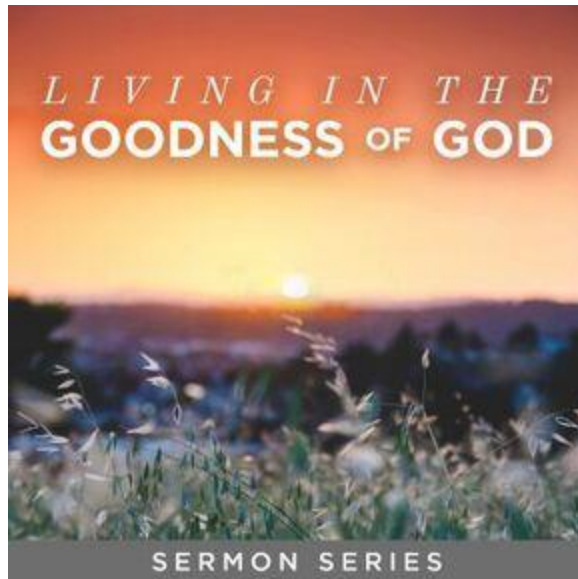


LIVING IN THE GOODNESS OF GOD

RELAXING IN GOD'S GOODNESS – PART 3
Psalm 23:1-2

Written by Pastor Steve Norman
April 25-May 1, 2021

Words of Encouragement Days 237-242



LIVING IN THE GOODNESS OF GOD

God's Favor - What is it and how to you get it?
Many men and women through the ages have been said to have God's favor. You, too, can have God's favor. This sermon series focuses on what it means to live in the goodness of God by trusting Him. Find the answer to worry, regret, indecision, emotional pain, and fear through the 12 expressions of God's goodness taught through the 23rd Psalm.

This Week's Memory Verse:

**"A psalm of David.
The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet waters,"
Psalm 23:1**

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 237
FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - JOY

"Keep me safe, O God, for I have come to you for refuge. I said to the Lord, "You are my Master! Every good thing I have comes from you." . . . 5 Lord, you alone are my inheritance, my cup of blessing. You guard all that is mine. The land you have given me is a pleasant land. What a wonderful inheritance! I will bless the Lord who guides me; even at night my heart instructs me. I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice. My body rests in safety. . . 11 You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever." Psalm 16:1-11

A JOY THAT LASTS

2020 highlighted the fragility of the world in which we live. Those in good health were suddenly sick. Those with thriving businesses now worried about their next payslip. Those with big plans to look forward to promptly had empty calendars. And those we held so dear swiftly became far from reach. But one thing remains constant when all around us is uncertain: God's love and character.

Psalm 16 illustrates the living faith that David has in the Lord during his times of real darkness and sorrow. Early in the Psalm, David cries out "Preserve me, O God, for in You I take refuge" (Psalm 16:1). If we, too, do the same in our own times of crisis, then God promises not only that our hearts will be glad and our whole being will rejoice but also that our flesh will dwell secure (Psalm 16:9).

While we live in this world, we are not of this world. So as we follow the path of life and remain in the presence of God - in the presence of trust and repentance, of rest, of

power, and of love - our pleasures are eternal rather than temporal (Psalm 16:11). God, in turn, promises us a "beautiful inheritance" (Psalm 16:6).

REFLECT: Earlier, you were asked to make a list of where you have seen the goodness of God in your life. If you have that list, review it and add any new ways you've seen His goodness in your life this week. If you don't have the first list, begin one by listing at least 5 ways you have seen God's goodness in your life. Then thank Him for each blessing.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Whatever trials and difficulties might come into my pathway today, grant me the joyful confidence to always seek You and walk the path of life with You. May this cause me to recognize Your limitless grace and, therefore, be of good cheer as I focus my heart and mind on You: my refuge and strength in every eventuality of life. May Your joy, love, and peace continually fill me today and spill over into all that I do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 238
FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - JOY

"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 everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Philippians 4:4-6

THE JOY OF THE SPIRIT

"**DO** not be anxious about anything..." (Philippians 4:6) Easier said than done, right? No matter how hard we try, there are always going to be things that will occupy our minds, filling them with doubts and worries. "Will people like me? Can I make good choices and meaningful relationships? Can I keep on top of everything?" And these are questions you ask yourself on your very first day of school! Then, the more life brings your way, the more complicated the questions become.

