

Peace that Surpasses All Understanding

Part 1

April 26, 2020



Daily Devotions

SOAP Introduction

As an individual or as a family, use this SOAP study to connect with Jesus each day this week. SOAP stands for Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer. When we do a SOAP study, we want to root ourselves in the Scriptures, observing what they have for us, applying them to our lives, and then communing with God in prayer both before and after our time in the Bible.

Each day there will be multiple Scriptures for you to ask questions about, sit with, hear from God, and be invited to respond in action to.

If you're doing this individually, be sure to prayerfully consider each day's truth, each day's passages, and each of the questions. If you are doing this as a family, don't be afraid to have each person in your family read one of the verses or to "popcorn read" if it's a longer passage (meaning, don't be afraid to have one person read a verse or two and then another read a couple verses and then another a couple verses).

Parents, if you are going through this with your children, be sure to ask questions that will help your children engage with the daily Scriptures by asking good, concrete questions.

Day One // The Pathway to Peace, pt. 1

Psychologists agree with the Scriptures. They'll tell you that even in an age of anxiety, fear, and worry, you can put yourself in a position to have peace amidst stressful circumstances. But when it comes to having peace, there is a difference between what the psychologists and the Scriptures say. Christians who have Jesus as their foundation find themselves, in our opinion, much better equipped to withstand storms and the harsh winds of life.

Scripture: **Read Philippians 4:4-7.**

Observation: *What do I see in this passage?*

- What words or phrases resonate inside of you as you read and re-read these verses?
- How do you think the peace "of God" compares or contrasts to the peace of men and women?
- What do you know that is true about God that you can lean on to give you peace?
- On a scale of 1-10, how at peace do you feel? Explain.
- Imagine being one of the folks in Paul's church and hearing Paul tell you to "rejoice" and to "not be anxious" so you can have the peace of God. Based on your current circumstances, how would this make you feel? What is your response to Paul's words?
- What resources do you feel like Christians have that those who do not have faith lack? How do you feel like you're drawing from these resources these days?

Application: *What do I do with what I've read?*

- What truth about God's character do you feel like he is specifically inviting you to sit with to provide you peace?
- What tangible action steps do you feel like God is inviting you into as a result of your reflection today?

Prayer: *Father, I want peace in my life. And not just some pseudo-peace that I can conjure up, but the peace that comes from being in relationship with You, the God of peace. Help my fear to know I am safe with You. Help my anxiety to know I can trust in You. Help my worry to know that You are in control. Amen.*

Day Two // The Neural Pathway to Peace

Today, we are looking at our passage from Philippians again and also adding to it some of Paul's words from Colossians. It's important to note that Paul often had certain practices that he would go to in order to form his thinking and feeling.

Paul knew that it was important to supplant worry, anxiety, and fear with thankfulness, being in the Scriptures, and rejoicing. Science tells us that by intentionally doing practices like Paul tells us, we can actually rewire our neural pathways so that our default is not angst or concern, but rather faith, trust, gratitude, and contentment.

Scripture: **Read Philippians 4:4-7; Colossians 3:15-17**

Observation: *What do I see in these passages?*

- Read and re-read these passages slowly. What words or phrases stand out to you from these verses? Why do you think they are resonating so?
- The apostle Paul experienced quite a lot of hardship during his ministry. Why was it important for him to have intentional practices to help him root his thoughts and feelings in Christ?
- When you think over the time you have spent social distancing, what practices have you instilled to keep you at peace? What practices have crept in that may be contributing to your sense of unease?

Application: *What do I do with what I've read?*

- To receive the peace of God, Paul tell us several actions to take (i.e. don't be anxious, rejoice in the Lord, present requests to God, etc.). Which of those practices do you need to press into? Why?
- What other practices do you need to instill into your life to experience the peace of God?
- Where do you feel like God is inviting you into greater stewardship as a result of your reflection today?

Prayer: Write a prayer to God expressing your desire to pursue his peace. Tell him which practices you are going to pursue and ask him for his help.

Day Three // Peace from the Father

There's a picture hanging in our church of Rembrandt's *Prodigal Son*. In the painting (and in the story found in **Luke 15:11-32**), we see that the father embraces his son after his son had previously spoiled his inheritance, left town, and abandoned the family. Upon doing so, the son came to the end of his rope. Things were not looking good. His only option was to turn to his father and hope he'd be accepted once again.

