

Practicing the Discipline of Peace

Rod Entekin

If Christianity is true...If the Bible is really the Word of God...If Jesus is who he claims to be...and if the Bible tells us to trust in the Lord and to not be anxious for anything...then there should be a way to get to that point in our lives. There should be a remedy for burning anxiety and fear that we wake up with in the morning as we meet the day considering all the problems we have with no way to solve them, sinful habits that we can't seem to break, or hurtful circumstances which we have no control over. It is one of the most common problems among Christians...that we know that we're supposed to "trust God," but our emotions are still just as fearful and anxious as if we didn't know Christ at all. Our emotions are clues to us of where our real thinking (our heart) is. The emotions of trust are peace and joy. The emotions of distrust are fear and anxiety. That is true for any relationship, or about any situation. So in order for us to experience the joy and peace that God intends for us, and that will glorify and honor him...we need something to help us get there because it's not a natural part of our experience. The heart is bent toward distrust. It's part of our fallen condition. It comes from a lie that we believe. Martin Luther said...*"The sin underneath all our sin is our believing the lie of the Serpent that we cannot trust the love and grace of God, and that we must take matters into our own hands."* And when we take matters into our own hands we'll always be insecure because deep down we know that our level of control is limited, it's an illusion. But the truth is...everyday we need a Savior. Therefore...

My basic premise is that the Word of God, the truths of God, the promises of God, when rightly understood and applied in our lives, should bring into our experience the peace and joy of God even when our circumstances are difficult and full of trial. It is the Word of God and the work of his Spirit working together to sanctify our minds (our thinking) and our hearts (our emotions). It should be the desire and experience of every Christian to live in a level of peace that is extraordinary according to the circumstances of life. But, how do we do that? We can say...*I trust in God...* but still our hearts are fearful and full of anxiety and stress. How do we experience the peace and joy of God in the middle of life circumstances that call for fear and anxiety? How do we get our hearts (our emotions) to come in line with our decision to believe and trust...so that we actually experience peace and joy, rather than anxiety, fear and stress? The key is this...our emotions follow the decisions of our will. They don't come instantaneously. That's why we don't make decisions based on our emotions. They are more tender, weak, vulnerable than our will. So they follow.

Our hope comes from God's word. It's the only thing that we can solidly put our trust in to be absolutely true and trustworthy.

Romans 15:4 (ESV)

4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

When we struggle with feelings of ungodly fear and anxiety over life's situations and our desire to bring the emotions of our hearts into line with the decisions of our will to trust God with our lives you must start with God, not you. Begin with what is true about God. Consider these eight steps to follow as a discipline to bring about a life experience of peace and joy.

1. Affirm the Truth: Affirm these things aloud. Our ears need to hear our own mouths profess what is true.

- God is Sovereign- God is in control. It is impossible for God to be too busy with someone else's problem while you're having yours. He is not on vacation, or sleeping that he needs to be aroused. Sometimes we feel like he is because we don't understand his timing of things and his purpose for what seems like his lack of involvement. If God misses even one moment of only one of all his creation of all times, then he is not God at all. He misses nothing. His is in control of everything. Absolutely everything...even the minute details of your life. 1 Tim 6:15—*He who is the blessed and only sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.* "Here's how it sounds: *Father I affirm and confess that you are sovereign and in control over all of creation. There is not one minute detail concerning my life, or that of anyone else's life, that you are not in complete control over. You govern all of your creation with absolute control and authority. Nothing escapes your notice, your care, and your utter control.*
- God is Almighty—This means that he can do anything. No matter what your situation is God is able to accomplish what concerns you. He is able to strengthen you to stand in the face of hardship, weaknesses of the flesh, unspeakable trials of disappointment, hurt, abuse, neglect, being wronged, or

any other brokenness of this world that we live in. He is able to strengthen you to be victorious in any and all situations.

