

Title: *The Fruit of the Spirit is Peace*

Text: Galatians 5:22

Max Lucado tells the story of a man by the name of Noble Doss.

Noble Doss dropped the ball. One ball. One pass. One mistake. In 1941, he let one fall. And it's haunted him ever since. "I cost us a national championship," he says.

The University of Texas football team was ranked number one in the nation. Hoping for an undefeated season and a berth in the Rose Bowl, they played conference rival Baylor University. With a 7-0 lead in the third quarter, the Longhorn quarterback launched a deep pass to a wide-open Doss.

"The only thing I had between me and the goal," he recalls, "was twenty yards of grass."

The throw was on target. Longhorn fans rose to their feet. The sure-handed Doss spotted the ball and reached out, but it slipped through.

Baylor rallied and tied the score with seconds to play. Texas lost their top ranking and, consequently, their chance at the Rose Bowl.

"I think about that play every day," Doss admits.

Not that he lacks other memories. Happily married for more than six decades. A father. Grandfather. He served in the navy during World War II. He appeared on the cover of Life magazine with his Texas teammates. He intercepted seventeen passes during his collegiate career, a university record. He won two NFL titles with the Philadelphia Eagles. The Texas High School Hall of Fame and the Longhorn Hall of Honor include his name.

Most fans remember the plays Doss made and the passes he caught. Doss remembers the one he missed. Once, upon meeting a new Longhorn head coach, Doss told him about the bobbed ball. It had been fifty years since the game, but he wept as he spoke.

Do you ever have recollections about something that you did years ago that you are still ashamed of? You've repented and asked forgiveness, you feel horrible about it, but there's still no peace? Doss by all accounts had an outstanding athletic career but that one failure haunted him for the next 60 years. Would you like to have peace?

We're talking these days about the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is a singular. People will sometimes talk about the fruits of the Spirit, but the bible mentions fruit of the spirit as a singular, or as a collective. We should have all of these qualities evident in our life. You can't say, well you have love and she had joy and he has peace. All of these qualities ought to be at work in our life.

I used to think of the fruit of the spirit as character traits, much like integrity, dependability, commitment and so on. Some of these you could say are character traits, others are not really character traits as much as they are something else.

This morning, we're looking at the fruit of the Spirit is peace. As a result of the Spirit of God working in your life, you should be at peace. That's not necessarily a character trait per se. Having peace though can set you free to work on other character traits that need developing and who doesn't need or want to be at peace?

So, what is there about the Spirit working in my life that will give me peace? Romans 8:5-7 says, "⁵ Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.⁶ The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."

Think about it. If you're focused on what the Spirit desires and allowing him to live

through you, you'll be at peace. To be living in rebellion is to be running from him, living like a fugitive in the Universe. There really can't be true peace, apart from being yielded to God's Spirit. Peace is one of God's highest intentions for us.

Romans 14 says, "¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men." Think about the progression of that. Being right with God doesn't come from what goes into the body. We are made right with God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in which we turn from our sin and our self toward God. I've described as telling God that we're sorry that we've been living only for ourself rather than for him, and he'll give us the strength and power to live for him, that's what we want to do with the rest of our life. Because of that you have peace with God and as we talked about last week, peace with God and absolute confidence in him will lead to joy.

As Paul writes to the Romans, he expresses this hope, "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." The Holy Spirit does a work in our heart as we learn to walk in trust with him.

I want us to think this morning about peace in three very simple ways. One, the gospel promises us peace with God. Two, once we have peace with God, we can be at peace within ourselves and then three, if we are at peace within ourselves, we can be at peace with other people.

First, peace with God. The deepest need or longing of the human heart is peace with God. We know that this is a beautiful world that God created. We know that it is God's nature to love. He created a world of beauty and goodness for us. But it is fallen and we are fallen creatures, so there is enmity between people and creation. Genesis 3:15 says, "¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Paul has spent the first 4 chapters of Romans laying out for us our desperate condition before God and our lost condition. We have sinned. We have fallen short of his glory. We were at odds but God in his great mercy and favor made a way for us to be made right with him.

It's interesting to look through all of the annals of history and the annals of religion and see what kinds of things people will do to try to have peace with God. The religious people of Jesus' day tried the religion thing. They got real good at it too and they had all kinds of rules worked out. There are 613 laws in the Old Testament. They were conscientious about keeping the law so you have to imagine at some level or at some point, they really were hungry for God and had some desire to please him. You have to wonder how did they get so far off course? They became totally focused on keeping the law and not only on keeping the law but making sure that everyone else kept their interpretation of the law as well. They were not only trying to keep it for themselves, they became militant about it persecuting anyone else who didn't keep their interpretation of the law. But if they were really at peace, would they be so nasty toward everyone else?

