

Life Lessons from the Psalms

Perfect Peace, Primal Patience

How Do You Respond When You Face a Big Crisis?

Years ago when I was in graduate school, I was extremely poor. I had two jobs on campus, and I still barely had enough to fix a meal each day. Suddenly, I lost one of my on campus jobs and not only was I heart-broken, but I was distraught. I had no idea how I would pull together enough money to eat or even pay my school bills and it greatly upset me. I had not yet learned the secret from the Psalms we will consider today. It is pretty easy to be calm and hopeful when all is going well. When the rug gets pulled out from under you and you come crashing to the ground, then what? We are going to look at an oft ignored secret to having peace when things fall apart for you and of course, at some point they will. That is not pessimism, it is just an honest evaluation of how life goes. Our Big idea for today is, "Gain perfect peace the old-fashioned way."

The book of Psalms is full of rich insight into how to live well but one verse stands out when it comes to adjusting to difficult situations. **My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him.** (Psalm 62: 1 NIV) The personal testimony of David is profound but rather ignored by many Christians and rejected outright by non-Christians. The original Hebrew writing that comes to us nearly 3,000 years ago reads this way. **Only unto God, silence of my soul, from Him my salvation.** Here are some points to make on this testimony. First, soul is the combination of the physicality of your body with the God given spirit that determines who you are. When you die, if you are born again, your spirit will go to be with God, that is who you are. You will receive a new body at the resurrection but you as you is forever you. Because you are both spirit and body, your body will be destroyed but you as spirit remain intact. When you have your resurrection body, then you will once again be soul, body and spirit combined together. Soul is you in other words. Second, silence of your soul is the magnificent quietness that comes over you when regardless of what is going on all around, you are still. No panic, no wild, distorted thoughts, no frantic efforts to make sense of things and flailing about to find a solution; you possess quiet within like a turquoise alpine pond resting in silence. Third, this comes only from God. It is supernatural and not from you. You cannot generate this silence by medication, mindfulness or positive thinking. It comes only through God. Fourth, salvation, as a Hebrew word means more than getting to heaven when you die. It is the help of God to make things right for you. Whatever you face, God will see you through it.

Let's consider two examples from the Bible that illustrate how this supernatural silence can be rejected or enjoyed. After more than half his life serving as the first king of Israel, Saul faced a great crisis. He had over time, drifted farther and farther away from the Lord and choices he made as a young king stripped him of his closeness to God. At the age of seventy, Saul and his kingdom were threatened by the Philistine forces that never stopped attacking and hounding Israel. The Philistines with far superior weaponry and a much larger army made their move to attack Israel. King Saul, panicked. Years before, King Saul outlawed witchcraft and sorcery in accordance with the Bible. But, facing the threat of the Philistines, Saul sought out a witch to tell him what the future held. He violated his own moral standard by hunting for a sorcerer. Even the witch he discovered noted the previous stance of King Saul on witchcraft and felt Saul, who had disguised himself, was putting her at great risk by seeking her help. **But the woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?"** (1 Samuel 28: 9 NIV) Rather than calmly and peacefully facing the risk of the Philistine threat, Saul's mind became a whirlwind of chaos. There was no silence in his soul, and his decision-making cratered. Rather than going to God and counting on Him, Saul lost his mind.

Let me share another example; someone I mentioned last week. Much earlier, the Philistines threatened Israel with a great army, but an even larger villain challenged any Israelite soldier to fight him, and the victor's country would rule over the country of the loser. **Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us."** (1 Samuel 17: 8-9 NIV) David alone, still too young to serve in Israel's army, took up the challenge. When King Saul heard that David announced his intention to fight Goliath, he pulled David in to interview the teen. To illustrate David's mindset, here is a part of what he told King Saul. **Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied**

the armies of the living God. The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." (1 Samuel 17: 36-37 NIV) There you see clearly the point of view of David maintained. God would see him through this tremendous challenge. King Saul, who still had a semblance of faith in God accepted the possibility that the LORD was in this. But still, Saul had to push for David to use Saul's armor and sword to give him a chance to win. Saul's faith was not wholly in God and despite it being obvious that David was too small for Saul's armor, Saul still had to make David see if it could work. When it clearly didn't fit, David abandoned the sword and armor in favor of his own sling and staff. Do you sense the silence in David versus the clamoring jangle in Saul? There is a sweet silence inside those who trust in God that carries through even when crises hit. But for those who are not reliant upon God, there is a mental storm that brews within when things get rough.

