



Cultivating Personal Peace

Who doesn't want to feel deep peace as we walk through the chaos of daily living? Yet often we experience just the opposite: *anxiety and worry and disconnection*. We feel bombarded and overwhelmed by a myriad of voices, crying for our attention... NOW! So, *realistically*, just how do we navigate life's

craziness and learn to cultivate deep peace in the midst of it all?

First, it's important to realize this is a journey, not accomplished in a day. It is a step-by-step learning process that is like planting seeds in a garden. Patience and trust are required. That's why we talk about cultivating personal peace. The good news is you can begin to plant "seeds" of peace right now!

There's more good news: God promises peace to those who desire it. Jesus offers his brand of deep, abiding peace to you. It's a free gift. But to experience this gift fully, it will be important to let go of attitudes and actions that hinder your embrace of Jesus' peace. As you make progress in releasing these hindrances, you will find a growing inner peace. A beautiful inner garden will be blooming.

I believe many of our hindrances to experiencing peace are rooted in one basic attitude: **Resistance to change**. We get stuck in truths we have learned in the past and it's really hard to move into new truth. Oftentimes, the traumas and hurts we experience dramatically color how we view our present. For example, if my father is abusive to me as a child then it's likely I will have problems trusting other men or other authority figures. Similar things may surface with an abusive mother. So if I want to develop healthy relationships with others, I may feel resistance to trusting, even if the other person shows a loving attitude toward me. A stubborn voice inside says, "Do not trust them! They'll just stab you in the back like before." So we use the same survival skills that we once used as a little kid, we now employ in our adult relationships: suspicion, separation, independence. We are always watching our backs. This is a fear-based strategy. While fear (fight-or-flight reaction) is sometimes helpful for the short term, it is a lousy strategy for the long term. In fact, God says its end is death. The direction toward life involves a surrender to new truth (aka faith). This is the truth that "sets us free".

So our quest for personal peace begins with a basic commitment to the discovery of new truth. God promises to lead us in this journey but also says that the going will be a bit bumpy at times. This is because God thinks and moves differently than we do. So His Truth at first feels "foreign". Eventually, though, that same truth begins to work some wonderful healing in our emotional, spiritual, and even physical lives.

A big turn-around for me happened when I finally decided to live out a new truth that God has been whispering to me for years: "You are not responsible for changing other people". A good part of my energy was spent convincing, coercing (always with a smile), and finding creatively manipulative ways to get someone to make healthy choices (in my mind). This created a bit of anxiety and tension, especially when the person would travel the "unhealthy" route, leaving me feeling disappointed, rejected, and even betrayed. So I'd try harder. And so the spiral downward continued. It's been in the last couple of years that I've really surrendered to this new truth and found a profound sense of liberation and, yes, peace.

My trust that the Holy Spirit will actually do his job has increased and I am left with the more doable mission of simply learning to live out the life of Jesus as much as I can.

There are no magic formulas. The best I can do is offer a tool box and let you decide which tools, if any, are helpful to your growth journey:

- **Try to treat yourself with kindness and compassion.** This is not easy for most of us. In fact, most people nurture a vibrant self-hatred that seeps silently into most of our ongoing attitudes and activities. We feel we are never "good enough". God says otherwise. He highly values each of us and calls us into revitalized living as we learning to trust his loving, powerful presence moment by moment. Meditate on Bible passages that speak the new truth of who you actually are in God's sight, like Psalm 139: 1-18, Matthew 11: 28-30, or John 10: 1-16.
- **Take time to listen deeply to God, to others, and to your own heart.** This is the essence of prayer. Find the quiet moments in your day to be more aware of God's participation in your life and the beauty that is tucked away in the seemingly "ugly" or challenging times. Learn to listen without trying to judge or categorize those observations. Breathe deeply and slowly. When emotions get lively, watch them with compassion and let them get "breathed out" with patience. Carve out times of rest and restoration.
- **Get together with friends who are on a similar journey.** Non-judgmental, encouraging, and authentic friendship goes a long way in supporting our growth in peace.
- **Learn to let go of old attitudes and grudges through real forgiveness.** It's time to relinquish the role as "Judge" over someone else. It's time to let go of retribution, an eye-for-an-eye kind of revenge. It's poison for you. The same release (forgiveness) that flows from God's heart to yours can continue to flow through you to others, if you allow it. Again, bolster these new truths with supportive friends and reading the Bible. The neural pathways of your mind can literally be shifted into more positive, peaceful places. That's science. But that's also God's promise of peace to you.

The bottom line is that you can change and find the peace you long for. If you don't have a community of support for this adventure, please consider experiencing the love at Lighthouse Church. We are a friendly bunch who enjoy God and people. And we are daily seeking a more intimate connection with God and others as we follow Jesus as our Guide. Let us know if we can help.



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