

Never Outsource Your Peace & Joy

On Sunday we continued to explore what “life in the Spirit” looks like, focusing on two more core characteristics of a Spirit-filled life – peace and joy.

1. Warm-up Question: In times like these, what do you personally find most nerve wracking?
2. It’s hard to experience peace and joy when life is so full of uncertainty and unexpected surprises, now and always. As you look back over the past year or so, how has life surprised you?
3. We’re in the midst of a sermon series in which we’re exploring what it means to be salt and light in the world, i.e., the hands and feet of Jesus. We’ve already seen that we cannot do it in our own strength. We need to tap into a Higher Power. That’s what “life in the Spirit” is all about. In Galatians 5, Paul tells us to “live by the Spirit,” then lists the “fruit of the Spirit” – seven high values that characterize someone who is living a Spirit-filled life. Peace and joy are two of those high values. Before writing his letter to the Galatians, Paul had already learned a thing or two about what it means to live with peace and joy. Read Acts 16:16-34.
 - a. Verse 22 tells us that Paul and Silas were beaten by an angry mob with the support of the police. Jeff shared Sam McClain’s description of what it’s like to be beaten by a mob. “First it goes dark, then you see bright lights. . . . They were kicking me in the back of my head, then both my eyes. I remember them kicking me in the back. After about the third kick like that, you don’t feel anything. My head was as big as a watermelon when they finished.” What’s the worst physical pain and suffering you’ve ever experienced? After their beating, how do you think Paul and Silas felt not just physically, but emotionally?
 - b. After they had been beaten to a pulp, verse 25 tells us, “About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening.” Jeff said, “Spirit-filled people in Bible times and ours have demonstrated that true peace and joy are not dependent on circumstances.” Jeff learned this from his Mother and Grandma. Have you ever known someone who exhibited that kind of peace and joy? Tell us about them.
4. Jeff summarized what he learned from his Mom and Grandma, this way: ***“There is no peace without surrender. There is no surrender without trust. And the same is true for joy.”*** In other words, lasting peace and joy begin with surrender. As long as we think we’re in control, we’re destined for a life of constant frustration and failure.
 - a. As the old saying goes, “If you want to make God laugh, tell God your plans.” Jeff shared a long list of plans in his life that have been derailed by circumstances beyond his control. Give us some examples from your life.

- b. In Matthew 16:25, Jesus says, “Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” What do you hear Jesus saying in those words?
5. Surrender is important, but our quest for peace doesn’t stop there. If it did, we’d simply be victims and pessimists, and there would be no peace and joy. The kind of surrender that leads to peace requires a further step – trust. But trust in what? Many preachers say, “Trust that nothing can happen in your life that God doesn’t want to happen.” Jeff said, “That’s patently false. Half the Bible is about things that God didn’t want to happen.” Your thoughts? Do you think things can happen in your life that God didn’t want to happen?
6. Jeff suggested there are three great truths that anchor the peace and joy of Spirit-filled people. ***No. 1 – A Spirit-filled person trusts that, no matter what we face, we are never alone; God is always with us.*** When facing terminal cancer, Professor Kate Bowler of Duke Divinity School says that throughout her ordeal, “I felt God’s presence. . . . Like the way you’d feel a friend or like someone holding you. I just didn’t feel quite as scared. I just felt loved [by God].”
- a. In times of great challenge, have you felt that Presence? How would you describe it?
- b. Suppose someone said, “I’ve never felt that Presence, but I want to. How can I?” What advice would you offer?
7. ***No. 2 – A Spirit-filled person trusts the promise of Romans 8:28, “For we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God’s purpose.”***
- a. What’s the difference between the promise of Romans 8:28 and someone saying “Nothing can happen in your life that God doesn’t want to happen”?
- b. When in your life has God brought something good from something awful?
8. ***No. 3 – A Spirit-filled person trusts that, no matter what we face in this life, unspeakably wonderful things lie ahead for us in the life to come.***
- a. Describe your vision of what the life to come will be like?
- b. I Corinthians 2:9 says, “Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, nor has the human heart conceived, the things that God has prepared for those who love God.” What do you get from that verse? What’s it trying to say?
- c. Jeff said, “If you believe in heaven, there isn’t much that can happen down here that can steal your joy and peace, even when life spins out of control.” Do you agree? Why or why not? On a practical level, how does your belief in heaven affect your daily life?