

Finding Peace Within Chaos

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With everything going on in the world, people are responding with fear or anger. They don't realize that trust is a third option. Fear or anger doesn't bring peace to our lives. So what does trust look like? And will that bring us peace?

Crisis or chaos threatens us. It brings the threat of loss—loss of value, loss of privilege, loss of security, loss of power. Our instinctive response to threat is fear, which can sometimes manifest as anger when we push back against what threatens us. People who are angry are also fearful, though you might not see it. Something they hold dear is being taken away or is at risk of such. For example, consider those who are angry because they feel their rights are endangered. Behind their anger is the fear of losing those rights. How can we prevent ourselves from experiencing fear when world events disturb us?

Too Attached to Outcomes

Part of our problem is that we are too attached to events and outcomes. Every outcome is personal to us. We make events about us, even if they are happening far away in Washington D.C. or elsewhere. When we do this, we invest ourselves too much in external events and set ourselves up to get rattled by life's surprises. We carry around the things that upset us, keeping them close so we can revisit them often and upset ourselves all over again. It's best to keep a loose grip on events. When we hold too tight, we are less able to adjust to the unexpected. Strive to be unattached to specific outcomes by having an attitude that *any* outcome will be manageable.

As part of keeping a loose grip on life, we need to have a buffer, a way to filter events to keep them at arm's length. Remember that not everything we hear is true or about us. Try not to take things at face value, but hold them at a distance and study them from multiple angles. Then, when you're finished, put them on the shelf. If you ingest them, you make them a part of your being. Ingesting an event is welcome when you're convinced it adds value to your life. When your wellbeing isn't dependent on exterior circumstances, you can

create it from within your interior life, deriving it from the depth and richness of your relationship with yourself and with God.

Managing Our Thoughts

We cause much of our anguish by what we tell ourselves about our circumstances. We label and judge them as bad, and thus respond to our negative assessment of them, not to the actual circumstances, all of which have no intrinsic valuation. By doing so, we believe the worst and increase our stress and worry. We would do well to manage our thoughts. Avoid labeling things as “terrible.” Instead, use labels such as “manageable” or “okay.” Conduct regular inventory of your thoughts. Decide which are worth keeping and discard the rest. Most thoughts don’t serve us. You will find yourself discarding the same negative thoughts over and over again. Stay at it, so it becomes a regular practice and your thought life becomes tranquil. One friend incorporates an action with this mental exercise where he turns both palms downward as if dropping something into a trash bin.

God is Bigger than Circumstances

At some point, you need to decide whether God is bigger than your problems or the other way around. If you decide that God is bigger, how might you change your thoughts and behavior to reflect that belief? Any problem you have is manageable for God. Not only is God bigger than your problems, but He has the bigger picture in mind. I don’t presume to know the bigger picture except that in the end, God will work things out for my soul. My soul has greater value to Him than my circumstances because it’s my soul that endures. Everything else will pass away. So we entrust our souls to God, expecting Him to keep them safe to the end. Because I trust in God, I believe I will be okay, no matter what. I have learned to not trust God for a specific outcome, but trust that God will enable me to embrace any outcome with His help. God says in Ezekiel 18:4, “Behold, all souls are Mine.” My confidence is that He will take care of me because I belong to Him.

Trust Leads to Peace

When we trust, we can experience peace. I define peace as a confidence in God that defies circumstances. We rest in God and find contentment in Him. I believe such confidence arises from cultivating a relationship with Him, growing to understand His actions and character, and learning to trust in that love relationship. This nurturing interior life with God becomes the bedrock for our outer lives.

In my book, *Four in the Garden*, Creator gives Cherished advice: “Try to stay in the present. Dwelling on the past or future will steal your peace. Only in the present, where We make Our abode, will you find Us and the peace We give.” God exists across all time, but His presence and activity happen in the present moment, and that’s where we encounter Him. We won’t find Him in our thoughts about the past or future. We experience God’s peace when we stay present and focus on the reality of God in that moment.

Smooth and Heavy

Strive to be like a rock in a fast-moving river. The water rushes past, but the rock is undisturbed. Are you slippery like a smooth rock? Or do events “stick” to you? If you are sticky, then ask God to rub away your sharp edges. He may send stronger currents in answer to your prayer. Are you heavy enough to stay in place? Or do you get washed downstream? Our “weight” depends on our relationship with God. Matthew 7:24-25 describes a person who follows Christ’s teachings as like a house built on bedrock that can withstand the raging torrents. If we are centered on God, then God becomes our anchor when currents try to sweep us away.

The Role of Gratitude

Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made know

to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Entrusting our concerns to God with thanksgiving is the key to peace. Gratitude is an important element as it repels anxiety. Without it, our prayers are tainted with fear and worry.

When I was bedridden after my back injury, I spent a lot of time processing my predicament, trying to make peace with it and my future, as I had scant hope for improvement. One morning as I lay in bed, I found myself thanking God out loud for “surrounding me with love and good things.” Surprised by this declaration, I stopped and considered if it were true. God had been gracious to show me His love over the course of my life and to send good things my way. I realized my injury hadn’t changed that. I still had God’s love and many good things as I reflected on my current situation, though desperate. That moment of gratitude brought me great peace and confidence that everything would be okay although I couldn’t see what that might look like.

Psalm 112 describes a person who reverences God. Verse seven says, “He need not fear a bad report, for his heart is unshaken, since he trusts in the Lord.” When we trust in God, our hearts are unshaken. All the bad reports we hear in the news need not create fear in us because God is bigger than circumstances and will enable our souls to endure. Place your confidence in God. You belong to Him. He will take care of you.

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