

May She Rest in Peace

By Mary Kane

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." God has given us a wonderful gift, but unfortunately peace has not often marked my life since I became a Christian. I have let stress and anxiety trouble my spirit and they have exacted a heavy toll on my health—heartburn, panic attacks, I.B.S, and headaches. Each new year seemed to bring a new symptom; I'd conquer one stress syndrome only to welcome another... instead of dealing with the heart of the matter, I was only putting bandages over the wounds. Rest and peace eluded me, but if God has given us His peace and calls us to rest in Him, it must be possible to do so. What then is the secret? How exactly does one *rest in Christ*? Over the past few months desperation has caused me to seek the heart of God concerning rest and peace and I believe that He has revealed to me three crucial factors pertaining to His rest and peace: prayer, His Presence and His Word. When we incorporate these three things into our lives we will indeed experience the peace of Christ, which surpasses all understanding.

Before we begin our study for today, please take a moment to pray and ask God to forgive you of any sin and fill you with His Holy Spirit and give you fresh insight into the Scriptures. Now please read Matthew 11:28-30

What invitation is given in verse 28?

We are called to *come* to Jesus. Your version of the Bible, like mine may miss the emphasis that should be placed on the word *come* as it is used in the original Greek. The word *come* transliterates as *deute*—an *imperative interjection*, which means "Come!" or "Come now!" An *imperative* is a command; it means that something that must be done, that it is crucial. An *interjection* interjects feeling or emotions into a sentence. Obviously Jesus feels very strongly about His people coming to Him to rest. When we are burdened and stressed let us obey Christ and come to Him immediately for rest and relief, because fretting causes harm (Psalm 37:8). Anxiety or peace is a choice we make.

Who is invited to come?

All those who labor and are heavy burdened. By definition, *those who labor* refers to those who are weary tired or exhausted from physical labor, bearing burdens or grief. These three descriptors cover the main types of weariness: physical, mental and spiritual. Thankfully, Jesus offers us rest from all three. *Burdened* refers to carrying a heavy load, the burdensome requirements of Mosaic Law, traditions and religious rites with the consciousness of sin. I am grateful that Jesus wants to relieve me of burdens that come because of everyday life, trials, troubles, my own poor choices and my sin.

What will be given to those who come?

If we will come to Christ when we are labored and burdened He will give us rest. Blessed rest. The word *rest* means to be refreshed, to cease from any movement in order to recover and regain strength. If you are *heavy laden*, how do you find rest? By dropping your burdens. Think of the blessed relief that comes when you make it into the house carrying bags of groceries, a purse and a child on each hip and you are finally able to set everything down. Jesus calls us to come to Him, into His Presence and set our burdens down at His feet. We are laden with things He never intended us to carry; burdens that we are not capable of managing while operating in our own strength...sin, guilt, shame, bitterness, worries, and overwhelming responsibilities. Once we drop our burdens at the cross, a great exchange happens. Please read verse 29 again.

According to this verse how else can we find rest?

By putting on His yoke. We exchange our yoke of anxiety for the yoke of Christ. A yoke is meant for two creatures. When we put on the yoke of Christ, Christ is harnessed to one side and we are harnessed the other. We now have access to the power and strength of Christ as we journey with Him. I have learned that farmers pair young oxen with mature oxen in a yoke so they can learn from the older oxen. The older oxen carry most of the load until the younger oxen become strong and mature. As Christians, this verse teaches that when we attach ourselves to Christ, He will lead and provide the strength we

need to accomplish the work He has given us therefore we are able to be at peace.

Glance back at verse 28 again.

What will be given to those who won't come?

There is no provision for those who won't come into His Presence.

Let's take a moment to consider what we've learned about rest and the peace of God from our study thus far. Please write a short summary in the space provided:

Now please turn to Philippians 4:6-7 and write these verses in the space below:

According to verses 6 and 7 what are we allowed to be anxious about?

Why shouldn't we be anxious for anything?

Because God is managing everything that concerns us. He has made ready the grace, strength and courage needed to overcome our trials and challenges. Not only shall we overcome them but also we shall be made better by them as God uses hardships to transform us into the image of Christ.

How do we banish anxiety from our lives (verse 6)?

When we pray, present our petitions to God and thank Him for what He will do, we banish our anxiety from our hearts and minds.

What will happen as a result (verse 7)?

The *peace of Christ* will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Repeat this process of praying, petitioning and thanking God as often as needed (more on this subject later). Now please read the next two verses, Philippians 4:8-9. These verses teach that in order to experience peace we must consider our hearts—what we are receiving and storing, and our minds—what we are meditating on. What is the first thing we are told to meditate on in verse 8? We are told to meditate on “whatever things are **true**,” (emphasis mine). When I go into my “stress and anxiety mode,” I leave truth behind and meditate on the worst-case scenario—the tiny new freckle on my arm becomes stage four cancer in seconds... my child’s runny nose turns into bacterial pneumonia... etc. Thankfully, God is patiently teaching me to redirect my mind to His truth and trust in Him. Even if any of those worst-case scenarios become fact, God will walk me through every step of that journey, strengthening me and providing His comfort and grace.

