

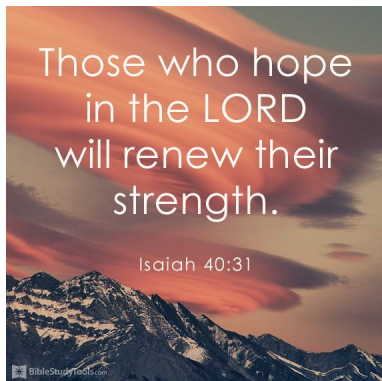


During Advent we typically study four themes: hope, joy, love, and peace. This year we substituted the Sunday of Joy with faith. This morning I want to go back and put them in an order that makes better spiritual sense. So just how *do* we put hope, faith, peace, love, and joy into a sensible order?

### FAITH

I think it all starts with faith. You can have no hope, joy, love, or peace without faith as your foundation. Hebrews 11:1 tells us, *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* (ESV). Simply put, the biblical definition of faith is “trusting in something you cannot explicitly prove.”<sup>1</sup> The “something” that we trust in that we can’t see is God. If we continue in that same chapter of Hebrews we read *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”* (Hebrews 11:6, NIV).

God rewards any amount of faith. Once, when Jesus’ disciples were unable to cast out a demon, He explained why they were not able to do it. <sup>20</sup> *“...Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.”* (Matthew 17:20b, NASB). This tells us that BIG THINGS can happen in our lives with a tiny amount of faith. A mustard seed is pretty small. So, we begin with that tiny spark in our hearts that says, “Maybe God really is.” Once we get to that point, that faith leads us to reading the Bible and studying to find out just exactly Who God is and what He will do. It leads us to speaking and listening to God in prayer. This is when we begin to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). In other words, we walk not in the confidence of self and our own resources, but rather in confidence believing God is Who He says He is, and that He will do what He says He will do.



### HOPE

Hope floods into our souls when we put our faith in God. The prophet Isaiah spoke of a day when Gentiles would put their hope in God. We read Paul quoting from Isaiah 11:10, *“There shall come the root of Jesse, And He who arises to rule over the Gentiles, In Him will the Gentiles hope.”* (Romans 15:12, NASB). Isaiah directly tells us <sup>31</sup> *but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

*(Isaiah 40:31, NIV).*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/definition-of-faith.html>

We have hope when, in faith, we read such promises as, *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5b, NKJV)*. When that sinks into our souls, we understand that we are not abandoned when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances. In reading more and understanding more, we realize that Jesus said even while He is physically gone from the earth that He is still with us till the end of time (Matthew 28:20). In reading scripture, we begin to have more hope when we understand that God really is good.

*For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive,  
And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You. (Psalm 86:5, NASB).*

*O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;  
For His lovingkindness is everlasting. (1 Chronicles 16:34, NASB).*

It is easy in times like these to lose hope. We are all so worn out with Covid-19 that we're not sure what to do. Also, people of faith are growing insecure and fearful as we see Western culture being hijacked by cultural jackals and wild beasts who are tearing it apart and trying to “reinvent America.” America has been the bastion of Western civilization for over 200 years and it is now under assault by cultural Marxism. Good is being called evil and evil is being called good. Solomon told us there was “nothing new under the sun” and the prophet Isaiah's words have never been truer. *“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.” (Isaiah 5:20, NIV)*.

Don't be fooled by any of this. It is part of the spiritual warfare that we studied in depth this year. God tells us clearly in His Word, *“<sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Eph 6:12, NASB)*. Remember that we are given spiritual weapons to do our part in this spiritual battle. This should give us great hope!

Hope comes in knowing the outcome of it all. It's ALL going to be alright. Jesus is coming again and when He shows up justice and mercy will rule in all the earth.



## LOVE

So, we see that faith in God and in His Word produces hope. Having faith-based hope leads to love, joy, and peace. Perhaps joy and ultimately peace flow out of love itself. We come to the point of receiving God's love for us which motivates and empowers us to experience a true joy that is bathed in peace. Scripture tells us that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Think about that. The Creator of the universe is perfect love. We learned that love is the first fruit of the Spirit listed in Paul's letter to the little church in Galatia. *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, etc.” (Galatians 5:22a, NIV)*. So, once we're seeing things God's way, and once we're submitted to His Holy Spirit; we're not only receiving His love, but we're giving it. When we've put our faith in Jesus, we put our hope

in Him. In doing so, we are receiving the greatest work done in the history of mankind. We are receiving God's love gift of Himself in the personhood of Jesus. The same God that created the universe and everything in it came in the fullness of time in the form of a man. That was Yeshua, which literally means "God saves." We use an English name Jesus that doesn't really carry words in it like the Hebrew name. God came to earth to save us from our sins, but also to deliver us from the grip they hold on us. God does not wait until we're perfect to love us.

Scripture tells us: *"<sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8, NKJV).