While we're on that subject, I did find some laws that are on the books here in Missouri that we might want to reconsider. Minors are allowed to buy shotguns but are prohibited from purchasing a cap pistol. Getting an elephant drunk or high is prohibited. It is also illegal for milkmen to run while on the clock. Don't ask me why. The point is not to say that all law is stupid and certainly not that God's law is stupid, but Jesus came to set us free from enslavement to something that could never bring us peace.

Paul writes in Romans 5:1 and 2, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith,

we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Paul says, “We are made right with God through faith.”

If you are at odds with someone and there is tension, what is one of the first things you have to do to make the relationship right and once more to be at peace? Don't you have to search your own heart to know what you've done to contribute to the situation? You may feel like the other person isn't 90% to blame for the situation, but can you at least find some 10% that you can take responsibility for? Then don't you have to say, “I'm sorry?” Be sorry for what you can be genuinely sorry for and ask forgiveness.

God is perfect, God is holy. We're the ones who have messed up. We're the ones who are 100% to blame for our rebellion and our disobedience and our tendency to do things that break his heart. It's up to us to come to him and say, “I'm sorry. I'm really truly sorry. It's not about me. It's about you and I want to live the rest of my life for you.” Because God is a holy God, that sin had to be dealt with some how. Jesus took the punishment for our sins upon himself on the cross so that we could be made right with Him and have peace with God.

You can make that decisive transaction that will lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and you can know what it is to have peace with God. You can have His Holy Spirit indwelling you and empowering you as a present reality in your life. You can have peace and you can know peace, but that doesn't mean that you don't have anxieties from time to time.

After you get peace with God, you need to experience peace within yourself. We can all probably think of someone without very much effort who is not at peace. According to a 2010 survey conducted by the American College Counseling Association, serious mental health problems are increasing among university students. In the words of one university counselor, "It's so different from how people might stereotype the concept of college counseling, or back in the '70s with students coming in [and asking]: who am I? Now they're bringing in life stories involving extensive trauma, a history of serious mental illness, eating disorders, self-injury, alcohol and other drug use."

Recent surveys about this trend have revealed the following statistics:

- § A majority of students still seek help for "normal post-adolescent trouble" like romantic breakups and life direction questions;
- § But in 2010, 44 percent of the students who came to university counseling centers were suffering from severe psychological disorders, a 16 percent increase from 2000;
- § 24 percent of students who utilized the university's counseling services were on psychiatric medication, up 7 percent from 2000;
- § 28 percent of the university counselors reported a marked increase in student violence on campuses over the last five years;
- § Nearly a third of all university students (not just those who seek counseling) reported that in the last 12 months they've been so depressed that it's difficult to function.

Experts say that the rise in mental health issues is partially linked to more effective drugs, which have allowed students to attend college who may not have attended in the past. But they also point to a wave of traumas that were either less frequent or underreported, including on-campus sexual assault, bulimia, self-cutting, learning disabilities, childhood sexual abuse, and the fear of campus shootings.

I'll grant you that adolescence is tough and while the college years are great fun for so many of us, they also can have their own stress and crises, but wouldn't you think that college students would be in that group that you would think have everything going for them? They're

young. They can choose their life path, but yet there are still so many things that rob their peace and steal their joy.

Even though you have peace with God, that doesn't mean that you don't get stressed out at times. We need to know inner peace. Why else would the Bible have so much to say about anxiety and what to do with anxiety? Paul tells us in Philippians how to be at peace within ourself. He says, "⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." What's the opposite of peace? Isn't it worry and conflict and storminess going on inside your own soul? Isn't it just to be riddled with anxiety that you just can't let go of?

What does Paul tell us to do if we want to experience this fruit of the Spirit known as peace? First, simply don't be anxious. Have you ever been fretting and stewing over something and had someone tell you, "Well, you just ought not feel that way?" Easy for you to say. Yet, here we are told, "Don't be anxious. Pray about everything with thanksgiving. Make your requests known to God. You what that sounds like to me is simply having an open, honest relationship with God. You don't have to wear masks with God and act like you've got it all together if your kids are driving you crazy, you're on shaky ground at work and you just don't know which way to turn.

Jesus said, "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 food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶ 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? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin." Jesus said, "Talk to me about it and I'll give you peace.

Then we can have peace with others. Paul says in Ephesians, "¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ In Romans 12:18, Paul says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

God wants you to live in peace. Are you enjoying this fruit in your life?

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