

Foundations Lesson #9

Joy, Peace, Patience, Part One

In writing to the churches in Galatia, the apostle Paul says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” This fruit, or evidence, of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives has to be developed and grown so that we'll continue to mature in the Lord. We have to understand. **God** is full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness. He doesn't need self-control because he's perfect, but he certainly helps us to control our self, to control our sinful nature, by the power of his Holy Spirit he graciously places within us believers. But this fruit, this evidence, of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives is **the primary** way in which God wants to shape and mold our character into greater Christlikeness. There are a lot of people who have the idea that the will of God is primarily something God wants them to **do**. So they're very passionate about asking God, “O, God, what would you have me **do**; what is your will for my life; what do you want me to **do**? I want you to understand something. We're not human doings; we're human beings. Who we are is much more important to God than what we do. If we're people who handle every situation that comes our way with the heart of Christ, with the attitude of **The Almighty**, with hearts full of love, joy, peace and all the other fruit of the Spirit, then it's very **easy** for God to direct us into **what** he wants us to do. The Lord's primary goal for our lives is Christlikeness. He wants us to be able to handle every situation as Jesus would have handled it. That means our emphasis, our passion, our priority should be much more focused on allowing God to develop **who** he wants us to become. I find that for every ten believers who'd be willing to cross an ocean to obey God, maybe only one or two are willing to let God deal with the anger, the unforgiveness, the impatience, the bitterness, the resentment, the pride that's in their hearts. That's a great tragedy. I want to encourage you: allowing God to develop this fruit of the Spirit in your life is **really** important. Please don't take it lightly.

What did Jesus say? I'm reading from Matthew chapter 7 starting in verse 16,

Mt. 7:16b-18 Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

If the tree is good, it's fruit will be good as well. That's very similar to what Jesus was talking about when he said, “out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.” What people see and hear from us on the outside is simply a result of what's on the inside. We need to allow God to make the changes he wants to make on our inside. If we allow him to do that, what we end up doing on the outside will please God just fine. There are many people in heaven right now with little or no reward for all eternity, who are wishing for all they're worth that they would have taken the fruit of the Spirit seriously while they lived on earth. Please don't end up being one of them.

With that in mind, I'd like to direct your attention to the **Additional Resources** at the bottom of this web page. Please take a moment to print out the document entitled “Fruit and Works.” On that document, you'll see a column on the left listing the fruit of the Spirit. Then, on the right, you can see that we've also been **commanded** to produce each one of these nine qualities. That leaves some folks a little confused, so I want to read the text at the bottom of the document. It says,

“As we can see from the chart above, the nine fruit of the Spirit are also qualities that we're commanded by the Lord to have in our lives. This leaves some people wondering **who** causes this fruit to grow in us. Does **God** do the work by His Spirit? Or do **we** do the work as an act of obedience?

The truth is that we need to cooperate with God. There's a part that belongs to God and there's a part that belongs to us. We cannot do God's part and He will not do our part. We are responsible to

have the desire, the vision, and the passion to change from who we are to who God wants us to be. God's part is to change us. He responds to our desire, vision, and passion by doing the work that only He can do. Just as mud is incapable of cleaning itself, we humans, who are sinful by nature, are incapable of changing ourselves to be more Christlike (In John 15:5 Jesus is speaking and he says, "Apart from me you can do nothing."). The good news is that God will always do His part with great faithfulness, tenderness, and power as we ask Him and let Him.

This arrangement also does away with both pride and laziness. If everything depended upon us, we would fall to the sin of pride at our accomplishments. ["Look at what **I've** done!"] Similarly, if everything depended upon God, we could sit back lazily and expect God to transform us with no effort on our part. But neither of these are valid because both we and the Lord have a part to play. As we do our part and trust in God's great faithfulness to do His part, we'll grow wonderfully in all nine of these qualities, and others as well."

If someone had taught me this when I was a new believer, it would've saved me a lot of heartache in my walk with God. When we get saved and we want to please God, we feel really bad when we sin because we know we've grieved the Lord. So we can make the mistake, like I did often, of telling God, "I'll do better next time." We try to do the work of changing ourselves. So God, in his goodness and in his mercy, allows us to fail so that we realize that we have to depend on him to do the transforming work. God will show us that we need him, and we do. We desperately need the Lord.