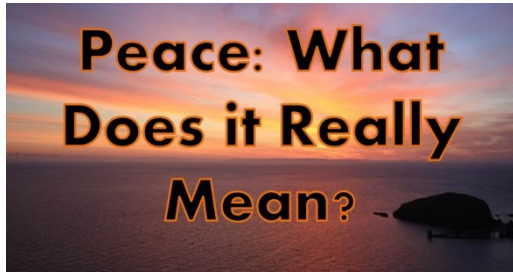
## JOY

In the same Galatians verse about the Fruit of the Spirit, we see that joy follows love. Joy follows knowing we are loved by Him, and we respond by loving Him and others. Do you want to know the secret to a joyful heart? It is gratitude. The people I see that have the most gratitude are the people that are the most joyful. People that can no longer find anything to thank God for live in a perpetual state of joylessness. People that are ungrateful are blind to the blessings that they have. The most unhappy people you'll ever meet are people that feel entitled, and they are ungrateful for anything in their lives. They feel they've been cheated and that they deserve more. They are thankful for nothing. They begrudge the successes of others. Their hearts are dark with envy and jealousy. A self-centered heart is a joyless heart.

Scripture is filled with passages that tell us that joy is integral to living the Christian life. My life and your life will have setbacks and heartbreaks. This is a result of living in a sinful broken world. Let faith have its way. Faith gives birth to hope and hope in God brings a realization that we can receive love from Him. If we stay focused on our past, we can never have a present or a future. If we stay focused on our hurts, our habits, and our hang-ups, we will have great difficulty experiencing much joy. This is true even if you are a believer. If Satan can't have your soul, he will try to steal your joy. It's hard for you and me to muster up joy when the unexpected happens, but God promises that if we yield our hearts to Him, and if we submit to the Holy Spirit, joy will be a fruit of the Holy Spirit that will come up out of us.

A joyful heart runs counter to a heart that is ruled by the old man within us. That old sin nature resides in us whispering discontent. It tells us we are not loved. We are not accepted. It tells us we have no value, and we have no worth. The flesh tells us we can never fit in. God tells us we are loved (John 3:16). God tells us we have tremendous value and worth (Genesis 1:27). God tells us we fit in because we are part of a family that is eternal (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Paul tells us again and again to rejoice. *"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice!"* (Philippians 4:4, NET). Let's now look at the peace that we experience when we rejoice in Him.



## PEACE

God's word for peace is **Shalom**. *Shalom* does not mean a lack of conflict. My father, who was a Hebrew scholar, defined it as an abiding sense of well-being regardless of the circumstances in which a person finds themselves. He explained that *shalom* is harmony, wholeness, completeness, unity, and lack of fragmentation. It is the feeling that you feel when a job is done, and it is complete. It's the feeling you experience when a debt that you've owed for a long time is paid in full. It is the feeling you might have if all the internal conflict within you is no more. That is *shalom*. It is God's kind of peace. It is not like the peace the world offers. The Hebrew word is actually the word that is stamped on a receipt to say, "paid in full." That's what Jesus did on the cross.



Jesus knew this meaning of peace because it was the Hebrew meaning of peace. He said, "My *shalom* I give to you not as the world gives" (John 14:27). He was saying that it is NOT LIKE THE PEACE THAT THE WORLD OFFERS. He offers us all His peace, His shalom, but have *you* taken it? *Shalom* only comes when we are focused and surrendered to God. Isaiah tells us, "You [Lord] will keep him in perfect **shalom** (peace) whose mind is fixed on You." (Isaiah 26:3, author's paraphrase). The Apostle Paul experienced every kind of hardship imaginable, yet he gave us the formula to find true peace in our lives. He told us EXACTLY how to find *shalom*. He told us how to get rid of our worries, anxieties, fears, tension, confusion, and anything else that robs our minds of peace. Listen to Paul exhorting us through the centuries. Let's look again at that verse from the fourth chapter of Philippians.

and the **peace** of **God**,  
which transcends all understanding,  
will guard your hearts and mind  
in **Christ Jesus**.

Philippians 4:7

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in

*Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7, NASB 1995).*

In this Christmas Season and in this New Year decide to write this verse in the recesses of your heart. These are not MERE WORDS. These are the unchanging promises of God.

I pray for each of you at this time that your faith will become more solid, that your hope will become stronger, that your love for God and others will become overwhelming, that your joy

would be overflowing, and that your peace, your *shalom*, would be absolutely present within you as you continue your journey in Jesus.

Last Sunday evening, Sandy and I attended a Christmas concert in which our daughter participated in a choir singing Handel's Messiah. Whenever I hear the Hallelujah chorus begin, my eyes well up with tears. There is a lump in my throat. I humbly stand knowing that I am standing in the presence of the King of the Universe. After that chorus, the cantata turned to the passage where in the dim lit past, some 600 years before the event, the Prophet Isaiah spoke.

### **New King James Version - Isaiah 9:6**

*<sup>6</sup> For unto us a Child is born,  
Unto us a Son is given;  
And the government will be upon His shoulder.  
And His name will be called  
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

When I hear these ancient words of Isaiah prophet, I experience Christmas in a real way. I understand clearly that the Answer to my life was born on Christmas morning. Not only is He the Answer to my life, but He is the Answer to the world's problems and injustices. Life is difficult. Situations are difficult. When I see things happening out of my control (for example in the political sphere of my country) my only comfort is knowing that justice is coming. Messiah is returning. All that is wrong will be set right. All that is evil and wrong will be brought to justice. Human cruelty will be held to account.

When Messiah rules, the governance of the world will be on HIS shoulders. His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Tsar HaShalom (The Prince of Peace). This realization that God is sovereign and that He is in control brings me great joy. The birthing of joy in my soul is based in gratitude for all that He is and all that He has done for me. He's done that for you as well. Come, let us adore HIM.

In His Name,  
Pastor Faber

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at [uniongrove362@gmail.com](mailto:uniongrove362@gmail.com) or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.