

LIVING
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**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

What's the Key to Happiness?

Monday, June 19, 2017.

Have you ever waited to get in trouble? Maybe you experienced this when you were younger and you did something wrong. In these cases, you knew that if you got caught, you were going to get in a whole heap of trouble, so most of your thoughts were consumed with not getting caught -- sometimes to the point that you even hoped that you'd finally get caught so it would be over. You'd be free.

I had this problem anytime I did something wrong growing up. My fear of being caught would consume my every waking moment. I would hope with everything in me that I wouldn't get caught, but I also knew that if I did get caught, there would be a great sense of relief, knowing that the momentary shame of getting found out would be worth it to experience the freedom of not carrying around that guilt.

As a kid, these memories seem to fade. As an adult, it's much worse. This feeling is more than just a feeling. It's like your soul gains 20 pounds - like there's a big sign above your head displaying your sin in big letters, and you're hoping no one is paying attention.

Why does this happen? Why is it that when we do something wrong, we carry that guilt around with us for so long?

Author and speaker Barb Roose explained this past weekend that what *ultimately* makes us happy is **peace with God**. However, when we don't deal with the sin in our lives, it becomes a problem. Simply put, **our sin separates us from God**.

We've heard this often, but usually, we think this statement applies to those who don't have a relationship with Jesus. *Their* sin has separated *them* from God. What we forget, however, is that **this also applies to us**. After we enter into a relationship with Jesus, our sins do not cause us to lose our salvation, but they can significantly impact our relationship with God in a negative way. As Barb said, though peace with God **begins with faith in Christ**, it is **sustained by submission** to Christ. In 1 John, 1:5-6, John writes:

⁵This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. ⁶So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth.

John, as with all of the writers of the different letters of the New Testament, is writing to Christ followers. We are called to live for God, and when we don't, we experience a sort of separation from him. The writer of Hebrews explains that this separation is *discipline* from God (Heb. 12:7-8).

We cannot have peace with God when we don't deal with our sin. That weight we feel, that more-than-just-a-feeling weight might be the discipline of God meant to draw us closer to him.

So, what do we do? When we know we are struggling to be at peace with God, what step can we take to fix that?

We need to confess our sins to God, because as John writes in 1 John 1:9:

But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

When we trust God to forgive us; when we confess our sins to him and then to others (James 5:16), we can experience healing. When we do this, we can experience the peace of God, which is what ultimately makes us happy. It's the purpose for which God designed us.

Are you at peace with God?

Are you carrying around unconfessed sins?

What can you do today that will help you to have peace with God?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, you are gracious and merciful to me. I know that you created me to be in relationship with you, but that I hurt that relationship when I sin. Help me to be holy as you are, and help me to confess the sins that I carry around because I know that you are faithful to forgive me. Help me to always be at peace with you. I ask this in the name of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This post was written by Andy Rectenwald, the Director of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

Embezzlement, Prison, and Mercy.

Tuesday, June 20, 2017.

Imagine you had embezzled millions of dollars from a company. What do you think that company would do to you? You have no means to repay the money, and the penalty for such a crime is years in prison. Now imagine you are standing in a courtroom before a judge who is about to hand down your sentence. Just before the judge's gavel falls, someone bursts into the courtroom and exclaims that the money has been repaid, and someone else has offered to serve any time in prison in your place. The judge slams down the gavel, looks you in the eye, and declares you, "Not guilty!" Does that sound pretty far-fetched? Today's scripture passage may make you think otherwise.

There exists an impasse between God and man that prevents a relationship between us (before we are saved). We are wholly incapable of fixing the problem and restoring the relationship. God is perfect and we are fallible. This is simply the fact of the matter, and we need to come to grips with this reality if we ever want to have a relationship with the Creator of the universe.

Romans 5:1 states that we (followers of Christ) have been justified. Other translations state that we have been "made right," or declared righteous before God. The divide between God and humans has been bridged. There is now peace between us. We the imperfect are now considered worthy to come into the presence of, talk to, and receive untold blessings from the only perfect being ever to have existed. Not only that, we are considered his friends (John 15:13-15) and children (Galatians 3:26).

How is this possible? Jesus Christ, the Son of God, paid our penalty and declared us righteous in the eyes of God. Jesus Christ was tortured and died a horrible, excruciating death ... *in our place!* That was supposed to be you whipped within an inch of your life. That was supposed to be me hanging on a cross for hours until I could not take another breath. But you and I were declared righteous and allowed to go free, never suffering one sting of that whip, or one stroke of the hammer that would drive a spike into our hand. Jesus, however, felt every punch, every leather strap, every nail. And because of his loving sacrifice, not only will we one day avoid eternal separation from God, we will reign in his Kingdom with him, sharing in his victory and glory. How does being declared righteous make you feel? If you have not accepted Jesus' offer to pay your penalty, what is stopping you from taking this step?