In the painting (and in the story found in **Luke 15:11-32**), we see that the father *does* accept his son back into the family, and the father's hands are seen clearly wrapped around his son's back in love. What art lovers will tell you about that painting is that Rembrandt painted two kinds of hands for the father: (1) A strong, masculine hand; and (2) a softer, more feminine hand. Why? Because he wanted to showcase the strength and compassion of God.

The question Rembrandt poses to us is this: Will we allow God to be our strength, our refuge, and our peace in times of hardship?

Scripture: **Read Luke 15:11-32.**

Observation: *What do I see in this passage?*

- What words or phrases resonate inside of you as you read and re-read this passage?
- As you read this story, which character do you find yourself most identifying with? Why?
- In the son's time of hardship, what do you think he felt after squandering his inheritance? Do you have any similar feelings with the way your life is looking in light of the impact of the coronavirus?
- When was the last time you were at the end of your rope and you had to run to the hands of the Father? How did he embrace you?
- How does the embrace of the Father lead to a life of peace?

Application: *What do I do with what I've read?*

- Take a few moments to invite the strong hand and the loving, gentle hand of God to wrap around you. How was that experience for you?
- How do you feel like God is inviting you into greater intimacy and security as a result of your reflection today?

Prayer: Take a few moments to prayerfully invite the strong hand and the loving, gentle hand of God to wrap around you. Imagine God loving you, holding you, welcoming you. Imagine the look on his face. Hear the words he whispers to you, "You are my son and with you I am well pleased" or "You are my daughter and with you I am well pleased."

How was that experience for you? Note your thoughts and feelings.

Day Four // Peace when the winds blow

Foundations are important. Boats that are not securely anchored will drift away. Houses without a stable foundation will collapse. Trees without a stable root system will tumble. The same is true for us as humans. Without a stable foundation, whenever the winds blow and the storms come, we will find ourselves perplexed and crushed. However, with a firm and solid foundation, we can be sure to find peace in the midst of the harsh winds of life.

Scripture: **Read Matthew 7:24-27; Isaiah 41:10**

Observation: *What do I see in these passages?*

- Read and re-read these passages slowly. What words or phrases resonate with you from these verses?
- What word or words would you use to describe how stable your foundation is these days? Explain.
- What would a person's life look like if it were a house built on sand?
- Who is someone in your life whose life is built on a firm foundation? What aspects of their life lead to that solidity?
- In what ways does having a firm foundation lead to peace?

Application: *What do I do with what I've read?*

- In the midst of the coronavirus, what would it practically look like to build your house on the rock?
- How do you feel like God is inviting you into greater trust as a result of your reflection today?

Prayer: *Lord, may you be the foundation of my life. If I have another, blast it away. If my foundation is my own merit, make it not so. If my foundation is my relationships, help me to see that they can't be. If my foundation is my career, help me to realize it shouldn't. If my foundation is my finances, help me to understand that is futile. If my foundation is anything other than You and Your Kingdom, I don't want it, Lord. You are my fortress! You are my shield! You are my helper! You are my rock!*

Day Five // Peace and community

The Redwood trees in California are quite a sight to behold. They are humungous! What's interesting about these trees is that even though they grow so big and tall, their roots are relatively shallow. They don't go very deep into the ground.

So the question becomes this: *How do these trees grow big and tall?* The answer? They wrap their roots around one another. In doing so, they are able to withstand whatever storms, winds, and rains come their way.

This is an important lesson for us. It can be hard to maintain community when we are to be social distancing and when things are chaotic around us. However, community is one of the greatest resources we have to find peace in the middle of unrest! When we are in community, we can be and we can interact with people who are called to be peace-makers, burden bearers, encouragers, and so much more!

Scripture: **Matthew 5:9; Galatians 6:2; Romans 12:9-21**

Observation: *What do I see in these passages?*

- Why do you think God wants his people to be peacemakers and burden bearers?
- How have you experienced peace because of community in your life? What was that experience like?
- What was it about your community that brought you peace? What did they do for you that brought you a sense of peace?
- When was a time you found yourself riddled with fear and worry and someone bore a burden for you? How did that make you feel?
- When in your life have you been a peacemaker? When have you been a peace-breaker?

Application: *What do I do with what I've read?*

- Which of the different commands in **Romans 12:9-21** do you feel like God is inviting you to practice today?
- In what ways might you be able to help lift the burdens of someone you know this week?

Prayer: Prayerfully think through your day with God. What opportunities are before you to bring peace? In what ways can you bear another's burden? Ask God to reveal where he might want you to act today.