With that in mind, let's turn to Roman Numeral number one on our outline: Joy. One preacher has said, "Be joyful always. It sure beats being happy." Now if you're wondering what the difference between joy and happiness is, please let me explain. Happiness is the result of pleasant circumstances. You get an unexpected check in the mail, so you're happy. Someone throws you a surprise birthday party, so you're happy. You get promoted on the job, so you're happy. That's happiness. Joy is similar, but its source is completely different. Many of the early Christian martyrs went rejoicing to their deaths, as if they were going to a wedding feast. One early historian who witnessed their heroism, wrote, "When the day of their execution arrived, the Christians marched in procession from the prison to the arena as if they were marching to heaven, with joyous countenances accented by gladness rather than fear." One early Christian martyr, a woman about 20 years old, was asked what her last wish was. She requested a hairpin. When her captors inquired as to the reason behind her unusual request, she told them that she didn't want anyone to think she was in mourning, since unkempt hair was considered a sign of sorrow.

What gave these believers such joy in their darkest hour? I believe they were fully convinced of two very important truths: 1) that God was in control of every detail of their existence, and 2) that God loved them deeply and did only good things. They probably reasoned that if they were close to death, they were close to a life of eternal fellowship with the Lord they loved so wholeheartedly. If we accept and embrace these same two truths, we'll be well on our way to experiencing the same abundant joy that the early Christian martyrs were know for.

Let's examine what the Scripture has to say about joy.

I Th. 5:16 [It's a short verse, only three words long.] Be joyful always;

Always. Always. Always. You mean even when I get cut off on the freeway? Absolutely, always. Even when I get reamed out by the boss for something I didn't do? Sure! Always.

Ro. 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

Pp. 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

We are commanded to be a joyful people. If a believer walks around with a disposition that's so sour that it makes you wonder if he's been sucking on lemons for a week and then got marinated in pickle juice, there's a problem. A Christian who's complaining about the corruption in the government, who's full of gloom and doom, and who can tell you everything that's wrong with the economy is not furthering the Kingdom of God, because the kingdom of God is a matter of righteousness, peace, and **joy** in the Holy Spirit. Whatever negative circumstances there are in this world, God has allowed them, and he's doing a perfect job of running the universe. In the midst of all the darkness and evil, he loves us far more than we can even imagine. If we train ourselves to focus on those truths, the joy we've been commanded to have will come far more easily. As a Kentucky preacher once said, "If you got the joy of the Lord in your heart, don't forget to inform your face!" I trust that I'm speaking to some informed faces today.

The Bible then goes one step further and tells us that we even need to rejoice in our trials.

Jas. 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

So when you get fired from your job through no fault of your own, and you have no idea where the money will come from to feed your family, rejoice. Why? Because you're about to experience the faithfulness of God in meeting your needs. He even feeds the sparrow; how much more will he feed his own children? You may not know what tomorrow holds but you know who holds tomorrow, and that's far more important. If we believe that God is true to his word, we'll be able to rejoice.

Mt. 5:11-12 [Jesus speaking] Blessed are you when people insult you (Let me pause there to ask you, last time someone insulted you, did you consider that a blessing? It really **is** a blessing. Jesus said so.) Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Here Jesus gives us another reason to rejoice – when we suffer unjustly because of our relationship to the Lord, God will turn our adversity into reward when we get to heaven. Have you ever considered that some insults, some evil reports, some persecutions are allowed by God simply because he in his goodness wants to be even more generous to that particular son or daughter of his for all eternity? We tend to focus on the hardship, whereas God in his goodness may be intent to give greater eternal reward. That's something to consider.

Then, there's a mind-boggling passage written by the prophet Habakkuk. In chapter three starting in verse 17 of his book, he writes:

Hab. 3:17-18 Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

If you can do what Habakkuk did, then I want to commend you for your faith. Your faith is pleasing God, and without faith it is impossible to please God. Habakkuk's joy was obviously not coming from the circumstances of this life – it had its source in the Lord. It was a fruit of the Holy Spirit, rather than a fruit of nice things happening.