Romans 5:1-2 (NIV)

¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith

into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

What does it mean to have peace with God?

What does this passage say we have gained access to?

What is grace?

Prayer

Sit quietly for a moment and think about everything from your past that has been erased ... wiped away as if it never happened. Let it sink in that not only has your slate been cleared, you have been declared **righteous** in the eyes of a perfect God, so much so that he calls you his friend and his own child. Now, what do you want to say to your heavenly father and your savior, Jesus Christ, who took the nails for you? Just tell him everything on your heart.

Happiness is Not Immediately Accessible, but God is.

Wednesday, June 21, 2017.

Tired. Restless. Weary. Burdened. If you would use these words to describe your life right now, it is unlikely that this is how you would like to feel. But for those of us who are struggling, there often doesn't seem like any way to find the rest and peace we long for. As Barb said, "Happiness is not immediately accessible."

Fortunately, Jesus is, and he has invited us to come to him to get the help we need.

Matthew 11:27-30

All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus teaches that by coming to him – by believing that Jesus is who he said he was – he will give us rest, which is what we need most when we are tired and burdened. Think about those stressful situations that keep you up at night, or the feeling you have when you are carrying a weight of responsibility. Then think about how you feel when you are able to stop, relax, and enjoy the stillness. We feel peaceful. When we have peace with ourselves, with others, and with God, we can be happy, and that starts with being at peace with God.

Jesus also says we will have to take up his yoke, which means we have to do some work. "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent," (John 6:29). Peace in our lives begins with faith in Christ. Having faith does take work, and a large part of that work involves learning to love and to forgive. As John teaches, we continue to live a lie if we say we love God but do not love other people (1 John 4:20) and if we claim to be without sin (1 John 1:8).

Jesus gave us the "greatest commandment" in Matthew 22:37-38: "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself."

When we are able to admit to ourselves that God doesn't hold our past against us, we realize we don't have to dwell in it either. We have the freedom to be

happy and to find peace in Christ. God has forgiven us for every mistake, for every regret, for every lie.

What are the things or people in your life that prevent you from having peace?

Do you need to seek forgiveness from God, from someone else, or even from yourself?

How will you find rest for your soul?

Prayer: God, I know that my hope and my peace rests in you, and I want more of it. Show me how to love others. Teach me how to forgive - starting with myself. Thank you that you do not count my sins against me, but that you offer freedom in Christ. Let the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard my heart and my mind, and provide my soul with the peace it desires.

In God We Trust.

Thursday, June 22, 2017.

Most of us are familiar with the phrase “In God we trust” in association with its presence on various forms of U.S. currency where it has appeared for more than a century.

The phrase is believed to have its roots in *The Star-Spangled Banner*, which was penned by Francis Scott Key during the War of 1812. The fourth stanza of our national anthem contains the words, “And this be our motto: In God is our trust.” The phrase was altered to its more familiar form – “In God we trust” – by U.S. Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase in the early 1860s when it made an appearance on selected U.S. coins. In 1956, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower established “In God we trust” as the official motto of the United States.

Today, the phrase “In God we trust” is so well-established in our national lexicon that it’s worth considering the question of whether we view it merely as a patriotic remnant or as a true declaration of faith.

So, do you trust in God?

During the fourth week of the “What Makes You Happy” series, author and guest speaker Barb Roose examined the topic of Peace with God. The Apostle Paul believed that trust in God is central to attaining peace with God. Paul wrote in Romans 15:13, *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

Paul’s prayer speaks to two key concepts – joy in God and peace with him – both of which are rooted in the sense of hope that we gain from trusting in God. But what happens when hope is elusive because we are struggling to trust in our lord?

Even as followers of Christ, there are times when we feel as though we aren’t at peace with God. Sometimes, this is because we aren’t pursuing him as we should. This can be because we have sin in our life that we aren’t addressing. Or perhaps we have grown cold to some of the disciplines that help us draw closer to him.

As Paul suggests, trusting in God unlocks the door to finding peace with him. On a spiritual level, this means that we must believe in God’s love, his power, and his undeserved gift of forgiveness for our sins through the death and resurrection of his son. As Barb noted this past weekend, peace with God begins with faith in Christ. And peace with God is sustained by our submission to Christ.

