

Wednesday, April 1, 2020

Turn off the outside “noise” for a couple of minutes and consider this message from God’s Word.
I am praying that it calms your spirit and encourages your heart.

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9 (TNIV)

⁶ Do not be **anxious** about *anything*,
but in **every** situation,
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.** •

— PART 5 —

*I found that when a passage of Scripture has been very familiar to me for a long time — such as this passage! — if I will simply **slow down** . . . take my time . . . and read thoughtfully and reflectively, it can become alive to me in new and fresh ways.*

I promised you more on this little phrase! Three simple words. “In. Christ. Jesus.”

“in Christ Jesus” — Those great theologians, THE WHO, were one of “The Big 3” of British Invasion rock in the 1960s, along with THE BEATLES and THE ROLLING STONES. If you watched the original “CSI: Crime Scene Investigation” series, you’ll remember the theme music by THE WHO: “**Who are you? Who, who, who, who? I really want to know (Who are you? Who, who, who, who?)**” Not a bad question, is it?

We often wonder, what really defines us? **What makes us who we are?** Geographic location? “I am a Northern Californian living in Southern California.” Our education? “I am a graduate of Biola University and Fuller Theological Seminary.” Our job? “I am a pastor at a wonderful church called BETHANY · A PLACE OF NEW BEGINNINGS.” Our hobbies? “I am a bibliophile and avid reader.”

During this unprecedented coronavirus crisis, we have been so bombarded with information that one could begin to imagine that **it** defines us. “I am a US resident who is worried that between 100,000 to 240,000 of US citizens could die in this pandemic.” Or, “I am an individual that feels **targeted** by the novel coronavirus.”

The late great British preacher John Stott wrote about **another** identity we carry:

‘The word “Christian” occurs only three times in the Bible. Because of its common misuse we could profitably dispense with it. Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul never used the word, or at least not in their recorded teaching. What distinguishes

the true followers of Jesus is neither their creed, nor their code of ethics, nor their ceremonies, nor their culture, but CHRIST. *What is often mistakenly called “Christianity” is, in essence, neither a religion nor a system, but a person, JESUS OF NAZARETH.*

The commonest description in the Scriptures of a follower of Jesus is that he or she is a person “IN CHRIST.” The expressions “IN CHRIST,” “IN THE LORD,” and “IN HIM” occur 164 times in the letters of Paul alone, and are indispensable to an understanding of the New Testament.

To be “IN CHRIST” does not mean to be inside Christ, as tools are in a box or our clothes in a closet, but to be organically united to Christ, as a limb is in the body or a branch is in the tree. It is this personal relationship with Christ that is the distinctive mark of his authentic followers.’

JOHN R.W. STOTT, “In Christ”: The Meaning & Implications of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Knowing & Doing (Summer 2007).

So for Paul and the leaders of the early church, our identity wasn’t so much that “we are ‘Christians’ ” — but that **WE ARE “IN CHRIST”!** What defines us most clearly isn’t our geographic location, education, job or hobbies.

It’s our relationships.

I am Shari’s husband.

Dad to Stephanie, Stephen & Michelle, Shelby & Ryan, Ariel, Justin & Genelyn...

Ariah, Ezekiel, Ellis, Allie and Luca’s “Pop.”

And most importantly, **I am “IN CHRIST.”**

E. Stanley Jones was an American Methodist missionary to India. He once said he learned his one major job in life: abide in Jesus; the rest is his to do. **“The business of my life, and the only business of my life, is to abide in him. All else follows.”**

E. STANLEY JONES, *In Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1961), p. 67

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So we pray today:

“Abba, thank you that we are defined by our relationship with you!

We are the beloved sons and daughters of the Most High God! (Romans 8:15)
We have the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead living in us! (Romans 8:11)

We are “alive to God ‘IN CHRIST JESUS’ ”! (Romans 6:11)

May the business of our lives be to “abide in Christ”! (John 15)
All else follows.

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May God’s serenity and peace be poured out on you today,

Pastor Doug

P.S. We would love to hear from you! How are you doing right now? And we would love to pray for you! Email us at info@bethanyonline.net

P.P.S. Keep checking this page — we will try to post fresh encouragement **every day** during this crisis!

P.P.P.S. And watch our **LIVE-STREAM Worship Service** this coming Sunday at 10:30 a.m. for more encouragement.