

Living in the peace of God

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” (Ps 91:1)

Jesus gives us rest. Inner rest. Rest from fear, anxiety, worry. Rest from straining and striving. I have just come back to peace from a couple weeks of living overwhelmed. Personal issues, family concerns, church and work responsibilities, chores and repairs around the house—it was all getting the best of me. Yet out of this experience I think I re-learned the way to find God’s peace. My hope is that you too will find this helpful. At least, it will be written down so I can find it again for future reference!

Jesus meant what He said: “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you...Do not let not your hearts be troubled and do be not afraid.” (Jn 14:27) The peace of Jesus has been poured out for His disciples. His peace is present in the heavens surrounding our bodies for us to receive and walk-in. Even if the “quantity” of His peace we seem to hold may falter, the quality of it is unmistakable. God’s peace is like no other.

The way back to God’s peace for me was by focusing in the present moment on my task at hand. Really focusing. Our minds are a continually flowing thing, so we direct and re-direct and re-re-direct our thoughts back to this present moment. What are you doing right now? Reading of course. Well then, really read, with full attention. Your concentration will blot out the wandering thoughts. While driving, really look at the road and grip the steering wheel. (The other day while driving, I passed a field with a sea of dark green soybeans. An inner drawing almost like a gasp hit me as I absorbed the beauty of that field. I would have never noticed had I been in my usual state of pre-occupation with my “to do” list.) While talking, really listen. While walking in the woods, watch the path. Listen for the sound of your feet hitting the dirt. Notice the bugs lighting on the Goldenrod, causing the blooms to sway, and the evening sun slanting through and back-lighting the green leaves.

To quote Brother Lawrence, “Useless thoughts spoil all.” I find that concentrating on the task at hand tends to quell the nagging thoughts of other things. Most important though, concentrating on the task at hand brings God into my mind. As the recognition of His presence begins to dawn, thanksgiving begins to rise, trust is renewed, further anxiety is released, and joy re-fills my heart in the small blessings of color, texture, sound, and smell. The comic activity of my dog, ignored until then, brings a smile to my face.



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For me, at least, returning to the peace of the present moment involved the giving up of all I felt I needed to accomplish. Somehow, in desperation, I became persuaded that God could engineer things for me to get done what He needed me to do. Letting go of the panicked rushed feeling of hurried motion (as if nervous quickness would get it all done!), a surrender took place. “I can’t do it all, Lord!” I cried. I was then able to turn-loose of “thinking about the next thing” and concentrate in the present moment. Oh yes, thoughts of what still needed to be done started to crowd in again. But as the anxious thoughts attempted to return, I had the mental poise to peel them off one at a time, give them up to God and re-focus on the task at hand. It occurred to me later that this concentration on the task at hand is exactly what Jesus meant when He taught us to “give no thought for tomorrow.”

This “technique” of focusing on the present moment and finding God’s peace depended on my prior arrangements for a lifestyle choice of “seeking first God’s kingdom and His righteousness.” Psalm 91 quoted above makes the connection: resting in the shadow of the Almighty comes as a RESULT of the prior “dwelling” or abiding with God. How do we abide with God? Jesus said this: “If you obey my commands, you will abide in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and abide in his love.” (Jn 15:10)

Peace comes from abiding in the presence of God. Abiding in the presence of God comes from obedience. Obedience to God is still the cardinal rule of relating to God. We “dwell in the shelter of the Almighty” through obedience to God. Grace does not remove our need to obey God. Grace enables us to obey God! We must never interpret grace and faith in such a way that obedience is not central. We obey Jesus. In obeying Him, we abide with Him. After all, obedience to Him is our way of staying at His side. We are His followers and we follow Him where He leads. Certainly we have grace for forgiveness with our many failures. But grace is God working with us to

enable us to do what we cannot do on our own—not only in the matter of our forgiveness, but also in the matter of our obedience!

Yet, let it be clearly said, our first act of obedience to God is to trust. Faith is the preeminent command of God towards man. Jesus said, “The work of God is this: to BELIEVE in the one He has sent.” (Jn 6:29) All acts of obedience flow from faith. Our obedience to God is described as the “obedience that comes from faith.” (Ro 1:5) And because it is so easy to interpret obedience as obedience to Law, which will inevitably lead to legalism, deadness, joylessness, a sense of burden, and self-condemnation, I want to say that the obedience that comes from faith is obedience to God as a PERSON and ought always to consciously begin with trust. Perhaps you believe God wants you to give more money away. You certainly could do so out of a fearful, dread sense of duty, resenting all the while that if you weren’t worried about getting on God’s wrong side, you would keep it! Or, you could give beginning with a declaration of trust: “I believe you are calling me to do this, Lord. Therefore I trust you are going to make it all work out. I will not give way to fear, but I will give gladly, and in faith. Thank you that I have this opportunity to share with you in what you are doing!” Such a voiced confidence in God will then provide the spiritual energy and conviction to follow-through with the act of obedience.

Many, many times I have been in such a dull spiritual frame of mind that I have had to pray, “Lord, I know you have given me by the Holy Spirit the ability to obey you—please give me the DESIRE to obey you.” And yes, I have found that our kind Lord will indeed answer that sort of prayer.

There is a flow of life all around us. Jesus called it the kingdom of God. It is God at work in the natural realm, from the bugs and worms burrowing in the earth, to birds flying to and fro, to neutrinos and gamma rays flashing through the atmosphere and planet earth. God’s working also includes His governing of all human activities to His good ends in history—even using an active devil and rebellious human beings to work out “everything in conformity with His will.” You and I are invited to bring our “kingdoms,” our spheres of influence, under His authority and rule. To the extent we do so and learn to cooperate with God as He works in and with us, to that same extent we “dwell” with Him and will find His peace and rest.

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