So some people ask the question, "Are we supposed to act happy despite being miserable?" And the answer is, no. We're not supposed to act happy despite being miserable; we're supposed to **be** happy because life is actually great, despite circumstances that are miserable. You see, our circumstances have no power to make us miserable, unless we let them! The issue is, **what are we looking at?** Where is our attention, our focus? If we're focused on the lack around us, the evil, the corruption, the pollution, the injustice, the moral decay of society, then we can't help but get discouraged. But if we focus on the goodness of God – if we remind ourselves that because of **The Almighty** no injustice, no lack, no corruption, no evil agenda will ultimately triumph, then we can

rejoice. Every act of love and selflessness in this life will ultimately be rewarded. The books **will** be balanced. Even though God in his goodness may be giving people time to repent, the Judge of all the earth will do right. Perfectly. And because of that we can rejoice. If our eyes are in the right place, we **will** rejoice.

Mt. 6:22-23 [Jesus speaking] “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If the the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

The question is, “What are we looking at?” According to these verses, some people are walking around with great darkness in their soul, and it's because they're looking at all the wrong things. They're focusing on the evil, the bad, the ugly. But if they were to focus on God, on his goodness, on his provision, on his grace, and on his justice, they would have light in their souls instead.

I want you to understand something. If you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you and I can be joyful because we have eternal life. You and I can be joyful because the God of the universe loves us with an everlasting and an undying love. You and I can rejoice because our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. You and I can rejoice because we have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade, kept in heaven for us who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed. If you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you can rejoice because on your very worst, most horrible day, you are still far better off than the richest, most pampered unsaved person on the planet – it's just a matter of time until your true destinies will be revealed. Rejoice, my brother. Rejoice, my sister. God's got your life in the palm of his hand. The question of joy is, “**Where is your eyesight?**” The question of joy is, “What are you focusing on?” If you're focusing on God and the wonderful things he's doing, you'll have joy.

Also, we need to be rejoicing because we have the right perspective.

Lk. 10:20 [Jesus speaking to his disciples] However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

What had happened? Jesus had sent out the 72 to minister. They came back excited, saying, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.” It seems like they may have been fascinated with the power and authority they were able to exercise. Jesus sets them straight. Being able to, in this life, boss other beings around, even if those other beings are demons, should not be cause for rejoicing. Having authority should always be considered a great responsibility. But Jesus tells them what they can legitimately rejoice over. They can rejoice that their names are written in heaven. That has **eternal** value. That's the result of God's goodness. That isn't a momentary blessing on a ministry trip. That will last for ever and ever.

Heb. 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him [eternal things] endured the cross [temporal things], scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

I Pt. 4:13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

So we see that having the right perspective helps us be able to rejoice. But I want to give another reason why we can legitimately rejoice even when bad things are happening to us. As it says on our outline, we can rejoice in what our trials are producing. You see, the adversities, the hardships, the sufferings **themselves** are actually accomplishing something wonderful **in us** as we are being ministered to by **The Almighty**.

Ro. 8:28

And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

God is working for our good all the time. And all the time, God is working for our good. There's not a thing that will happen to you or to me that God isn't using for good. There may very well be all sorts of trials, adversities, and hardships that want to impose themselves on our lives, but God says, "Excuse me. I'm in control of the universe." And he places a filter between those trials and each of his sons and daughters. What the filter does, is that it only allows through those trials, those hardships, those tribulations that would do us good. The others aren't allowed to get to us. So there's not a single thing that will happen to us that God isn't using for good in our lives. Nothing. Nichts. Nada. Zip. Zilch. Zero. In **all** things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. That's cause to rejoice. If you're undergoing a trial, a hardship, a difficult circumstance, rest assured that in that very situation God is working **for your good**. Perhaps he's refining you on the inside. Perhaps he's giving you a greater revelation of his power to give you victory when the trial is over. The possibilities are numerous as to **how** he's working for your good. We may or may not understand **what** he's doing in working for our good, but beyond any shadow of a doubt he **is** working for our good. We need to believe that and if we really believe it, we won't find it hard to rejoice. I encourage you, don't wait to rejoice until you understand what good thing God is doing. Rejoice because you know he is working for your good, even if you have no idea what good thing he's doing. I exhort you, live by faith, not by sight.

