

Anxiety relieved

Jogging on trails in the woods often provides the occasion for me to hear from God. Recently while jogging, I was reciting the Bible verse, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship." (Ro 8:15) Right then I stopped. Out loud I asked, "Then why, LORD, do I so often feel anxious?" No answer. I continued, "LORD, how can I overcome my anxiety?" This time He spoke inside me.

"Be filled with the Spirit and believe Jesus."
 "How does this happen, LORD?" I asked.
 He replied, "Ask to be filled."
 "But what do you mean 'to believe,' LORD?"
 "Trust," He said.
 "And how does that come about?"
 "Through a vision of reality."
 "And how does that come?"
 "I speak it into you."
 "And what do I do that you would speak this into me?"
 "Ask—and long."
 "And what would make me long for this, LORD?"
 He answered, "My grace."

Then I laughed, because I could see the circularity of where this was going.
 "But then LORD, if it is all of grace, what do I do? What do I preach?"
 He said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." To me this meant saved not only from sin, but from anxiety, and dread, and every other oppressive thing.

At that point I was reminded of another verse from Romans, "Faith comes through hearing and hearing by the word of Christ." (Prior study of this text—Romans 10:17—had shown me that the phrase "the word of Christ" has two aspects—the message ABOUT Jesus, as it is spoken through the Holy Spirit BY Jesus.) Then I saw in my mind's eye an image of a man seated in a chair, carefully absorbed in reading the Bible. "Of course," I thought to myself. "This is how Jesus speaks reality into us. He uses the written Word of God to frame and form our thinking."

If you have followed this interior conversation, you will realize that there is nothing new here. Yet, even though I have been a pastor for many years, I find I need constant reminders of what it is to live by faith (instead of my own energies). I need fresh realizations of where faith comes from. And I absolutely know by experience, that as I trust Jesus, my anxiety dissolves away.



*Scott
Hilborn*

*Guest
Columnist*

Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount that His disciples are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. In other words, there is an illuminating, cleansing, curative, and blessed presence which emanates from His disciples. Jesus warned us though, that we must keep our "savor," and "let our light shine" before men. By this He did not mean that we wear ourselves out trying to "look good" in the eyes of others. Nor did He mean that we try to live as moral policemen for others. Nor that we strive to keep a smile plastered on our faces. What our Lord did mean though is that His disciples abide consistently in REALITY.

So what is reality? According to Jesus, it is the presence of the kingdom of God among us. Possibly you saw the first "Matrix" movie. If you remember, what people thought was real, turned out to be the Matrix—a product of highly advanced computers. Real reality they discovered was far less pleasing and much grittier.

So too with our reality. The life we started off hoping to have in this world, one of pleasure, advancement, esteem, power, safety, and the ability to control circumstances so as to always be happy—that life is a fiction. We might as well call it the Matrix. But overlaying this world we interact with through our senses is the presence of the kingdom of God. It is the invisible (but real) governing of God over everything. For reasons of His own, for this present time, He permits evil to co-exist. This state of affairs, though, will not last very much longer, at least in terms of how God views time. Jesus Christ reigns in God's kingdom as Savior and Lord. His power is ultimate, yet because it is formed in divine love, it often seems weaker than evil. But it is not.

"No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper;
 And every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn.

This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD,
 And their vindication is from Me,'
 declares the LORD." (Isaiah 54:17)

Here is an example. The boss comes tearing into your office. Heatedly he demands to know why the materials you were to have ready yesterday aren't in place yet. Anger is written all over his face. Instantly, you feel the clutch of defensiveness and fear rising within, but as you inwardly turn to God, you realize the truth. Your boss is angry because of his own fearfulness. Yes, his anger is unpleasant, but it is not the end of the world. You will survive this as you have other similar scenes. Plus, you know that the materials were delayed at the printer, and are on their way to the office, even at that moment. So, with little nervousness, you calmly explain the situation and assure your boss the materials will be there on time. With no apology, he glares in silence and leaves. Still, you continue abiding in the reality of God's presence in and around you. You call Scripture to mind: "If God is for me, who can be against me?" (Rom 8:31) You are even able to breathe a prayer of blessing upon your boss and then turn back to your work in peace.

Of course not all our situations of conflict are this easy. Most people you live around are NOT living in reality. They are living in a reality they are trying to create, and when things don't go their way, they get scared and angry. The disciple of Jesus, however, is learning through a life of prayer and immersion in Scripture to perceive true reality and then abide in it. Others around you flail to exert control. You stand peacefully firm in the truth. God is present. You belong to God. He has given Himself to you. In this situation as in all others, God is working for your good. God is more than sufficient for what you need.

Those near you sense your confidence in God. It may puzzle them, even irritate them, but they instinctually know you are living out of a higher order of reality. Your presence blesses them and is a witness of the invisible God. You are "salt and light" in that moment.

*Scott Hilborn is the pastor of the
Banks Presbyterian Church in Marvin.*