

**HOW TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S PEACE ©
A VITAL SUPPLEMENT FOR SPIRITUAL VITALITY**

By Paul R. Shockley, PhD
www.prshockley.org

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." ~ John 14:27

Introduction. Ever have those nights where you lay awake anxious about what might or might not happen? With every slow minute passing by you find yourself becoming more and more anxious? Then some time later you discover that what provoked those sleepless nights never came to pass and you think, "Why did I let my imagination wreak havoc on me?", I suspect for many of us, *most* of our anxieties come from the fact that we just don't know what the future holds.

On the other hand, many of those gut-wrenching anxieties we do experience are related to our past. We lay there realizing that we really messed up. We want to so desperately change the past but we can't. What is done is done. We sit there with those feelings of regret hitting us like waves upon the sea wall. We just can't past our mistakes to embrace the present. The sun dawns and we now add exhaustion to the list of our regrets.

Then there are those of us who find what people think about us to be a huge source of anxiety. Worried about what others think immobilize us from doing anything worth doing. We so hunger to be loved, to be respected, to be valued, that we can't seem to get beyond the idea that people may not approve of who we are.

Still, some of us are facing anxieties because of our health. We can't do much to change the situation. Rather, we are called to endure it. Doctors try to tell us that we should not focus so much of our attention on those issues because with stress, our conditions only worsen.

Some of anxieties are tied to impatience. We want things done and we want them done our way and right away. So, we struggle with tension because we do not like the way something is being done or we become so impatient. We wait and wait and nothing happens! So, the tension builds.

We also have anxieties tied to various relationships. Conflict at work, marriages are not where they should be, relationships with loved ones are estranged, or deadlines we are mandated to meet (all seems insurmountable). Some of the problems are those of utter contempt and hostility. Issues such as these weigh heavy on the soul. We feel the tension, the pain, the anger, and the regret.

Sadly, there are those of who honestly believe that this angst we feel is part and parcel of being human. We have a God-like void in us but there is no God to fill it. But there are those who have drawn the opposite conclusion. a dear lady who is now present with the Lord had experienced God's peace in the midst of her long and terrible struggle with cancer, a cancer that was wreaking havoc throughout her body.. She would proclaim to you that as hard as it has been, God has walked through her through it all. She was experiencing God's peace. She was facing her last enemy with utter confidence and absolute trust in God. I told her, as I mentioned to her husband and one of her sons, that she modeled the strengths of Martha and Mary. Like Martha, she served others even when it costs her. She loved people by ministering to them. When I was over at her house, she looked up at me from where she was dying and told me that he had been praying for me regarding my upcoming dissertation defense. But she also modeled after Mary. See, she knew when to sit at Jesus' feet- to listen, learn, pray, and see. If you knew her, you would know that she had the peace for which so many hunger and desperately desire. You could see God's peace in her eyes, you could hear God's peace in her voice, and you could see God's peace permeate her disposition.

Do you long for that type of peace? Do you regularly find yourself struggling for peace? You go from one hobby to another, one job to another, one relationship to another, one home to another, one church to another, one philosophy to another? Has money, power, and popularity given you what you are longing for? Are you still searching and searching for that peace? Do you find yourself in deep angst, looking but never finding a remedy to end the chaos and discontentment around you and the hunger, disconnection, or the emptiness within? Are you at your end? Have you given up?

Consider these words by Christ. He gave them to a group of disciples he traveled with, laughed with, taught, and ministered with over a period of three years on the eve of his betrayal, trial, torture, and crucifixion:

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

When we face anxieties, we relish in this promise, but do we really understand it? Do we apply it appropriately? Let us turn our attention to John 14:27 where we will examine these words of Christ and relate it to personal anxieties we experience in as we walk through this precarious and unstable world.

Context. Our first observation of this passage is that some of these words were recently used just earlier by Christ in the Upper Room. We first see them in John 14:1:

“¹Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.”

Why repeat these words? What is going on? If we study the whole Upper Room Discourse beginning with chapter 13, we discover that confusion, tension, and anxiety finds expression among the disciples throughout this Passover celebration. Let us briefly trace these moments of confusion that gain momentum among the disciples.

The confusion begins in chapter 13 with Jesus Christ washing the disciples’ feet.

Our first source of confusion, tension, and anxiety is found in John 13:1-7 when Jesus Christ washes the disciples’ feet. Peter can’t understand why!