2 Corinthians 9:8 (NIV) And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Abraham was challenged to believe God to give him a son at the age of 100, facing the fact that his body was as good as dead, yet he did not waver in unbelief, but rather was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God was able to do what he had promised. God make it happen. He made his promise happen for Abraham and he will for you as well because God has not changed. He is true to himself.

What is his promise to you? God has promised you victory over every evil of this world what ever it is or whatever form it may take in your life. Romans 6:6-7 (ESV) We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.

If you desire his strength to overcome some hardship, bondage, habit, addiction in your life you can be assured that God is able to strengthen you to have victory over it, or else he is not God at all. And if he is unable to help you, just you, he is not God at all.

Romans 16:25, 27 (ESV) Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ...to the only wise God be glory because of you, forevermore, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

So, no matter what your situation is, if you desire to follow God, to be the person he created you to be, to give him glory in your body, in your heart, and in all you do, then believe the gospel that the death and resurrection of Jesus our Savior was not in vain...that he is able to do in you immeasurably more than all you can possibly imagine, according to his power that is at work in you...to him be glory in you (let him be glorified in your life). (Eph 3:20)

So never doubt that God is able to give you the strength and power to overcome the weaknesses of your flesh and to become all that he created you to be. His name is on the line. His reputation is at stake. Your hope is in this...that he will be true to himself. He will not abandon you to your problems.

HOPE: And your hope is not in yourself, not in someone else, but your hope is in the gospel of Jesus. Jesus died to bring your sin to nothing, powerless, so that you are no longer enslaved.

The evil one will try with all his might to convince you otherwise. He will lie to you, and fill your thoughts with lies to lead you astray. When this happens, focus on the truth. Keep the truths of God in front of you all the time. Write them on a card to keep with you.

God is in control. He is almighty, able to do anything. And...

- God is Wise—He makes no mistakes in all his judgments and his actions. All that he allows to come to you is so in its perfection without flaw, and full of purpose for your good and welfare. He is not a god like Rabbi Kirsner (*Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*) says: *Give God a break, he has a bad day once in a while.* He never has a moment when he is not absolutely and utterly acting in the best possible way toward his children, even if that action seems hard or bad to us. If, at even one moment in all of time and history, God fails to act in the absolute most wise and best way, then he is not God at all, and not worthy of any praise by us. But we know that this is not true of him, rather, it is utterly impossible for God to act in a way toward us that is unwise in any possible way. Therefore he is one who can be completely trusted.
- God is Loving—Not only is he a God who is sovereign and wise concerning all things, also everything that comes to you because you are his child it comes so out of love even though it may not feel like love at the time. If God is only sovereign and wise, but not loving then he is not worthy of our trust and, in fact, we are left hard pressed to trust him, because he may be this capricious god who is only concerned about himself and not our own welfare (this was the lie of the

serpent to Eve...*"He's holding you back from reaching your potential. Eat anyway and see...you'll be like God".*) But, we know that this is not true of him. In fact, it is absolutely impossible for God to act toward us, or allow actions toward us in any way at all that is in any sense unloving, even though an unloving action may be initiated by someone toward us. God ordains even the evil of man to accomplish his good purposes toward his children (example: Joseph and his brothers). So we can fully trust that, as his son or daughter, he will act toward us in our absolute best interest for our own welfare. 1 Chron 16:9 *For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the whole earth that he may support those whose hearts are completely his.* Of course the challenge to us in this verse is to believe the gospel to be true...that our hearts are completely his because we know that we are still sinful. However, if we believe the gospel of our Blessed Christ, we must also believe that our hearts are made pure toward God through the righteousness of our Savior Jesus. And...if the trend of our lives is one of obedience rather than one of disobedience we may have full confidence that we belong to him, will be cared for by him, and this verse is true and applies to us.

