at how God meets our need for peace, but before we do let's look at what robs us of personal peace,

There are three things that rob us of personal peace, three things we all experience on a regular basis.

FIRST, ARE UNCONTROLLABLE CIRCUMSTANCES. Much of life is beyond our control. Little things bug us like getting stuck in traffic or losing internet connection or a dropped call on our cell phones or a long line at the check out counter. Those are the little things we can usually do something about. But the really big things in life are ultimately beyond our control like our **health** or the health of our loved ones. Like **marriage**. There are people who want more than anything to be married but it's not happening for them. There are people whose marriages are irreparably broken beyond their control. How about **children**? There are people who want children so bad but they're unable to have them. When we have children, we can't control how they are going to turn out. We can't control the economy or the stock market or world peace. These are the huge things –the uncontrollable circumstances that rob us of personal peace.

SECOND, ARE UNCHANGABLE PEOPLE. People by nature resist change. Change is threatening. People resent it when you try to help them to change. Have you ever tried to change anybody? Maybe you've tried to get your spouse to make some personal improvement and he or she just wouldn't cooperate or appreciate your efforts. It's for your own good, you say, but they still resist making the change. The quickest way to lose your peace of mind is to try to change somebody else because people are not going to change just because you want them to. It's hard enough to try and change your own behavior, but it's impossible to change someone else. They have to want to change.

THIRD, WE ARE ROBBED OF PERSONAL PEACE BY PROBLEMS THAT ARE UNEXPLAINABLE. We know that life isn't fair and yet we think it should be. We know that not every life has a happy ending, not every couple lives happily ever after. Things don't always turn out right and we aren't always going to know why. Not everything that happens has an explanation and when you can't explain the why, you tend to get frustrated, anxious, nervous, angry, and stressed out.

Personal peace is one of the deepest needs of all human beings. God made us with this need and He has designed a path for us to take to fulfill this need, a path that won't lead us to neglect our faith or the faith development of our children. God's path to personal peace will not keep us from influencing the next generation or the culture around us. He has a path for us to take that will bring us personal peace and enable us to be the salt of the earth as we interact with the culture around us and influence the next generation for Christ.

We've been looking at the names for God in the Old Testament that reveal to us God's desire to meet our deepest needs. The name I want to share with you today is *Jehovah Shalom*, which means, "*I am the God of peace.*" In the New Testament the most common greeting between Christians is "*Grace and Peace.*" This greeting was taught them by our Lord. Three times in chapter 20 of John's Gospel we find Jesus saying, "*Peace be with you.*" Jesus wants us to be filled with peace. In John 14:27 Jesus says, "*I am leaving you with a gift – the gift of peace of mind and heart. The peace I give isn't the same as the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid.*"

The peace that Jesus gives has nothing to do with problem free living. If that were the case, then peace of mind would never be possible for anyone because as long as we are in this world we will experience problems. Jesus said, "*In this world you will have problems.*" Peace of mind isn't about having no problems. It's about making three important decisions -- three important choices. When you choose to make these three choices, you will discover the peace God. **Personal peace is a direct result of ACCEPTANCE, TRUST, and SURRENDER and these are choices we choose to make or choose not to make.**

THE FIRST CHOICE ON THE PATH TO PERSONAL PEACE IS TO ACCEPT WHAT CANNOT BE CHANGED. Worrying about what cannot be changed won't give you peace. Becoming resentful or bitter about what cannot be changed won't give you peace. Feeling guilty about things that cannot be changed won't give you peace. Even self-pity for the things that cannot be changed won't give you personal peace. There is only one way to find personal peace and that is to **accept what cannot be changed.**