Second source of confusion, tension, and anxiety takes place in verses 18-30 when a betrayer among their close knit group is identified by the Messiah. Peter motions to John to ask Jesus. Jesus shows the disciples that Judas is the betrayer. Jesus says to Judas Iscariot, “What you do, do quickly!” But no one knew for what reason Jesus said this to Judas. Judas leaves the room.

Third, Jesus announces in verse 33 that He is departing and where He is going, none of the disciples can come.

Fourth, verses 36-38 Jesus informs Peter that he will deny Him three times before the rooster crows.

Just consider: these men have walked and served with Jesus for three years. They are a family. Reasonable to say that with each situation the confusion and anxiety reached new levels. As a result, Jesus acutely aware of their anxiety gives them a commandment. John 14:1 opens with these words:

“Let not your heart be troubled; you trust in God; trust also in me.”

Looking more closely at John 14:1, notice that Jesus’ statement is a command with a strong prohibition, saying, “Do not let your hearts be overcome with turmoil or we could put it this way” or do not allow yourself to be intimidated by the situation.”

Looking more closely at the phrase, “*Trust in God, trust also I me.*” Jesus then calls these dear ones to trust Him. Why make such a claim? Not only could Jesus see their reaction from the news that He will be departing them, but also by the fact that they will witness His betrayal, trials, torture, and crucifixion (cf. Isaiah 52:13-53:12). Therefore, he exhorts them to place their “trust” not in the power evident in the world but in God and in himself.

These Jews had great historical reasons to trust in God. At ever juncture in their history, God has been faithful to His people, giving ample evidence that He is their God and they are His people. God is to be trusted.

Jesus has also proven Himself to be faithful in providing for their needs. He never failed them. He never had to offer a sacrifice. They heard the greatest words ever spoken and they witnessed the greatest deeds every done. Jesus never let them down. Since God the Father and Jesus the Son proved faithful in Him, He calls them to trust Him.

Following the resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost, what do we find? We learn from the Book of Acts that the disciples couldn’t be stopped in trusting God! They discovered that He was faithful to them even with His physical absence.

But the Lord does not merely attempt to comfort them with a command. He offers the disciples a look into the future. He says in John 14:2-3:

² In My Father's house are many dwellings if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. ⁴ And where I go you know, and the way you know."

In sum, Jesus Christ declares to them that the separation they will experience will only be temporary. In fact, the very idea of preparing a place for them implies that He has not forgotten them. But Jesus also says to them they will one day come back for them. And when Jesus says, 'Where I am, there you may be also,' Jesus is saying that their reunion will be permanent.

But what follows this threefold promise is interesting to note: we have a question from Thomas, a declaration by Philip, and then a question by another Judas (vv. 5-26). The questions and declaration reflects *further confusion, tension, and anxiety*.

Not only does Jesus inform them that He is the sending the Holy Spirit to enable them to do greater works, but also that the Holy Spirit will be taking up residence inside them. Moreover, Jesus promises that He will not leave them as orphans but also that they will also one day see Him (vs. 19).

Then in verse 25-26 Jesus explains the reason why He told these things to the disciples.

²⁵ "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

Here Jesus explains to the disciples that the Holy Spirit will remind them of all the things that Jesus taught them.

After these statements Jesus addresses their confusion, anxiety, and tension with these comforting words:

²⁷ Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

So many of us cling to this verse when we are in the midst of a storm of problems! We find this verse comforting, don't we? Having better understood why some of these words were repeated (cf. John 14:1), let us continue to make some observations about this incredible promise by Jesus Christ.

Our second observation is that the word "peace" is used twice. While the word "peace" has several nuances in N.T. Greek, the word here is used to refer to the calmness or confidence that is generated when one trusts God. But notice where this peace is coming from? "Peace I leave with you; **my** Peace I give to you." The word, "my" makes this statement emphatic! In essence, Jesus is bestowing His peace upon them. How can He do so? As we saw earlier, Jesus is God. If you have seen Jesus, you have seen God. On the eve of His own horrific death, Jesus offers His peace to them.

Now note how Jesus' contrasts the peace that the world offers to what He offers:

The world, that is, *cosmos*, can only give false peace. He stating that we can't rely upon the physical earth to give us this peace. We can't rely on the world's godless system to generate this peace for us. We can't rely on worldly people who are estranged from God. We can't reply on any earthly possession to give us this peace. We can't even rely on supernatural powers to give us this peace.¹

How is this promise applicable to us? This promise and lesson is applicable to us when we face confusion, anxiety, and tension because Jesus draws upon the **timeless theme of trusting God**. All throughout the Scriptures we see accounts of biblical figures who were faithful to trust in God's promises and purposes and those who failed to do so (e.g., Hezekiah).