- 2. Decide to Believe**—So first affirm the truth about God, and then...Decide to believe it. Make an audible affirmation with your mouth what you've decided to believe as an act of your will. *"I will trust in God." When I am afraid I put my trust in you. In God whose word I praise, In God I trust. I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me? Psalm 56:3-4* We "know" what is true, but often we find ourselves struggling to "believe" it. It is important to regularly affirm our belief in the great truths of the Bible...those about God and those about man. When we recite the Apostles Creed in Church it's purpose is, yes, to worship affirming these truths, but also, it's a means of grace to our hearts to hear our mouths confess the truth about God. Choose to believe what you know is true. It sounds like this: *"Father, I now choose to believe what the Bible tells me is true about you...you are in control of my life (if in fact you have given him that control...if you haven't stop here and do so), you are wise in your governing my life, and you love me more than I can possibly imagine. I choose to believe these things and to allow the truth of them to impact my heart and mind to be sanctified in the righteousness and goodness of these truths,*

and thereby to lead me into the experience of the peace and joy that is mine as your son/daughter.” Then...

- 3. Refuse to live in bondage to ungodly Fear, Anxiety, and Sinful Desires of the flesh—Psalm 56:3-4:** *“When I am afraid I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid.”* Just as you would flee from an ax murderer, flee from the temptation to fear. Flee from the things that tempt you away from your trust in God. God is NOT the author of fear. Who is? Your enemy Satan authors fear in you through wrong thinking. This kind of fear (the kind that lives in a morbid dread of impending hurt) is a natural emotion of the fallen heart which must be met with faith. The thoughts which result in fear must be challenged with these theological truths. The Bible tells us...*be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2)*. Begin to think correctly...think about what is true. When we meet our temptations with faith...with truth...the result then is courage. Courage only finds its definition in the context of fear. It only has its meaning when the heart is tempted with unbelief that God is our refuge, that we're stuck in our situation and without hope. When the emotion of fear is allowed to have its way; when fear in us is not stopped with faith, acknowledged as such, confessed, denied and replaced with emotions of faith; when fear is allowed to have its way we then submit to its demands and live in it as conquered slaves to it. Then all of our decisions are based on fear rather than faith. Seek the Holy Spirit of God to bring your emotions & desires in line with the decision of your will to believe what the Bible tells us is true about God. The sanctified WILL that chooses truth and righteousness must lead our lives and not our fleshly temptations and emotions which tend to follow or lag behind the decisions of our will. Ps 56:4 *I will not be afraid. Lord, I choose to believe you, and I choose to reject these emotions of fear and anxiety. In Jesus' Name I reject and refuse to allow my heart to remain in fear, but rather to live in faith. Lord Christ, as ruler of my life, and Holy Spirit, the One who empowers me daily for life and godliness, I ask you to rule in my emotions that I will not be led by fear and anxiety, but rather, that I will experience and live in the joy of my salvation and the security as a son and rescued by my blessed Christ. I ask that the power of your Spirit and affirmation of my decision to believe will lead me into the peace of God through my relationship with you through the crosswork of the Lord Jesus Christ. I choose to be filled with the Spirit of God which is a*

spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. Refuse to believe the lies of the enemy of the church, who is your personal enemy, to cause you to bring into question his love for you, and to lead you to take matters into your own hands. This is why we're often such control freaks. We need to control our lives because we are not convinced that God either is capable of controlling our lives for our good, or will choose to do it, and in the fashion that we want him to.

And be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2). Become the new person that God created you to be. Do NOT let your future be determined by your past. Let your future be determined by the great things God has for you. Think on the right things Philippians 4:8 (ESV) Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. When the wrong things even begin to come into your mind, put them out. Don't let them, for a moment, stay in your mind to take root. When you're tempted in any way, as soon as the first thought of temptation comes, deny it, refuse it, and rather set your thoughts on the good things God has for you. Remember...don't let your past determine your future. The apostle Paul, who had a very dark past said, (Philippians 3:13-14 (ESV)) Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Never let the enemy trap you with your past. Get past your past, and move on. If you're a Christian, you are forgiven. The judgment is already decided. You are forgiven and loved. The trial is over. The pain that you experienced can be healed. Move ahead to the things God has for you.