II Co. 4:17-18

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

What are these verses saying? I imagine you've seen the scales of justice. Across the top there's some kind of a metal bar and on both the right and the left ends of the bar there are three chains that come down that hold up a circular plate. So if someone puts a one pound weight on the left-hand circular plate, that plate would go down, causing the plate on the right to go up. Then, if a two pound weight is placed on the right-hand circular plate, it would go down, causing the plate on the left to go up, because that one would now be lighter. That's the picture the apostle Paul is painting here. He says that our troubles are light and momentary. So let's say that they're represented by 2.7 ounces of hardship placed on the left-hand plate of the scales of justice. God says, "No problem," and he heaves on 47 pounds of glory on the right-hand plate. He smiles and says, "That should take care of it." We need to understand that our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. It's not even close. It was never intended to be. Next time you have 2.7 ounces of suffering, you can legitimately rejoice that it's achieving pounds and pounds of glory for you when you get to heaven. It will be manifested then, but God is even now working that into your spirit, so rejoice.

Paul also writes about the benefits we receive from the Lord in our troubles later in the same book. He says,

II Co. 12:9-10

So that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

The hemp plant has for years been used to make strong ropes. An experiment was performed by removing hemp plants from their rugged and severe environments and planting them in favorable, pleasant conditions. The experiment failed. In order to become strong, the hemp needed the adversity of a harsh climate. Like it or not, the trials, the difficulties, the adversities of this life have a way of making us stronger. When I was in the fourth grade we had a cocoon in a glass jar in the back of the classroom. I saw that cocoon gyrating and twisting and struggling. I felt so sorry for the poor

butterfly that wanted to get out. So I helped it. Much to my horror, I actually ended up killing the butterfly by trying to make its life easier. The truth is, the struggle is necessary for the butterfly to become strong enough to survive. God knows exactly what struggle is necessary for us to become the strong believers we have been ordained to become. Have you noticed what happens to children who always get what they want? They usually become selfish and demanding. God is a good, good father. He's not raising us to become selfish and demanding. He loves us so much that he wants us to become good in every way. Let's rejoice in that truth.

Jas. 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

You see, we like the end result. We love the idea of becoming mature and complete. And, secretly, most of us wish God would just make us more and more mature and complete without our having to undergo any struggle or difficulty. God in his goodness usually doesn't do it that way. He knows we need to develop perseverance. He does what is best all the time.

Ro. 5:3-5 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

We have a choice. We can either focus on what *man* is doing *to* us *in* our circumstances, or we can focus on what *God* is doing *for* us *through* those circumstances. If we focus on what man is doing to us, we'll get discouraged or depressed. If we focus on what God is doing for us, we'll have joy. The choice is ours. So joy is primarily a matter of having good eyesight. But Hebrews 1:9 also talks about joy being a result of walking in righteousness. It says,

Heb. 1:9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."

This verse specifically refers to Jesus Christ. But there's a principle involved that can apply to anyone. Have you ever noticed that murderers don't smile a lot? ...that robbers don't laugh much? ...that extortionists aren't all that happy? If we love righteousness and hate wickedness, and because of our love for the one and hatred for the other we discipline our lives to do what is right, as a result of doing what is good and right we will have a measure of joy. And we also see in Scripture that joy makes us stronger.

Neh. 8:10b ...for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

I want to testify from my own experience. When I've had the attitude, "Life is hard," that very complaining attitude has sapped my strength. That attitude, all by itself, has taken the wind out of my sails. But in the very same set of circumstances, when I was able to sit back, smile, and say, "I wonder how God's going to help me through this one," the joy of the Lord made me much stronger mentally and emotionally. Proverbs 17:22 tells us that a cheerful heart is a good medicine. So joy is not only a fruit, an evidence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, it's also a wonderful benefit for us.

Many of God's finest servants have been full of joy. Oswald Chambers, the author of My Utmost for His Highest, was known for his great sense of humor and joyful lifestyle. A rather serious seminary student once remarked, "I was shocked at what I then considered Chambers' undue levity. He was the most irreverent reverend I had ever met." Charles Spurgeon, a great preacher and a pastor of a large church in London, was once reprimanded by a woman in his congregation for using too much humor in the pulpit. With a twinkle in his eye, Spurgeon replied, "Madam, you should give

me a medal for holding back as much humor as I do!”