But what are some of the little things that bring happiness to your everyday life? Music? Food? Family? Friends? All of these things have something in common. Although good for us to enjoy, they can be taken away, they are all finite and will come to an end at some point. A song, no matter how many times you play it on loop, has an end. Food has an expiration date. Family and friends, sadly, also will cease to be here on this earth and may leave you behind. So what kind of joy lasts forever? The Joy of the Lord. It's eternal. It's life-changing. It will never leave nor forsake you.

Sometimes, we are so preoccupied with worrying and trying to find a solution to our problems, we forget to come and ask God what to do, even when the answer is staring us right in the face. If we know the Lord is always with us,

at hand, we need not be anxious about anything because He has already given us His peace which surpasses all of our attempts at understanding. This joy is like no other and it cannot be touched by ever-changing emotions and circumstances. Yet we easily forget this fact. Commit today to let the joy God has given you be a fire that will never be put out, keeping you warm and glowing, no matter what. Never try to replace the eternal joy the Spirit gives you with short-lived happiness.

REFLECT: If someone were to ask what the joy of the Lord, how would you define it? What things has or does God give you that bring you great joy? What things about God himself bring you joy?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, You are trustworthy, and yet this is something I can forget. Too often I try to work out every situation in my own thoughts without acknowledging You have the answer! Instead of relying upon myself, help me to turn to You for answers first. As I face unknown circumstances, help me to ask you to, "*Give me the right words to help my child. Give me a heart of love and patience. Use me to remind them that You are with them, You will be their God, You will strengthen them. Remind me You will uphold them, You will be their help. Please be my help today. Be my strength today. Remind me that You have promised to love me and my children eternally — and that You will never leave us.*" Help me to rest in You and trust You, and help me teach others the same. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 239

FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - PEACE

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

PEACE OF MIND

WE live in a world where things are constantly changing around us, getting in our way, keeping our minds on the move, and bringing much uncertainty, guessing, anxiety, stress, and pressure in our already full worlds - a true picture of chaos. We find ourselves always jumping from one thing to another, feeling like we are burning the candle at both ends.

All the while, at the very same time, everyone around us is searching for peace of mind, that one thing which will give them a moment to take a breather, something that will take their minds away from the chaos. We are all guilty of trying to find solace in something - movies, social media, music, or people - truly believing that this is the answer. But it isn't. Movies paint a perfect picture of what life should look like – but there's no such thing as a perfect life! Social media and influencers set standards that they themselves can't reach. And people, as much as they want the best for us, are struggling with the same things we are and, sadly, can't be fully relied on. Do these things bring more disturbance into our world than help? Things that disturb our minds disturb our bodies which end up disturbing the way we function and our motivation and drive – until we have stopped living our lives.

But the beauty of God is that He is peace itself, the true source you can rely on. The peace that comes from God is a never-ending supply – and it's a peace that you don't need to earn. It's not something we have to work for or be worthy of, but

something that is just there for us to take, have, and keep. Are you willing to take it? God is waiting for your transaction with Him. All He wants for you to do is to trust Him, let go of your anxiety and stress, and hold onto His peace.

Jesus said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Him as you are. He doesn't add any conditions and there's no burden you can't share with Him.

REFLECT: Are there any burdens you're carrying today that you could share with Jesus? Bring them to Him. Then take His peace with you throughout your day.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I thank You for placing Your wonderful, powerful, protective peace in my life. I am grateful that You have positioned it to stand at the entrance of my heart and mind and that it dominates my mind and controls my life. Because what is inside me is what rules me, I choose to let Your peace rise up and fill me. With this peace standing at the gate of my heart and mind, I know it will protect me from the enemy's attack on my emotions and will not permit his lies and accusations to slip into my mind! Thank You for loving me enough to put this powerful peace in my life!