- 4. Act in Faith, not in fear**— Psalm 37:3 Trust in the Lord and do good... Follow your decision to believe with actions of faith rather than actions of fear. Ps 56:12 *I must perform my vows to you, O God.* For example...if your anxiety is over finances, write your tithe check. Whatever is the appropriate action of faith...do it. If you're a pastor and you know that the proper

discipline of a member for unrepentant sin will result in five families leaving the church...find the best, most appropriate way (get the counsel of the wisdom of others) and DO IT without regard to the negative consequences on the numbers. Trust God *really* by doing the right thing, and live out actions of faith in him rather than actions of fear. Then...

- 5. Give Your Best**—Give your very best (work hard) in whatever situation is at hand knowing that your best will never be good enough, then trust the rest to God. Ps 56:12-13 *"I will render thank offerings to you, for you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life."* The gospel tells us that man's best efforts will never be good enough for life and godliness. You'll never be the father that you, indeed, should be. You'll never be the perfect husband, pastor, Bible student, preacher, leader, neighbor, on and on and on. So...give your very best. Bust your rear giving all that you should give...all the while knowing that on your best day...at your best moment...all that you can give will never be good enough...and then trust the rest to God...whose best is all that is needed.
- 6. Expect the Extraordinary**—Ephesians 3:20 tells us that he is able to do immeasurably more than all we could ask or even imagine. On our best day we can't dream up anything as great as the wonder of his might can perform for us. He is quite prepared to do the extraordinary. In fact, it glorifies him that he blows us away with his mighty and awesome acts of power on our behalf. Many of the psalms are praises to God for his mighty acts in behalf of his people. Present the need of your life to God in prayer asking him for his provision and then expect that God will work his good pleasure to provide what he has committed. Luke 12 tells us that he will provide all we need (be careful to distinguish between need and want). 2 Chron 16:9 tells us that his eyes move to and fro throughout the whole earth in order that he might strongly support those whose hearts are his. Ps 56:9 tells us that because of his actions our enemies will turn back in the day when we call. He will do amazing things that you could have never orchestrated in order to provide for what you need. Pray for them and look for them. The truth of God's word will then protect our hearts from anxiety & fear. Philippians 4:6-7 is given to us to protect our hearts from such craziness. It is given to us to allow our hearts to be at peace and enter into the rest of God. However,

the greatest thing that these precious promises are given to us for (not simply for our peace...that's quite secondary) but rather for the glory of God. His brilliance is shown in our weakness (2 Cor 12:7-10)..*my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.* It is primarily the glory of God that is seen in our utter dependence on him. In our weakness and frailty, when we trust in him and find our greatest joy in him, it is then that we most glorify him. His glory is our highest aim, not our peace and personal joy.

7. Receive the Rest (the peace of God)—Receive the rest of God into your life. Enter his rest. After refusing emotions which hinder our peace, then receive God's rest. Bring the emotions of your heart into line with the actions of your will. *Lord, now that I've chosen to believe what is true about you, that you love me, are able to provide for me, and as I do my best knowing that my best is not good enough, and trusting in you for what is lacking, and now that I have chosen to act in line with faith rather than fear, would you now enable my feeble heart to find it's rest in you through the power of your Spirit working in connection with your word? Enable me to apply my decision to trust in you to my heart that I might enjoy your wonderful peace in my life. Now, as your son/daughter whom you love and have committed to provide for, I now receive your peace and rest into my life.* Then meditate on the promises of God and what you've affirmed and allow your heart to become restful.

8. Give Thanks—Philippians 4:6-7 tell us ask with thanksgiving. We ask with thanksgiving because we ask with confidence that he hears our prayer and he will, indeed, answer this prayer of seeking to live in the peace of God because we know that what we ask is his will. Could it possibly not be his will for us to live in his peace? Could it possibly not be his will for you to have victory over sin? Absolutely not. So we can ask with confidence and thanksgiving. Give thanks to God that who he is, the truths of the Scriptures, when we apply them will bring to our lives, the life that he created us for, lasting peace, and glory to him.