Submission to Christ means that we say “yes” to him by not only believing, but also demonstrating our obedience. It means that we pray to him, that we confess our sins to him, that we forgive others, and that we relinquish our doubts and worries and trust in him, especially in trying times.

Pastor and author Francis Chan said, “Worry implies that we don't quite trust that God is big enough, powerful enough, or loving enough to take care of what's happening in our lives.”

There is no question that trying times test our faith. In the eye of the storm, when we're wrestling with relational problems, financial woes, health concerns, or any number of other challenges, we can be all too quick to forget that we can and should trust in God.

Pastor David Nicholas, founder of Florida's Spanish River Church, once said, “God's promises are like the stars; the darker the night, the brighter they shine.” When we realize the beautiful truth in God's promises and trust in him, we find peace with him, peace with ourselves, and peace with others.

Do you trust in God?

If so, what can you do to ensure that you sustain this trust, even in seasons of doubt or worry?

If you struggle to trust in God, what steps can you take today to move closer to fellowship with him?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help me to always know and remember that I can trust in you. Help me to believe the good news of what you have done for me and to see the beauty in your promises and be fulfilled by the peace found in a life lived with and for you. Amen.

When Everything Goes Wrong, You Can Have Peace.

Friday, June 23, 2017.

Horatio Spafford did not have an easy life. His two-year old son died in the Great Chicago Fire in 1871. Two years later, he sent his wife and four daughters to England, planning to meet up with them after he attended to some business. He later received a telegram from his wife Anna stating: "Saved alone ..." The ship they were sailing on collided with another ship and sunk quickly. While traveling to meet up with his wife he penned these words when passing the place where the ship went down:

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well with my soul*

How can someone who has suffered so much pain be so full of peace to pen such words, "Whatever my lot ... It is well with my soul." I know that all it takes is a bad day with children for me to trade in my peace with God for a bitter and angry spirit. I can look at all that I have been given and want more. I can get angry at God for the supposed "injustices" in my daily life and trade his peace for the "right to be angry." What does it mean to have peace with Christ? What does that really look like? Does it mean being happy with every trial that comes into our lives?

In Colossians 3:15-17, Paul is teaching the Christians in Colossae how to live a life rooted in Christ. He begins with some "dos and don'ts" but finishes the passage by talking about the "peace of Christ." The Hebrew word for peace in this passage is *shalom*. As Ben stated several weeks ago, *shalom* means "completeness, soundness, welfare, peace." If we use this as our starting place, "peace with Christ" means that we have found completeness and welfare in him. We are not looking for something else to make us whole, but have everything we need in him. We don't have to be happy about everything that happens to us, but we know that in him all of our needs are met.

Once we accept that in Christ we are made complete, how do we let it "rule in [our] hearts?" Once again going back to the original word, "rule," helps us understand what Paul meant. In this context, "rule" is a word used in athletics – it means umpire or referee. So, when we let his peace rule in our hearts we let him be the ref; he makes the call and we abide. We don't let our feelings and desires make the choice as to how we react. We look to him. When we do this, we will automatically be at peace with others. When we treat those around us

as Christ would, we bless them and live in peace with them even when we don't always like them.

What is the "message of Christ?" Put simply, it is the Gospel – our story of hope. When we let the Gospel "dwell" with us, we let it rule our lives. The Gospel of Christ is our master and we make all decisions according to what we know through his words. Finally, by "do[ing] it all in the name of the Lord Jesus" we are calling attention not to ourselves, but to Christ who lives in us. We do not take credit for our "good deeds," but direct all credit back to him who enables us to live at peace with those around us.

So now what? What does this mean for you and for me today when the kids are fighting, or our co-worker gets the promotion we deserved, or someone we love hurts us deeply? It means that we allow Christ to rule in our hearts; his word and spirit help direct our responses. We love those who hurt us. We pray for those who persecute us. We offer gentle responses to harsh statements. And when people notice, we point them back to Christ. We don't take credit for our good deeds, but thank God that his peace is in our lives through Jesus and that he saw fit to work his plan through us.

Colossians 3:15-17

¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Are you at peace with God? Does the "peace of Christ rule in your heart?"

When you think about the message of Christ, how does it make you feel? The Gospel story is amazing, it is life changing and absurd. Why would God continually seek after us – the rebellious children he created? How can you let this message change you? Who are you telling?

Prayer: *God thank you for your amazingly absurd love for us. Thank you for this message of hope and redemption. I ask, Lord, that the peace of Christ rules in my heart and gives me the peace you so freely offer. Help me to boldly proclaim this love story and invite others into this life of peace. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

This post was written by Julie Mabus, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.