I confess that I am guarded and protected by the powerful peace of God that works in my life. It rises up to dominate my mind; it controls my thinking; and it determines the condition of my life and the environment where I live and work. I am unaffected by the circumstances that surround me, for this supernatural peace stands at the gate of my mind and emotions to monitor everything that tries to access me. Because no fretting, anxiety, panic, or worry is allowed to enter me, I remain free, calm, and peaceful - even in difficult situations that in the past would have upset me! I declare this by faith in Jesus' name, Amen!

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 240

FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - PEACE

"All this I (Jesus) have spoken while still with You. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 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." John 14:25-27

FORTRESS OF PEACE

A favorite book in the Bible for many is the book of Philippians. Paul's letter to the church in Philippi is filled with rejoicing over God's goodness, encouragement for the church, and useful instructions. Tucked away toward the end of the letter lie some of the most highlighted verses in people's Bibles.

Peace is a theme in Philippians chapter 4. The English language sometimes falls a little bit flat when we look for definitions in a biblical context. Peace in English is simply defined as "freedom from disturbance", but Paul meant so much more when he wrote about this peace. The Hebrew word for peace is "shalom" which, as well as meaning freedom from disturbance, also includes notions of totality, completeness, success, fulfillment, wholeness, harmony, security, and well-being. This is not a peace we can gain through human achievement, but a gift from above. Jesus told His disciples in John 14:27, "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." Jesus has given us **His own** peace, something the world cannot give us. It is this same peace that kept Jesus asleep in the middle of a storm and the same peace He had when He was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane. The peace that kept His heart soft and thoughts clear can be our peace too.

How do we obtain this peace? Philippians 4:6-7 says we receive it by praying about everything, laying down all of our worries and anxious thoughts before God, and choosing to remain full of gratitude while we do so. We do our part by deciding to trust that God is taking care of our circumstances no matter how chaotic life may seem, and God will do His part by bestowing His peace upon us. Therefore, we can rest assured that no matter what our circumstance, no matter the delay or failure, diagnosis or battle, pandemic or lockdown, if we present our requests to God through prayer and with thanksgiving, He will surround our hearts and minds with a fortress of His very own peace.

REFLECT: What issues or circumstances are disturbing your pleasant peace from God? Write a few of them down and then pray about them while thanking God for listening to you and sending you an answer. No matter how big or small the problem, God wants to hear from you today!

TODAY'S PRAYER:

Lord, at the start of each day, help me to recognize You above all else. Enlighten the eyes of my heart so I will see You and notice how You are at work through my life. Give me wisdom to make the best choice, and fill me with a desire to seek after You more than anything else in this world. I ask that Your power at work through the Holy Spirit would breathe in me and through me once again, to fresh and make all things new. Thank You that You are greater than anything I may face today. Thank You that Your presence goes with me, and Your joy is never dependent on my circumstance but is my true and lasting strength no matter what I am facing. I ask that Your peace leads me and guards my heart and mind in Christ Jesus. I also ask for Your grace to cover my life this day. I love You Lord and I need You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 241

FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - PEACE

“Since God chose you to be the holy people whom He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful.” Colossians 3:12-15 (NLT)

PEACE STARTS WITH CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 3:15 begins with the words "And let." To 'let' something happen is relatively passive, you just allow it to happen. So the peace of Christ is something that we allow to dwell in our hearts, not something we strive to achieve. It goes on to state that the peace of Christ should "rule in our hearts." If something rules over something else, it means there's a power dynamic at play. A king or queen, for example, has the power to rule over their kingdom. In the same way, when we allow peace to rule in our hearts, it is a powerful thing.

There are times we may make the mistake of believing that peace means the absence of all other negative emotions and difficult circumstances. This, however, is not true. Instead, the peace we have comes from the fact that Jesus decided to become one of us, chose to know all the suffering and pain we experience, and die for us, proving how much He loves us by paying the cost and suffering which were the consequences of our turning away from God; and then because He was raised to life - showing

that He has power over death and thus can always bring something good out of something horrible - He reconciled us to God, providing a way for us to be at peace with God and giving us the peace of God.

