

How To Be Calm, Poised And Unafraid - In The Midst Of An Often Dangerous World

What is today's news: A suicide bomber kill, developing atomic weapons, and so on. If you took all that to heart you would lock the bedroom door and go quietly insane!

How do we acknowledge reality yet stay sane? How can we read the newspaper and cope with the turmoil and instability that the media report? There are three main options: a) We can ignore it, be ostriches and put our heads in the sand. Or b) we can study it, worry about it, and end up terrified. Or c) we can believe that there are solutions, that Someone is in charge, that there is a God and He is capable both of protecting us and of bringing His purposes to pass.

Somehow those with a strong faith in God survive, and even thrive in the midst of adversity. With King David, the writer of Psalm 91 they affirm: (Psalms 91:2 NKJV) I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust." King David survived wars, battles with giants, palace intrigues, and even his own terrible mistakes and in the end came out triumphant. The secret of a calm life is to fill it with faith instead of filling it with fear. The person full of faith has hope in the midst of the trouble and can see the solutions, where the person full of fear only sees the problems.

Our minds can only cope with so much fear and stress. A part of our brain called the reticular formation decides what's important and urgent and what the rest of our thinking processes should pay attention to. If everything is important, urgent, fearful and frightening the reticular formation overloads and we get that clogged up, stressed out feeling, and lose our joy and creativity. An example: If you are driving along in the countryside and listening to music and enjoying the view and suddenly a child on a bicycle crosses in front of you - you forget about the music and the view and concentrate on the emergency and on applying the brakes. Everything goes on hold while the urgent and fearful is dealt with. The trouble is that many people spend their whole lives reacting to the urgent and the fearful "slamming on the brakes" and never get to enjoy the music and the view.

For thousands of people their childhood was the last time they can remember feeling free from anxiety. For them adult life is one long shot of adrenalin. One crisis after another, a world filled with problems, threats and emergencies. Unless we find some way of dealing with all this we never really live, we just exist. Faith in God can help us to overcome fear and anxiety and to live calmly and joyfully in the midst of a fear-generating world.

Here is another one of the Psalms that talks about trust in God: (Psalms 46) God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. {2} Therefore we will not

fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; {3} Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah {4} There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. {5} God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn. {6} The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. {7} The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah {8} Come, behold the works of the LORD, Who has made desolations in the earth. {9} He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. {10} Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! {11} The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

Amazingly the writer says: "Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea". Just imagine a massive earthquake with the earth moving the mountains sliding into the sea. Even then those who trust in God can be calm, poised and unafraid.

Firstly, God's recipe for inner peace is to let Him carry the load. It is God that can deal with wicked people and stop wars and bring peace. The big issues are God's job and we can safely leave them to Him. "Be still and know that I am God" is the advice. Rest from anxiety, stop fretting and worrying and thrashing around in haste. Do the small everyday things that are our real responsibilities, pay the bills, love the kids, work hard, pray often, live peacefully, love your neighbor. Leave Iraq and terrorism to those whose job it is, and to the Lord. Worrying won't change a thing but praying just might. As the Scripture says: "Cast your burdens upon the Lord and He will sustain you." (Psalm 55:22)

Secondly, we need to get the big picture. The eternal picture, the view from Heaven so the Bible tells us to: "Come, behold the works of the LORD". There is something very peaceful about looking at the stars or at the sea. Once we get the rhythms of eternity, we can slow down. It's not so urgent. Our place in the scheme of things is not so vital. The world will keep on turning if the assignment is late and no-one on their deathbed has ever said "I wish I had spent more time at the office." As the 59th St. Bridge Song by Simon and Garfunkel goes "Slow down you move too fast, got to make the morning last, just kicking down the cobble-stones,feeling groovy.."

Thirdly, we have to keep our mind fixed on God and His goodness, not on all the anxieties and problems. We have to keep ourselves in the place of faith and trust and not let ourselves drift into the place of doubt and fear. If we stay fixed on God we are filled with peace: (Isaiah 26:3 NKJV) You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You." Part of this is really

believing that God is big enough to handle things and that God is big enough to make anything happen that He wants to happen. As He declares through the prophet Isaiah " My purpose will be established. And I will accomplish all my good pleasure." (Isaiah 46:10)