So let's develop great eyesight to see clearly the wonderful things God is always doing. As a result, we'll have much joy. I want to remind you, be joyful always. Amen.

Foundations Lesson #9 Joy, Peace, Patience, Part Two

Turning to Roman Numeral number two on our outline, we're covering the subject of peace. I think we can all agree that the people of this world want lives that are full of peace. In their search for peace, people have tried various kinds of meditation, isolated living quarters on mountain tops, joining communes that promise peace, and even tranquilizers, but still the peace they're longing for has escaped them.

In stark contrast to all this, heaven is a place of rich and enduring peace, mainly because the Creator and Sustainer of all things is, himself, “the God of peace” (Romans 15:33). Revelation 4:6 tells us that before the throne of God there's what looks like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. I believe that's symbolic of God's nature. Just like the sea of glass is smooth with no waves or ripples, so also there's no anxiousness or worry in the heart of the One who sits on the throne. Even though his responsibilities are far greater than we can imagine, even though his design and plan is constantly being resisted by the humans he, in his great love, has created, even though everything depends on him, he still displays no hint of being frazzled or stressed.

So how can we receive this peace that so wonderfully saturates all of heaven? The good news is that God has already lowered it into the lives of believers by his Holy Spirit. He has invested it into our hearts.

Ro. 8:6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;

To the degree that we believers allow the Holy Spirit to have control of our lives, our attitudes, our emotions, to that degree we can live in the peace of God. We've already received what the world is so desperately looking for.

Col. 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

As you may have noticed, in this verse we're exhorted to **let** the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. God has provided his peace, but we have a part to play in yielding to God's provision.

Is. 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah is here speaking about Jesus Christ prophetically. He lets us know that there was a price – a severe price – that had to be paid so that we could have access to God's peace. And, just as Isaiah prophesied, Jesus faithfully paid that price. Because of Jesus' death on the cross, every ounce of peace we'll ever need has been made available to us. I can understand why Christians don't have peace at times. But I can't understand why they put up with it. God's provision for us to have peace is rich and abundant. It's there for the taking.

When I was 20 years old and had only been saved for about three months, I had the opportunity

to talk to some of my friends about the Lord. I told them what had happened to me. Unfortunately, the conversation didn't go all that well. When I got home I was distressed. I went upstairs to my bedroom, got down on my knees, and started talking to God. I really had no idea if I'd represented him well or not. Finally, after about a minute with the Lord, I said to him, "If I did anything right, please just give me peace." Instantly, I was saturated in peace. All the turmoil, all the anxiousness was completely gone. It was a night-and-day difference in a split second. At the time I was even a little taken aback because I didn't realize such a thing was possible. I climbed into bed. Then I made the mistake of choosing to dwell on what had happened again so, unfortunately, I forfeited the peace God provided. But it was an experience with the Lord I'll never forget. I know that abundant peace is available from the Lord. No one will ever be able to convince me otherwise. I've experienced it.

Before going any further, I'd like to talk about the difference between external peace and internal peace. External peace has to do with the absence of war, strife and conflict around us; it has to do with what's happening in our circumstances. Internal peace has to do with what's happening in our hearts. Fortunately, the external does not need to determine how much internal peace we have. Just as the source of our love and our joy is the Lord, so also the source of our peace is the Lord. God gives *internal* peace. So it's possible for you or me to be in a combat zone with bullets flying everywhere and yet to have great peace in our hearts. All the love, all the joy, all the peace, all the patience we'll ever need is available to us in Christ at all times, regardless of what bitterness, conflict, tragedy, deceit, or animosity the world may throw at us. We have little control over how much external peace we may experience in our lifetime, but we can always walk in great internal peace because of God's provision.

