

## Peace That Passes All Understanding

(Philippians 4:6–7) Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

That's certainly easy enough: prayer + thankfulness = peace. Go through these steps, you get to peace. Then why doesn't this formula work? Then what?

So look for the Prince of Peace

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

The Lord is near

Commands such as “do not be anxious” typically come after the reason why we don't have to be anxious. In this case, the reason was slipped into the preceding verse:

(Philippians 4:5) “The Lord is at hand”

That changes everything doesn't it . The emphasis is not on how we pray. It is on the God who has come close, who hears, and who is with us. The only thing that could separate us from His love and presence are our sins, and they have been washed away by Jesus' blood.

Isn't it true that the presence of another person in our frightful situations can lessen our fears? Fear doesn't want a series of impersonal steps; it wants a person. Walk in an unknown dark place by yourself and you are afraid. Hold someone's hand while you are in that dark place and fears ebb. If we are comforted by the presence of a mere human being, who might be less strong and brave than ourselves, how much more will we be comforted by the sworn presence of the reigning Christ?

This is the path toward peace and comfort. Meditate on Immanuel, which means “God with Us.” Remember how the Spirit of Jesus has been given to us (John 14:27). He is not limited by a physical body that confines Him to one place and one person at a time. He is with all God's people all the time.

Immanuel will give us manna

But what will He do when He is with us? Will He give us the money we need? Will He zap the person who wants to do us harm? Will He keep the kids from all accidents? We have a pretty good idea that the answer to these questions is “not always.” We know that bad things happen to God's people. So what difference does God's presence mean when, although He is the Almighty God, He doesn't always use His power in the way we would like? We feel like we are left where

we started — trusting in some steps that we hope will make us feel more peace. There must be more that God says.

And there is more. First, we should understand that when God says He is present (or hears, sees, remembers), He is saying that He is doing something. He is never a passive bystander. Second, what He is doing is this: He gives us what we need when we need it (Matt. 6:19–34). In the New Testament He says that He will give us the grace we need, and that grace is part of a tradition that began with the appearance of manna for the needy Israelites. In times of trouble, God promises to give us the manna that we need.

He even spells out how this will happen (Exodus 16). There are times when we will feel like destitute wanderers in the wilderness with little hope of food and water. God will then give us manna at the time we need it. He won't give us so much that we will have enough for tomorrow because then we would just start trusting in the manna rather than trusting Immanuel.

God makes a promise. He will give you manna — or grace — when you need it, but not before. That means you will be anxious if you forecast the future because you are making your prediction based on the manna you have left over from today, and there is none. What you don't factor into your prediction is that you will receive fresh grace when you need it.

That should sound familiar. Think of the times you dreaded an upcoming event and it was not as bad as you anticipated. You were given manna when you needed it. Think of the times when you were surprised by something especially difficult. Though painful, you received grace to endure with faith.

We will have hardships in life, of that there is no doubt. Scripture does not offer a kingdom that spares us from pain. The King does promise, however, that He will be with us in every trial and will give us all the manna we need so that we can know Him better, trust Him, live for Him, and be increasingly transformed to look more like Jesus no matter what the wilderness of life might throw at us. In other words, He will give us the best of gifts when we need help. Manna was pointing forward to something much better (Deut. 8:2–3); it was pointing to the Bread of Life who would satisfy our hunger in such a way that we wouldn't always feel hungry two hours later. Manna was pointing to Jesus and what we are given in His death and resurrection.

Do you notice any hope stirring? The opposite of anxiety is hope. Anxiety predicts that manna will not come. Hope predicts that God will be with us and give us something better than manna. Where does peace fit in? Peace is the companion of hope.

Humility is the path

Hope and peace don't come without a fight. God is pleased to work hope and peace in us surely but gradually. They come as we meditate, feed on Scripture, feed on Christ, and keep calling out

for manna and grace. The kingdom of God advances through weakness and dependence on the King, not through quick and bloodless victories. If you are feeling a bit weak, you are probably

Here is how the apostle Peter makes the link between humility and anxiety:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6–7)

He is asking us to do just one thing — humble ourselves before the Lord. Humility is expressed by casting our anxieties on the mighty and trustworthy one.

Mere information and knowledge will not bring peace. Even more, we must respond to what we hear with humility and trust.

Pursue peace for God's Glory

There are steps toward peace, but they are a little different than the steps we take in following a recipe. These steps are all personal. Know the God who comes near, expect the better manna, and walk before him in humility. Don't give up on the pursuit of peace. Peace will make you feel better, which is a good thing, but there is something greater at stake. In a world where true peace seems impossible, we want to be ambassadors who say that real peace is available to us only in the Prince of Peace. This, indeed, will bring glory to God.