The Bible makes this promise to you regarding what God can and will do for you as you trust in Him. **He will keep in perfect peace all those who trust in him, whose thoughts turn often to the Lord!** (Isaiah 26: 3 TLB) I discovered this myself one Christmas morning. Our family had left Christmas Eve to stay at a lovely Baptist camp where there was a beautiful cabin dedicated to providing a vacation home for pastors. The boys and I got up early Christmas morning and headed for the ski slopes. The boys went off on their own and I started down a blue slope to begin the day's adventure. As I began my first turn down the slope, the tip of my ski caught in the snow and the bottom of my leg snapped in half. As I lay in the snow, my leg broken in seven places, someone came up to me and asked if I was ok. I told him I thought I had broken my leg and when he saw the bottom of my leg was at a ninety degree angle from my knee, he immediately headed down the hill to get medical help. Quickly I was surrounded by a crowd of skiers who wanted to protect me from someone crashing into me as I lay in the snow. Flat on my back, I was praying and perhaps it was just the natural part of how the body responds to serious injury, but I believe it was God keeping this promise made in Isaiah, the pain was very tolerable. I looked up at the sky and I told those nearest me that the clouds were quite beautiful. There was not a part of me that was worried or even disturbed at that moment. There was just an overwhelming sense of peace and comfort I felt as I prayed and thanked Christ for my salvation.

Remember that salvation in the Old Testament and particularly in the Psalms did not always refer to what Jesus did for you by dying on the cross. Often it meant something much less profound like God taking care of your problem, helping you in your time of need, protecting you and comforting you. Silence of your soul is one of the most crucial and spectacular benefits to staying with Christ and having Him in your life. The way you develop and maintain that silence, the perfect peace you have when you are not worrying or growing angry or in turmoil is by keeping your mind focused on God and God only. Those moments may be fleeting at first, just for a few seconds at a time. But when you practice turning to Christ again and again as you are coping with what you face, you will find a supernatural form of peace and comfort coming over you, one you cannot explain. With Christ in you, the silence of God is yours to gain. Watch as Jesus faced His coming execution. Carefully note the anguish He was under as He knelt in prayer. **"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."** (Luke 22: 42 NIV) Have you ever prayed something like that? "God, I would love it if you would take this away from me, if you would not let this happen!" The text goes on and gives us Jesus' internal state. **And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.** (Luke 22: 44 NIV) Can you feel the inner pain He was experiencing, the storm swirling like a hurricane within? Have you ever been in that state psychologically? It is hard to fathom God going through something so turbulent emotionally as that, but He did. Now take a few steps forward to the next morning when, after having been arrested, His body shredded by whippings and beatings, He was led out to the place of execution. As He stumbled along, exhausted and in great pain within and without, He was met by some women weeping and mourning loudly over Him. Jesus calmly, almost serenely told them not to weep for Him but rather weep over their own situation. As Jesus hung on the cross and His mother stood nearby, Jesus told her to let John take care of her and for John to love His mother as His own. Sometime later, after being berated and insulted by the two criminals being crucified on each side of Him, one in meekness and humility begged Jesus to have pity on His soul when Jesus came into His Kingdom with power and majesty. Jesus, still silent within, full of peace and quietness of heart, rather than rebuking or scolding the thief who previously had been scolding and mocking Him, graciously responded. **Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."** (Luke 23:43 NIV) Consider with great reverence the peace and silence of soul Jesus had as He went through such pain and anguish. Our Big idea for today is, "Gain perfect peace the old-fashioned way." Rather than suffering needlessly within when you are going through it, turn to Jesus and invite Him to pour into you His peace and quietness of soul. The supernatural silence of God is available to you if you will simply receive it. Let Christ work His way in you and you will find your soul become silent when all others around you are in chaos.