In 2nd Samuel, chapter 12, we are given an example of how to do this. God tells David that the son Bathsheba is carrying will die. Sure enough, as soon as the baby is born he begins to die. David fasted. He wept. For a week he spent all night lying on the ground, pleaded with God to spare the baby's life, but on the seventh day the baby dies. David's advisors receive the news before David and they're afraid to tell him for fear of what he will do. David over heard them whispering and he asks, "**Has the baby died?**" What could they say but yes? They were afraid David would really do something crazy, but he didn't. Instead, he got up and took a shower, got dressed and went to church. After worship he went home and had lunch. His servants were so confused; they asked him, "What's going on? While the child was alive you fasted and wept, but now the child is dead, you get up and eat!" David answered them, "*While the child was alive I fasted and wept because I thought 'Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live. But now that he is dead, why should I fast: Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.'*" David accepted

what he could not change and went on with his life. **Accepting what can not be changed is the first step on the path to personal peace.**

The apostle Paul teaches us this same thing in his amazing testimony written from a prison cell. He writes, *“I have leaned to be satisfied with the things I have and with everything that happens. I know how to live when I am poor, and I know how to live when I have plenty. I have learned the secret of being happy at any time in everything. ...I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* (Philippians 4:11-13) How did Paul do this? How did he learn to be content in all circumstances? The secret is to let Christ strengthen you. Do it in His strength. He will strengthen you and enable you to accept the things you cannot change. And He will give you the wisdom to know the difference between the things that can be changed and the things that can't.

Everyday there are millions of people around the world who pray the Serenity Prayer. **“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.”** But that's not all there is to this prayer, written by Reinhold Niebuhr. Listen to Niebuhr's prayer in its entirety. **“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, living one day at a time, accepting hardship as the pathway to peace, taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is not as I would have it, trusting that You, God, 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.”**

THE SECOND CHOICE ON THE PATH TO PERSONAL PEACE IS TO TRUST IN GOD'S LOVING CARE. The prophet Isaiah understood this when he said, *“You, Lord, give true peace to those who depend on You because they trust in You.”* (Isaiah 26:3) In Proverbs we read, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding. In all of your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.”* (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Life is full of problems and crooked turns in the road. The minute you take care of the Number One Problem on your list, the Number Two Problem gets promoted. The rest of your life you're going to have one problem after another. That is the nature of our earthly existence. Not only do we make mistakes and have to reap the consequences, but we have a world that is working against us and a creature called Satan who is trying to undermine our faith. Evil is real and the presence of evil effects us continually. It is difficult sometimes to remember to trust God to make our crooked paths straight.

There's another story in the Bible, this one about a blind man. Jesus healed him one day and the religious leaders had a problem with that. They began to question Jesus, *“Whose fault is it that this man was born blind, his parents or his own?”* Jesus responded, *“Neither. This happened so the work*

of God may be displayed in his life.” Friends, when bad things happen to us, it is an opportunity for God to display His power in our lives. There are times when we have problems so unsolvable, unchangeable, unexplainable and uncontrollable in order that God might display His power in our lives. Those are opportunities for us to trust in His loving care. From a dank dark dirty prison cell, Paul tells us, ***“Don’t worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God your needs and don’t forget to thank Him for His answers. If you do this, you will experience God’s wonderful peace which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand.”*** (Philippians 4:6-7)

THE THIRD CHOICE ON THE PATH TO PERSONAL PEACE IS TO SURRENDER TO GOD’S LOVING CONTROL. The real reason we have so much turmoil, so much anxiety, so much tension in our lives is because we’re fighting a war with God in our minds. We think we know better how our lives should go. We insist on our own way with God. We deny Him His rightful place as Lord of our lives. When we do, the more the addictions and distractions of this world consume us and strip us of our dignity. To find peace we must surrender to God’s loving control. The apostle Paul tells us, ***“If a person’s thinking is controlled by his sinful self, then there is death. But if his thinking is controlled by the Spirit, then there is life and peace.”*** (Romans 8:6) What will that look like when we surrender to God? The evidence of a surrendered life is always obedience to God’s Word. The psalmist said, ***“Those who love your teaching will find true peace, and nothing will defeat them.”*** (Psalm 119:165)