

“Removing the Shackles”
Philippians 4:4-13
Series: The Missing Peace Week 2 Peace with Yourself
Meg Smith

The Woodside Church

January 10, 2021

Have you ever felt trapped or restrained by something? We can experience this feeling from something physical or emotional like a burden weighing us down. We feel like a prisoner in shackles. Shackles are heavy, confining, tiring, can chafe away at your skin, and leave you bruised and scarred. I have never had a chance to experience chained shackles; however, when I was 18 years old I tore my ACL and was confined to a full leg cast, crutches, and sometimes a wheelchair. In an instant I felt my independence stripped away. I could not walk or drive, which was torture! I had to sleep downstairs on the couch the week after my surgery because steps were impossible. My mom had to help wash me and get me to the bathroom, talk about a humbling experience! It was physically draining and emotionally taxing. I felt like a prisoner in my own house and mind. Think about a time when you have felt like a prisoner, and it could be what you are feeling like right now.

This week, we are going to take a look at one of the Apostle Paul’s writings; who at the time he wrote this passage, was a prisoner himself in Rome awaiting trial. The difference between his imprisonment and most other people’s experiences was that although shackled, he was content. Paul was at peace because the Prince of Peace dwelled in his heart and in his mind. He preached the Gospel to anyone who would listen and was not worried about his future because he knew where he was going when he died. Here are the encouraging words of peace he sent to the Church of Philippi which we will dive deeper into:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, 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.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 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 all this through him who gives me strength.”

As I stated in the opening, we all go through times where we feel like we are prisoners in shackles. Shackles can be things that others put on us that pile up, they can be things that we continue to put on ourselves, or they can be things we do not allow God to take away from us. A few examples of shackles can be judging others or ourselves, resentment, dwelling on hurts instead of focusing on forgiveness, envy/jealousy, idols, worry, depression, anxiety, the list continues. Any of these sound familiar? Are you feeling the weight from these shackles? All shackles are sinful attitudes that we naturally have. **Romans 3:23 “We are all sinners and fall short of the glory of the Lord.”** Shackles are uncomfortable and unfortunately many times we continue to wear them even though they hurt us!

My shackles have taken slightly different forms over the years. This all attests to my relationship with God and how it has grown through my different life experiences. Currently some of the shackles that I continue to put on myself are trying to stay in control of my life by not trusting God’s promises for me, constantly trying to please people or trying to please God to receive affirmation, striving for perfection - which is impossible, and allowing circumstances and people to steal the free gifts of joy and peace that God extends to us.

We need to admit that we ALL have shackles that weigh us down and separate us from God. This is an incredibly hard thing to admit for all of us. Last week, Pastor Doug kicked off this sermon series by explaining to us about the importance of beginning peace talks with God. Peace comes from God so we cannot have peace without God. From those peace talks we are to trust God, tell the truth, take the path of peace, and even do an idol inventory. If you have not taken this yet, you can find it with last week’s sermon or under Growth Group Resources on our website. While we have hopefully been practicing peace with God this week, today we are taking it a step further and focusing on finding peace by losing those shackles! This week’s Peace Practice is called Anxiety Analysis can also be found on our website. We will be walking through this exercise while closely examining Philippians 4:4-13, and beginning to break free from the shackles that bind us.

The first thing we are to do to break free comes from verses 6-7 from our Philippians passage

“do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, 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.”

We need to “turn our worries into prayers.” This is where step one of our Anxiety Analysis comes into play. I do not know about you, but one thing that I find myself doing is playing the “what if...” game when it comes to worrying. Step one of our Peace Practice is to **write down everything that is making you feel anxious, worried, or fearful.** I decided to list mine using “what if...” statements. “What if I never get married and have kids? What if I forget my purpose? What if I cannot afford to pay my bills? What if...” That was a lot of energy and emotion stirred up just in those few “what if” scenarios.

How differently would it come across or even make me feel if I turned those what if's into prayers? This is where step two of our Anxiety Analysis starts. **Prayer and Petition:** present each anxiety individually to God and ask Him what He will do in that situation. Let's give it a shot using our "what if's" as I replace mine, insert yours: Father, I just want to take a minute to thank you for all that you provide for me. I pray over my future husband and children if they are all a part of your plan for my life. Holy Spirit, continue to guide my heart and remind me of why I am here on this earth. That I am your precious Daughter, God, and You do have many plans for me that my one true purpose is being YOUR child. Jesus, Thank you for providing for me financially and having extra to donate to others in need.! Thank You for being able to wipe away my "what if's" and I pray that you do the same for all of your children who just prayed away their "what if's" with me. Jesus in Your Holy and Precious Name we pray, amen. Well I feel better right now; however, there have been times when I needed something else too.

We prayed; now we can move to our third step in our Anxiety Analysis which is **Thanksgiving.** Giving thanks to God that He is more powerful than each one of your anxieties and that He is working to do His will in each one. We need to thank God not for the anxieties that we are feeling, but for not abandoning us with these anxieties. He is working His will in all of our situations even when we cannot tell. There is NOTHING that will ever surprise God or be too big or even too small for Him to handle. When He says He wants to know all of us, He means our anxieties and insecurities too. Thank You God, for being with us in these trials.

It is important to remember that true peace comes from knowing that God is in control (v.7). This step comes back to our relationship with God. Pastor Doug also shared with us last week about how we CAN trust God because we have been pardoned for our past. We are FULLY pardoned because Jesus took the punishment for our sins that we have done, the sin that we continue to do, and the sin we will commit in the future.

Romans 5:1-2: Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through 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.

We grow to trust people the more we get to know them, their character, and their beliefs. Maybe we do not always trust God because we have not taken the time to truly get to know Him as our Father? The more time we spend working on relationships, eventually, they start to improve. It starts with communication. Prayer is our communication with God. This is where we do our final step of the Anxiety Analysis which is called **Protective Peace.** Receive His peace in each one of your worries. Picture Christ's peace as a fortress around your heart and mind. This is what I imagined Paul practiced in order to feel the contentment in an otherwise uncomfortable situation. The more time you spend time getting to know Jesus, the more you will trust Him to protect your heart and mind. We learn more of His character by reading Scripture. Through Scripture we learn His truth and we learn to trust Him more and more. I challenge you this week to pray and to read the Bible MORE than you did last week. The more often you do it, the more comfortable and natural it becomes and you start to desire it and make more time for it. It is a sacrifice, are you willing to make it?

One final step in knowing God's character through His word is to not just read it, but actually believe and obey it.

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (vv. 8-9).

Remember those shackles that we are carrying around; they are usually an indicator that we are not obeying God's word. We hear the phrase “do not worry” a few times in Scripture; so I think it is in our best interest not to worry. It is easier said than done, I am also preaching to myself as I stand up here. It just takes practice. There is NOTHING that we will ever feel or experience that Jesus has not felt or gone through first. We need not hide things from God, no matter how shameful. We are to repent, ask for forgiveness, and then forgive ourselves and not hold onto those things. Once we hand them over to God, He has it, no need for us to try to control it anymore. God is our anchor. He can and He will get us through anything, as long as we obey.

I challenge you to dive deeper into this Anxiety Analysis this week and report back to your Growth Group or a close friend about it. Better yet, invite them to practice it with you. Need a Growth Group or want to join a new Peace Pod (a small group of up to 4 people)? I am the girl to get you into one. Check on the Connection Card that you are interested, and I will be in touch.

We can have peace, it is no easy feat; however, WE ARE NOT ALONE IN THIS ENDEAVOR! God IS our perfect peace and provides that peace for us to use as we walk through life. Even in the darkest of times, peace is available AND attainable as long as we pray, know God is in control, and obey His word.

In 1555, Dr. Nicholas Ridley was sentenced to be burned at the stake in England because of his witness for Christ. On the night before Ridley's execution, his brother offered to remain with him in the prison chamber to be of assistance and comfort. Nicholas Ridley declined the offer saying, “I intend (God willing) to go to bed, and sleep as quietly tonight, as ever I did.” Because he knew the peace of God, he could rest in the strength of the everlasting arms of his Lord to meet his need. [Source: *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, John Foxe; <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/the-martyrdom-of-nicholas-ridley>]

Let us hear Paul's words one more time to bring us comfort,

“I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 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 all this through him who gives me strength” (vv.10-13).

Throughout our lives, we will all be prisoners to something. You may have reflected on one of those times during my sermon or maybe you are in a season right now where you feel shackled and trapped; without peace or hope. Paul referred to himself as a prisoner and a slave to Christ, yet he found the peace that God grants us. We are prisoners to whatever shackles we put on or continue to keep on, yet God longs for us to be free and full of His peace. What shackles are YOU still holding onto? You CAN be free and have peace. Let us ask God to remove those chains that bind us, TODAY!