Let's define peace. Peace is a state of rest, quietness, and calm. The ancient Hebrews used to greet one another by saying, "Shalom." That was their word for peace. "Shalom" meant peace but it also meant well-being in all areas of life – health, wealth, success, and security. And when they'd leave a conversation, often they'd say, "Go in peace." That's a common expression in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, Jesus talks to his disciples about peace in John 16:33. He says,

Jn. 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

This verse plainly shows us that the peace Jesus is talking about has nothing to do with what's happening in the world. Jesus was clear, "In this world you will have trouble." The good news is that our peace comes from the Lord. The world didn't give it, so the world can't take it away. In this verse Jesus doesn't say that he'll remove the trouble. He just lets us know that he's far greater than the trouble. Since we are in him, there's no need to worry.

Jn. 14:27 [Jesus speaking] Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Pp. 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

What are these verses saying? There are circumstances we will face in this life which would tempt us to become anxious. But here God says, "Do not be anxious about anything." So how do we handle those circumstances? The rest of these two verses gives us the prescription we can take to handle those circumstances successfully. They say that in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, we present our requests to God. In other words, we ask God to take care of it, and we rest in the confidence that he'll do just that, because he's told us that if we ask it will be given to us; if we seek we will find; and if we knock, the door will be opened to us. Since God will always do what is best, we have no cause to be anxious. He'll take care of business. Then as a by-product of our

giving the situation over to God and letting him handle it, it says that the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. We may not even understand why we have peace, because this imparted peace transcends understanding. But we **will** have peace. Why? Because we've **trusted** God.

Ps. 3:6 I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side.

David, the author of this Psalm, is looking at tens of thousands of enemy warriors aligned against him ready to attack, and he's not afraid. I suspect his attitude was, "Why should I be afraid. God's got this!" David was a man of faith, and that same faith is available for you and me. God has **not** given us a spirit of fear. The troubles, the conflicts, the battles of this life only **reveal** how much of our peace actually comes from God and how much of it comes from our circumstance.

Joy comes primarily from having good eyesight. Peace comes primarily from trusting God.

Is. 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

Ro. 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.

God isn't worried, fretting, anxious, or upset. Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). If **we** are worried, fretting, anxious, or upset we're not as connected to God as we should be.

Many years ago, there was a woman who came to me for help. She would often think of some troubling scenario and anxiously ask, "What if?" "What if?" "What if?" I finally taught her to answer her own questions. Every time she asked, "What if?" I would have her recite the answer, "...then God will see me through." That simple exercise has helped quite a few people over the years, including myself. What if you can't pay the electric bill? Then God will see you through. What if your spouse leaves you? Then God will see you through. What if your son doesn't overcome his drug problem? Then God will see you through. He's promised never to leave you or forsake you. He is faithful. You don't need to know what tomorrow holds; you just need to know who holds tomorrow. Peace comes from **trusting** God. There's a part of us that wants to know what will happen, but if we always knew what was going to be happening, we'd never learn to live by faith. On those many occasions when we don't know what tomorrow will bring, we still **can** and **need to** have peace. Again, peace comes from trusting God. He's large and he's in charge.

There's a story about a man who goes on a hike in the mountains, far away from civilization. He loses his balance, starts falling off the edge of the cliff he's on, but manages to grab onto a vine. Hanging off the edge of the cliff and desperately clinging onto the vine he yells, "Is there anyone up there who can help me?" A voice responds, "I am the Lord. I can help you." The man says, "Save me, Lord. If I fall, I'll die." The voice responds, "Let go of the vine." The man says, "I can't do that. I'll fall to my death." The voice says, "Trust me." The man hesitates, then he says, "Is there anyone else up there who can help me?" Trusting God can be scary. But the more we get to know him, the more we develop our relationship with him, the better we know his Word, the more we experience his faithfulness, the more our trust in him will grow, as it should.

Mt. 5:9 [Jesus speaking] Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

I have a little insight for you. If there are two co-existing parties and one is intent on peace and the other's intent on war, guess what – you're gonna have a war. I know; I pastored a church like that once. It was a combat zone. But those who actively work to bring peace into such a situation, as much as they possibly can, they'll be blessed by the Lord. Blessed are the peacemakers. You may not think you'll be able to accomplish much, but God loves peace so much that he rewards those who

do what they can to bring peace.

The next passage of Scripture is lengthy, but it's more than worth reading all of it.