The heart (emotion/flesh desire) is weaker than the will, so it may take a while for the heart to follow the will. If you struggle with a temptation of the flesh it will tend to follow the decisions of your will. The above steps are a discipline. Peace is not a once and done. You

must regularly practice the discipline of peace. The more that you practice this discipline the quicker the emotions and flesh temptations will come in line with the decisions of the will.

I've found that I sometimes need to rehearse this process many times a day. Don't give up if it takes a long time for your heart to become peaceful, hopeful, or to experience joy again. Like any discipline when we first begin to practice that discipline it is hard and often frustrating. Don't give up on the truth. The more that you exercise these truths the quicker the heart seems to respond. Write this process on a smaller piece of paper in a brief format that you can keep with you to review during the day. Practice it several times a day and bath your heart in truth in order for it to trust. These are the doctrines of God put into specific application for life to allow us to live as true *sons* and daughters of the true nobility that is ours in Christ rather than living in the ashes as orphans as our enemy seeks to convince us. Resist the temptation of the evil one to convince you to doubt the love of God for you and that you must take matters into your own hands. Rather than doubting which produces fear...BELIEVE. Hebrews 10:39 says...*But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.*

When we experience loss in our lives it immediately comes to us...*this does not feel like love.* We want to say, or may say, as I did...*God I know that you love me, but sometimes it doesn't feel like it.*

John Piper, in his little book *Pierced by the Word*, says...*Love labors and suffers to enthrall us with what is infinitely and eternally satisfying: God. Therefore God's love labors and suffers to break our bondage to the idol of self and focus our affections on the treasure of God.* It's not until we find our treasure in him that we are able to survive the pain of loss and to experience joy and peace again. Not that we'll ever understand his workings, but that we will trust him. It is in that trust, especially without understanding, especially while experiencing pain, that we offer to him our greatest worship. It is the gospel of Christ that saves us. This gospel doesn't mitigate or minimize in any way the pain of the brokenness of this world. We experience the consequences of this sinful condition in which we find ourselves, but not to their fullest extent. Jesus already did that for us. The gospel doesn't minimize the pain, but it does give us a new perspective in which to view the pain. It gives us a fellowship of suffering that brings us closer to the One that took our greatest pain. It enables us to identify with Christ in his sufferings. He came to experience the fullest measure of loss. He *didn't* survive it by his own choice. He took the cup as an act of his will, not as an act the desire

of his emotions. *My soul is very sorrowful, even to death (Mark 14:34)*. Remember the garden...*Father, remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will*. We should find it very helpful that he asked this three times. The humanness of Jesus here we can identify with. It helps us to see that his emotions (everything human in him) wanted to escape this pain and loss. But he chose to go through with it. He endured the cross for the joy that was set before him. That joy was you and me. He endured the cross for the joy of the satisfying relationship that its full completion would bring between him and you and me. And...The same power that raised him from the dead is available to us through the work of the Holy Spirit. This too is a mystery. This too we don't understand. That's why Christianity is not just logical and reasonable, but it is also mystical. The Holy Spirit is beyond our understanding, but he's real. He is promised to us as a Helper...a Comforter. That same power of Jesus' resurrection we gain access to by grace (Romans 5), this mystical grace that comes to us through the Holy Spirit. That same power we have in us to say yes to endure our brokenness, and to receive the truths of God that we may then enter his rest...his peace...his joy.

It begins with the choice to believe what the Bible tells us is true about God. Everything else follows. The peace follows. The joy follows. Then life follows.

We will still endure pain and loss. Paul said... Brokenness and weakness may continue to mark our daily reality. Our waking thoughts may be *Dear God I need you desperately. Please come to me today and enable me to do your will*. It may continue to be a daily discipline for us to gain access into his peace by this grace as we believe the truth. May you believe, even when nothing in you understands, nothing about your circumstances warrant it, and even when every fiber of your being is in pain. May you believe, to be saved, and to again experience this peace. *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. Hebrews 10:39*