Fourthly, we have to guard our reactions to threats. Jesus said "Let not your hearts be troubled" indicating that we can control our anxieties. Scripture says "be anxious for nothing" and "do not worry" and 366 times it says "fear not" – one or every day of the year – including leap years! We are not compelled to react in a certain way. In fact we can chose to press the alarm button or the stop button, we can let our reactions go through the roof or we can choose to calm them down. Example: The phone rings in the midst of a heated argument, you are shouting, your face is red. You pick up the phone, suddenly you are polite, your voice quickly becomes modulated and professional, you manage to cover up the fact that you have been angry and the caller perceives you to be "perfectly normal and friendly". In the two seconds it took you to lift the receiver you totally changed your reactions and responses. You mastered yourself and brought yourself under control in a very short period of time. You are in control – even when you are feeling out of control. You can apply that same self-mastery over and over again bringing your reactions under control and deliberately calming yourself when faced with stressful, anxiety-provoking events.

Fifthly, we need to learn to live from a peaceful, grateful, prayerful spiritual center in our spirit. We need to learn to live from the still space inside us out to the external world rather than the other way around. We need to create inner peace through prayer than stay in that inner peace. (Philippians 4:6-7 NKJV) 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 understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

We need to cultivate the art of gratitude to God and humble supplication as creatures of the Creator, taking our small part in the cosmos. Instead of complaining, grumbling, rushing, fighting and trying to be the "god of our own lives" we just need to take time to see the beauty, hear the voice of God, be thankful for all He has made and find the peace that passes understanding when we stop being "god of me" and let Him be the God of all. This utter loss of independence and personal sovereignty is at first hard to bear or even to contemplate – but it is the path of peace. It is as we fit into Creation and its rhythms and values, its joys and its graces that we find deep inner peace.

When we try to fit Creation into our rhythms and values, in a doomed attempt to force the Universe to conform to our personal desires, then we are in for a fight with reality that we cannot win. I fact it will just destroy us and shatter any peace

of mind we may have. Here is a tranquility building exercise for you: Take a single drop of water and "behold it" clearly and thank God for every aspect of it that you can - its beauty, life-giving power, refreshment, goodness, sparkle, its wetness, its simplicity, and its ability to seek the lowest place. Just be thankful for a single drop of water, then a flower, then your breath and the sunlight. Then thank God in all things.

As we surrender being "god of our own lives" we also surrender our fears and the constant need to defend ourselves from threats both real and imagined. If we are just part of God's world (rather than Him being part of our world) then it's His world and He is responsible for protecting us from harm. If we surrender to grace, we also surrender to His protection and love and provision. (1 Peter 5:6-7 NKJV) Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, {7} casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Sixthly, we need to build a serene unity to our life by serving just one God. Divided loyalties create multiple anxieties. That's why religions with many gods have historically failed to bring peace to their people and why people who try to run after money, sex or fame at the same time as they try to serve God frequently end up with a complex mess of a life. You need one center to your life - and it's not you, not money or sex or power, it's not even a cause or a church or a political party. When the center of your life is that same as the center of the Universe than you will stop the disharmony of being off-center and will know true peace.

God, and God alone, as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, should be the true center of your life, your values and your sense of self. You must know yourself in relation to Him and His will. When that happens your created earthiness, will line up with your spirit and your mind with your body. You will have the unity of purpose and serenity of being of the angels if you serve the same God and focus on the same center.

Seventhly, we need to take this peace into how we treat others. We need to live in love and love our neighbors as ourselves. If we live in hatred and strife or in envy and competition, then we will create enemies, ensure stress and make the world even more dangerous and strife-ridden. Attitudes such as jealousy, greed, coveting, anger, rage, hatred, unforgiveness, and bitterness will make us highly reactive and create turmoil in our life and in our work and in our relationships. You cannot even approach God with these things in your life. It is impossible to approach the still center of All with a raging fire of bitterness within you. You must let grace do its work. Letting go of the "bad stuff" and embracing love of God and neighbor is an essential first step towards inner peace and poise. If you want to be at peace, first stop fighting!

The Christian virtues such as love, patience, kindness, faith, hope and goodness create a more peaceful and less anxiety ridden world. If we are patient then we do not fill our lives with rush and hurry. If we are kind we do not create a backlash to our actions. If we are full of hope we are positive people not filled with gloom and despond. Christian living becomes tranquil living. The quiet and godly life is filled with peace. When we surrender the control of our lives to God, fix our minds on Him, live in gratitude and stillness, deal with our junk and reactivity and adopt a prayerful lifestyle of love – then we will know a peace that passes understanding, even in the midst of a dangerous world.

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever. (Psalm 125:1)