Mt. 6:25-34 [Jesus speaking] “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

What I really appreciate about Jesus' message to us here is that he not only says, “Do not worry,” he also tells us why it's unnecessary to be worrying. For believers, it's not appropriate to carry the burden of worry because God takes such excellent care of us. He's faithful. He never fails. If we trust him, we will have peace.

Ro. 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

There are many things we have no control over. At the Throne of Judgment, God won't evaluate us based on what circumstances came our way, but He will evaluate us based on how we handled the circumstances that came our way. We're required to do our best. As one songwriter has said, “You just do your best, and believe that it's blessed, and he'll take care of the rest.” I realize it's a bit of a paradox, but the book of Hebrews even tells us that we need to make every effort to enter God's rest, and Peter tells us to **seek** peace and **pursue** it. Then, Psalm 37 verse 1 says,

Ps. 37:1 Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong;

One man in a church I pastored memorized just two words of this Psalm: “fret not.” I have to admit if you're just beginning to memorize Scripture, that may not be a bad place to start. Fret not. One Texas preacher said, “Unlax thy bosom and fret not thine gizzard.” Later in Psalm 37 we also see that there's disadvantage to having a fretting, anxious, or angry heart. When we don't abide in the peace of God that's available, the quality of our decisions has a way of taking a nose dive, since we're not clear-minded enough to function in the wisdom of God. Not having peace can even cause problems like ulcers, headaches, and high blood pressure.

Heb. 12:11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

We live in a society that wants everything fast: instant mashed potatoes, world news in a 5 minute podcast. But in the kingdom of God, most things can't be rushed. This verse tells us that unpleasant discipline is not the end of the story. We have to **wait** for the last chapter to be written. And even then, the treasure of righteousness and peace doesn't find its way to just anyone. The treasure only comes to those who have allowed the unpleasant discipline to be a tool of **training** them. Some of the trials of today will work more peace into your heart for tomorrow. We love having peace but we don't always enjoy what we have to go through in order to get that peace. In the Kingdom of God,

things that happen quickly are usually of little consequence.

Ro. 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

How do you picture the Kingdom of God? When we use the term kingdom, or nation, we tend to think of borders between countries, land masses that are governed by a particular ruler. But the kingdom of God isn't like that at all. I believe the Kingdom of God is wherever God's reign is honored, where his authority is submitted to. So if you or I make 100 decisions in the course of a day and 70 of those decisions are in line with the desire of God and 30 are not, then the kingdom of God has been furthered in 70% of our decisions and resisted in 30% of our decisions on that day. As we can see from the verse we just read, one of the hallmarks, one of the main characteristics of the kingdom of God is peace. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, **peace** and joy in the Holy Spirit. Amen. Peace be with you.

Foundations Lesson #9

Joy, Peace, Patience, Part Three

Roman Numeral number three on our outline deals with the subject of patience. The first thing I want to say about patience is this: Patience has **nothing** to do with how long you wait. You can wait a long time patiently; you can wait a long time impatiently. You can wait a short time patiently; you can wait a short time impatiently. Patience has absolutely nothing to do with how long you wait; it has everything to do with your attitude while you're waiting. A patient person, while he's waiting, is content and satisfied. He's at peace. He's not perturbed over how long this is taking. He's not bothered in his heart. He's not feeling, "Come on, let's get this show on the road." The husband who looks at his watch and sees that they should have left home 10 minutes ago and calls to his wife putting on her makeup in the bathroom saying, "I'm being patient..." would be much more accurate if he said, "I'm being impatient." Patience has to do with our attitude while we're waiting.

The word used in the original Greek text has no equivalent in the English language. It's μακροθυμία, from makro meaning **long**, and thumos meaning **temper**. So it refers to patient endurance, or being long tempered. Some older versions of the Bible use the word "longsuffering" to translate μακροθυμία, and that may even be a bit more accurate, but since the word "longsuffering" is rarely used in conversational English, newer versions usually use the word **patience**. Μακροθυμία describes the person who has the power to exercise revenge but instead exercises restraint.