For this reason, the peace we have and experience starts with Christ and what He has done for us. As with all of the fruit of the Spirit, peace grows from our relationship with Him.

REFLECT: Write down a definition of what the peace of God means in your life. Now, when was the last time you had a "storm" come into your life? Did you experience God's peace in the midst of it? If so, write down a description of what that peace looked like. Compare your definition of peace and your experience of peace. Are they the same? If not, you can begin now to prepare for peace in the midst of each storm by asking God today to show you what His peace looks like.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Father, Thank You for sending Jesus to die for me so I can experience peace with You. Jesus, Thank You for Your life, death, and resurrection which reconciled me to God, my Father. Thank You that because of who You are, I can have peace in the midst of chaos, a peace You promised to give me. Help me to let the peace that comes from You rule in my heart, and may it serve as a testimony to others when they see Your peace in me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 242

FOCUS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - PEACE

“Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when He adopted you as His own children. Now we call Him, ‘Abba, Father.’” Romans 8:12-15 NLT

PEACE TO REST IN

PEACE. It is probably the one fruit of the Spirit that we are all yearning for most right now. In this age in which we live, with circumstances often swiftly changing from day to day, it can seem inevitable that our hearts feel restless. However, as we daily stand and face the unknown, today’s verses give us a secret to lasting peace. In them, we learn that those of us who are in Christ have been given His Spirit, and we are reassured of a mind that is shaped by life and peace.

Here we see the contrast between a mind governed by the flesh, and a mind governed by the Spirit, and only one of those offers us the peace we crave. These verses sit in one of the richest chapters in the Bible, detailing the difference between the frustrations of life in our imperfect flesh, and the promises God has made assuring our future with Him in glory. It’s when we step back and read this entire chapter, which is strongly encouraged, that we see all of the reasons we have to rest fully in the peace of the Spirit. Here are some of the reasons we can fully rest in that peace:

The knowledge of what we’ve been saved from - We know from Romans 8:6 that the alternative to the peace-filled, Spirit-governed life is death. But more specifically, it’s a life in which our minds are slaves to sin. We can have deep peace knowing that sin is no longer our master because God sent Jesus to condemn that sin.

The identity the Spirit assigns us - Romans 8:15 tells us that the Spirit brings about our adoption to sonship: to have the Spirit is to be an adopted child in God’s kingdom. We can have peace knowing that God is a present and listening Father and that when we don’t have the words to express our pain and frustration, the Spirit will speak on our behalf.

The promises God makes to us - The final verse of this chapter is a promise God makes to us that nothing in this world is able to separate us from His love. With His Spirit, there is nothing and no one who can stand against us. Is there any statement as solid and sure that could offer us peace in this same way? So today, let your mind be governed by the Spirit so that you may know the deep love and peace of Christ, a love which we cannot be separated from, even when we don’t feel it.

REFLECT: Read Romans 8 and underline all of the promises of God you find in the chapter. Then, write each one in your journal, personalizing them as you write them. For example, Romans 8:1, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" could be written, "I am in Christ Jesus, therefore, I am not condemned." Read your list each day this week to be reminded of His great promises to you.

TODAY’S PRAYER:

Lord, thank You that You are a loving, gracious God, who has offered me forgiveness and the gift of new life in You. Thank You that Your love is perfect, it never fails, and that nothing can separate me from Your love. I pray my life would be filled to overflowing with the power of Your love so I can make a difference in this world and bring honor to You. I ask for Your help to remind me that the most important things in life are not what I do outwardly, it’s not based on any talent or gift, but the most significant thing I can do in this life is simply to love You and to choose to love others. Help me to love others as You love. Fill me with Your Spirit so that I can choose what is best and thank You that You equip me to face each day with the power of Your love, Your forgiveness, and Your grace. I love You, Lord, and I need You today, and every day, In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve