

Home Group study week beginning 24th February 2020

Fruit of the Spirit: Peace

For so many of us, life is mad and hectic. We seem to be under increasing pressure in all aspects of life, and we all experience anxiety to a greater or lesser extent.

What things lead to anxiety in our lives? What are group members' favourite activities, or where do they go, to find peace?

Read: Mark 4: 35-41, Acts 12: 1-7

One symptom of anxiety is that it can be difficult to get to sleep. In the Mark passage Jesus has had an exhausting day, teaching crowds of people and has suggested they take the boat and escape to the far side of the lake. Often a day like Jesus has just had would fill us with adrenaline and things would be whirring around in our minds when we tried to sleep: and that's without trying to sleep on a cushion on an open boat in a howling gale and driving rain! Why is Jesus so peaceful?

Do you sympathise with the disciples' response in v38? Jesus clearly doesn't: he rebukes them for their lack of faith. What does that say about our anxieties? *(Please note: there are positives we can take from this. The answer isn't as simple as 'we're all lacking faith'! Rather it speaks of God's ability to deal with our anxiety and the importance of accepting that, turning to him first.)*

In the Acts 12 passage, as Dave pointed out on Sunday, Peter is languishing in jail facing almost certain execution (vv2,3). Verse 6 describes the conditions he was sleeping under, which are bad enough, without factoring in the anxiety we would expect Peter to be suffering knowing he would soon be executed.

How well would we be sleeping in such circumstances? Yet the angel who comes to rescue him has to dig him in the ribs to wake him up: even though he's turned the light on (v7)! Why is Peter, one of those anxiously accusing Jesus of 'not caring if we drown' in the Mark passage, now so peaceful? What does this say about our ability to enjoy peace?

Understanding

Peace is a fruit of the Spirit. It's something, like the other eight aspects of the fruit of the Spirit, that we can expect God to work in us as we allow his Spirit to work in our lives. But God doesn't expect us to be passive: he wants us to work in partnership with him. Dave gave us three pieces of advice for replacing anxiety with peace. Let's have a look at those now.

1: Do not be anxious

Psychologists tell us that anxiety is part of our primeval instinct of 'fight or flight': it causes us either to fight against our circumstances or to run away from them and is all part of our innate survival strategy. But God offers us peace as a third, and far more effective, way of dealing with our anxiety.

Philippians 4: 6-7 gives us a beautiful process to overcome anxiety. So what should we do when we face anxiety? What does v7 promise us in return for obedience to v6? How does it describe the Peace of God? What do you understand by this description? Is it possible not to be 'anxious about anything'? If so, how do we reach this blissful state?

2: 'Box' your anxiety

Matthew 6: 34 is wonderfully practical. One of the worst things about anxiety is the way we build it up. Once those thought processes start, we worry about all sorts of things that add together to make the situation seem totally beyond our control.

There is a well-known quotation that 'there is only one way to eat an elephant: a bite at a time.' (Don't try this at home group...) But Jesus is saying much the same thing here. Just worry about the immediate problem and let tomorrow take care of its own problems.

How easy is it to work this through?

3: Introduce peace into our lives

Colossians 3 v15 tells us to 'let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts'. We can sometimes hold on to things in our lives almost like a comfort blanket: even if that comfort blanket is actually giving us *discomfort*. But Jesus always has a better way for us. We need to let go of our anxiety and let Jesus work his peace in our lives.

Dave suggested we can 'orchestrate a sense of peace in our lives'. In what ways we could do this? (*Amongst his suggestions was to practise thankfulness and to let the message of Christ dwell in us and divert us from anxiety.*)

Application

Peace is a fruit of the Spirit, something we can expect God to work in our lives. But there is a wonderful process to go through here, where God the Father, through promises given by his Son works with us in partnership with the Holy Spirit. The process involves:

- having faith to believe that God is on top of all our issues and anxieties and is capable to dealing with them;
- Bringing them to God
- Keeping our anxieties in proportion and in their proper place
- Experiencing God's peace and at the same time developing a peaceful attitude so that we know yet more of God's peace

There is an imperative to know peace for our own well-being: but what does our peace say about our great God to the community around us?