Perhaps the greatest example to me of trusting God in the midst of impending horror is Jesus Christ Himself. Take your Bibles and turn to Luke 22:39-44:

In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus is faced with anxiety:
Luke 22:39-44:

¹Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Greek (New Testament)* (electronic ed.) (DBLG 3180, #8). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

³⁹ Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. ⁴⁰ When He came to the place, He said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.”

⁴¹ And He was withdrawn from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” ⁴³ Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. ⁴⁴ And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

⁴⁵ When He rose up from prayer, and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow. ⁴⁶ Then He said to them, “Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation.”

Jesus, who will be declared innocent six times is not only about to be tortured and nailed to a cross, dying a brutal death, but He is about to become sin on our behalf. Jesus, who humbled Himself and become obedient to the point of death, even the death of cross, is about to take the sins of the world upon Himself. Here is a Holy God becoming the sacrifice so that we might have the possibility of being with Him!

So, how did Jesus deal with this anxiety?

1. He withdrew himself to prayer.
2. He asked God to take this burden from Him.
3. But what did He do? Did he bathe in the anxiety? No, He said, **“Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.”** With resolve and determination, his number one goal is to glorify God! To complete His calling! To fulfill the task!
4. What happened? An angel ministered to Him, strengthening Him!
5. He prayed more earnestly. He was deep in agony. In other words, the word confirms that even Jesus was deep in anguish to the point that his sweat became like drops of blood falling down to the ground.

6. Then in verse 45 what did He do? He rose up from prayer, came over to the disciples and asked them a question: **“Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter temptation!”**

As we know, God’s will was for Him to die on the cross on our behalf! He willingly fulfilled the Father’s will as He said He would in John 14:30. Satan did not have power over Him. Rather, Jesus voluntarily gave Himself up for us in loving obedience to the Father.

The application from this example by Jesus Christ is simple:

When you are faced with anxieties, do not feel like you are unspiritual when they come over you as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Not only did the disciples experience anxiety, but Jesus himself did! Experiencing anxiety is part and parcel of being human. But we make a serious mistake if we do not follow Christ’s example: Cast your anxieties upon God! How you do so is by earnestly praying!

Realize, as Jesus did, that the world and all of its accoutrements can’t offer you the peace that God can. It is so amazing how we turn to the world’s resources to deal with our anxieties. But when we do turn to those aspects of the world, we are turning to *“finite solutions”* that were never designed to continue to fill us with peace that God can only give. Moreover, Jesus is clear that what the world (*cosmos*) offers is only hostility. Though the world’s pleasures may be captivating, alluring, and promising, their attractiveness is only a disguise for entrapment, slavery, and death

Lastly, with resolve and determination, when you and I are faced with anxiety, we need to pick ourselves up and whole heartily trust God! He is Sovereign! Leave it with Him! Job’s words are telling: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him ~ Job. 13:15.

In conclusion. In the midst of great agony and despair, if you will behold God, then you will be able to go beyond your own resources, and come to grip with God’s higher purposes-even if you do not know what they are on this side of heaven. You must continue to trust Him no matter how difficult, painful, or precarious your circumstances become, no matter how persuasive or tantalizing one may be, and no matter how unlimited your resources appear to be. All too often Christians, who have experienced God’s peace in salvation, fail to trust

Him with all their anxieties, disappointments, fears, and the unknown, even though they know that God is both good and sovereign as the Bible declares and our experiences confirm.

Let's pray:

Father, all too often we fail to trust you with every aspect of our lives. We have trusted you with our eternal destiny, but we can't we trust you with our circumstances, our unseen future, our problems, the hauntings of our past, our losses, and our pain. I suspect the reason why is that we have a tendency to turn to the world for answers rather than beholding you.

Do we really walk in intimacy? It seems all too often that the reason why we do not hand over our anxiety to you is because we do not behold you! Yet, we know and have experienced, time and time again, when we have walked intimately with you, that you fill us with a peace that surpasses understanding.

Therefore, enable us enable us like your disciples following Pentecost to confront this world of hostility without being dismayed. No matter if mobs chase us, governments imprison us, people stone us, family and friends mock us, may our confidence will remain in you. No matter how difficult, painful or turbulent our circumstances, may you find us consistently and diligently on our knees in prayer, allowing your "calmness" to reign supreme in our lives.