In regards to verse 8, during this present season of your life, what kind of thoughts do you need to focus on to experience God’s peace?

Now we will turn our attention to the Old Testament and learn another way we can experience the peace of God. Perhaps the most famous section of Old Testament Scripture is Psalm 23. As Christians we are very familiar with the beloved Psalm. Most of us can probably recite these beautiful verses from memory. Sometimes we tend to skim over well-loved portions of Scripture in the erroneous belief that we have already gleaned every possible bit of truth and wisdom from them. With this in mind, please ask God to open your eyes afresh to His infinite wisdom buried deep within His Holy Word. Please read Psalm 23.

How is God referred to in verse 1?

He is our shepherd. The word used for *shepherd* in the original language is *ra'ah*, which means, "to pasture, to feed, to tend, to rule, shepherd." The majority of the time this Hebrew word is used in the Bible it translates as *feed* or *graze*.

What does God make us do (verse 2)?

He makes us to lie down. Lying down refers to peaceful resting. When we follow God, He purposely provides for times of rest and peace as well as opportunities for service and ministry.

Where does God make us (His sheep) lie down?

In green pastures. *Green pastures* mean one thing to sheep—abundant nourishing food. As the Good Shepherd gives His sheep rest by providing them with nourishing food our Good Shepherd bids us to come and rest by spending time in what nourishes us—His Holy Word. The Word of God is our abundant green pasture. Jesus, the Bread of Life, the Living Bread, the manna from heaven refreshes and nourishes us as we feed upon His Word. In order to have the peace of Christ in our lives we must have the Word of God. The more time we spend in His word, the more peace and rest we shall have.

We have two choices concerning nourishment: the lush green pastures that God provides or the weedy thorny wastelands of the world. On what have you, have I been feeding today—novels, TV shows, movies, magazines of the world or sermons, devotions, Bible studies full of the nourishing truth of God's Word? When God feeds us, we shall not be in want for any good thing, including peace.

What happens when we spend time dining on the pastures of the Word of God (verse 3)?

He restores our souls. The Hebrew word for *restore* used in this verse transliterates as *shuwb*, which means, "to return, to go back, to refresh, to repair, to bring back, to repent. The word *restore* can refer to turning back to God. When we wander our own paths, they take us far from God; we become wounded by sin, bad decisions, and attacks of the enemy. God restores our souls by healing our wounds, forgiving our sins and leading us instead down paths of righteousness. Sin brings anxiety, apprehension and fear while righteousness leads to peace and rest.

Please glance over your work from today and recap what you have learned about living in the peace of God.

Now, please make a plan on how you will act on what you've learned.

As I mentioned earlier in this study, a season of stress and anxiety drove me to learn about the peace of Christ. I had read all the verses concerning God's peace but I wasn't experiencing it. I came to a point where I had to make a decision: I was either going to believe God for His peace or continue to destroy myself through anxiety and stress. I decided to literally take God at His Word and did the following:

- 1. "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy burdened":**
In addition to my regular morning Quiet Time at the end of the day, no matter how much work I still have to do, the work is put aside and I read my Bible, listen to a podcast, or read a Christian book and I rest in God. I also take rest breaks with God when I start to feel myself becoming anxious. Replace exhaustion with rest.
- 2. "Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything through prayer supplication and thanksgiving make your requests known to God."** Throughout the day, whenever I feel anxious, I take a moment to pray. I tell God my petition concerning the situation, then I ask Him to answer my prayer according to His will and I thank Him for His answer. After I

finish praying I claim His peace, make decisions based on faith not fear and I continue on with my day. I do this as often as I feel anxious. Replace worry with prayer.

- 3. "He makes me to rest in green pastures."** (Remember that *green pastures* refers to God's Holy Word) I write Scriptures on spiral-bound note-cards that refer to my present challenge. I carry these Scriptures wherever I go (sometimes down the hall to the copy machine) and I speak or pray them into my present challenges as often as needed. Replace vain imaginations with the Word of God.

These three practices, based on the truth of God's Word have made a huge difference in my life. My stress level has greatly diminished and I am living a more peaceful life. God has not called us to cower; He has called us to conquer. Just as anger is a decision or love is a decision, peace is a decision. We can continue to live in turmoil and stress or we can seek the Presence of God and live in His peace. I pray that you will seek His peace as well.

*"Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way.
The Lord be with you all."*

2 Thessalonians 3:16

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