Pp. 2:14 Do everything without complaining or arguing,

If you or I are waiting and we have a complaining attitude, we're not being patient, even if we haven't said a word, because patience is a matter of the heart. God knows if we're being patient or if we're being impatient. Patience is an attitude. So if you've received Christ as your Lord and Savior, and because of that the Holy Spirit dwells in your heart, one of the evidences, one of the fruit of your being a child of the Most High God is that you'll be patient, you'll be long tempered. You won't have an attitude of complaining while you're waiting. Incidentally, all complaining is ultimately against God. Since he oversees every detail of his creation, if we complain about some aspect of our circumstance, we're actually complaining about how he's running his creation. So let's do everything without complaining or arguing, just like the Scripture says. The Israelites who came out of Egypt had their journey extended for 38 years because of grumbling and complaining.

Pr. 20:22 Do not say, "I'll pay you back for this wrong!" Wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you.

The mills of God's justice grind slow, but they grind exceedingly fine. Wait patiently for the Lord.

Pp. 4:11-13 [the apostle Paul writes] I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Again, patience is waiting in a state of being satisfied and content. Just as we saw that joy is a result of having good eyesight, and peace is a result of trusting God, so patience is a result of having a strong conviction that God's timing is best. There are some things I had wanted to happen much, much sooner than they did. I've had to remind myself, it's never about me and what I want. It's about God and his ways, because whatever he does cannot be improved upon. It's always best. That includes his timing. Impatience says, "come on, how long is it going to be, I'm waiting." Patience says, "I'm waiting because it's not God's time yet, and God does everything perfectly."

Ecc. 3:1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

Ecc. 3:11 He [God] has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

There's no way you or I can improve upon God's timing. And if we think we can, we need to repent of our great arrogance. Don't cut off the tomatoes because they're still green! Why? Because God has made everything beautiful in its time.

Ps. 27:14 Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

Is. 30:18 Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!

Just as we've seen that God is the source of all love, joy, and peace, so also Scripture shows us that God is the source of all patience. He's extraordinarily patient.

II Pt. 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

We tend to need patience with slow-moving waitresses, in line at the bank, the DMV, or the Post Office, or with people who haven't yet paid back the money they borrowed from us. But God concerns himself with matters that are much more important. He wants people to repent! That carries eternal consequences. And he does it with great patience.

Ro. 2:4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

I Tim. 1:16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

God is extraordinarily patient. Scripture also shows us some blessings which flow out of a patient

heart.

Pr. 14:29 A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly.
Those who, because of their impatience, talk before listening only hurt themselves.

Pr. 15:18 A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.

Pr. 16:32 Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.

Pr. 25:15 Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.

Heb. 6:12 We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

Rick Joyner has pointed out that, according to this verse, it's necessary for us to have both faith and patience in order to inherit the promises of God. We have a faith movement in the body of Christ, but we don't have a patience movement. Even though patience is required it's not popular because, unfortunately, people don't like to wait. I've even heard a teaching on "how to bring tomorrow's promise into today." The truth is, we can't speed up the fulfillment of God's promises in our lives. We can slow them down by not cooperating with God, by not submitting to him, but we can't speed them up. He knows just how long the steak needs to be grilled for it to be juicy and tender. He knows just how long the cake needs to be in the oven so that it's not doughy or dry. Patience acknowledges that His timing is best, that if we had our way it wouldn't come out nearly as well.

I'd like to finish off this segment on patience by reading a few more scriptures.

Ps. 37:7 Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.

Ps. 40:1 I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry.

It may take us about five seconds to read this verse. So it's difficult to grasp how long it may have taken for David, the author of Psalm 40, to have received the blessing he cried out to God for. Was it two months? A year? Five years? We don't know, but I'm sure we can agree that it's a lot easier reading about it than having to do the waiting. What we do know is that however long it took for him to wait, that amount of time was best for David.

The Chinese bamboo is an incredible plant. When it's planted, it produces no visible sign of growth for five years. Then, in just a few weeks, it grows to a height of 90 feet. The question is, "How long does it take for the Chinese bamboo to grow 90 feet tall?" The answer is that it takes 5 years. Everything that took place underground was essential for the plant to be able to do what it did above ground in such a short period of time.

Ro. 12:12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Eph. 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

1 Th. 5:14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

Be patient with everyone. Amen. God bless you all.