

Peace Like a River

by David Posey

We are a people seeking peace. The popularity of a Thomas Kinkade painting – a cottage or a bridge or a gazebo in an exquisitely peaceful setting – is one piece of evidence. One look at the picture and we are transported into another world where nothing can trouble us and all is well. Perhaps your vision of peace comes from a quiet walk in the woods or standing on the banks of a river or lake or ocean or listening to soft music. Wherever our search might lead us, we all want peace.

We tend to look for peace in the wrong places though, sometimes literally. Travel agencies profit from the search as people seek the perfect vacation, to "get away from it all." Others seek peace in reading or in watching TV or movies as less expensive ways to "escape" everyday problems or the drudgery of life. Still others are so torn up inside that they'll use liquor or drugs for the ultimate "escape." Finding no real peace, many slip into a deep depression; and some even commit suicide, ignorantly, and sadly, hurling themselves into an eternal abyss of conflict and discord.

Even as we seek peace in things and places, we know deep down that peace is not really dependent on external factors. Even if a Kinkade painting came to life and became my home, it would be meaningless if my marriage was a wreck, or my kids were in trouble, or my conscience was bothering me. We know all too well that the peace that comes through external means is destroyed by external means. The person sitting in one of those Kinkade gazebos can contract a melanoma cancer just like a person in the city. And then what becomes of his "peace"?

We're not going to find any true, lasting peace in the things of the world. It's just not there. But, oddly enough, the real secret to peace is found on every Kinkade painting. Near where he signs his name, Mr. Kinkade always puts "John 3:16." The familiar text reads: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here's the clue to real, lasting peace.

A group of us sang a hymn recently that goes like this: "Peace like a river, flows through my soul...I've been forgiven, cleansed and made whole...Peace gently flowing, sweet and divine, gives the assurance, Jesus is mine..." There is the only path to pure peace: Jesus, the "only begotten Son." When we are right with God, we are right with everything else. It doesn't matter what kind of house we live in, or how it is "decked out." It doesn't matter where we spend our vacations because they are for relaxation and recreation, not an attempt to "get away from it all"; movies, TV and music are for entertainment, not for "escape." And if Jesus is in our heart and we value the peace He gives, we will choose for our entertainment those programs that are most conducive to keeping Him there. Choosing fare that is base and vulgar will only shake our peace,

because it will assault the conscience – unless, God forbid, our conscience becomes "seared" (1 Tim. 4:2).

Peace is a product of being right with God. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7). This peace cannot be explained in human terms, because it comes from God. Yet, we know it when we have it. And when we have it, conflict and stress ("anxiety") tend to fade. We may still be under job pressure or face problems with our children or even have "deep concern" for the church (cf. 2 Cor. 11:28). But it doesn't rock you deep down. Deep down, you know the "peace that passes understanding."

Do you have this peace? Is your soul like a gently flowing stream, or a walk in the woods or a quiet cottage in an English village? Would you like to get there? Here's how:

1. If you've never been baptized, do it now. Until you do, your sins will come before you night and day and trouble your heart (Psa. 32:3-4). In baptism, you appeal to God for a clear conscience and He grants it when you obey Him (1 Pet. 3:21).

2. As a child of God, there may still be some habitual sins that nag you. You must determine to put them away, once and for all. You make a choice here between the "passing pleasures of sin" (Hb. 11:25) or the "peace that passes understanding." It's your choice. God has promised to forgive you if you will confess (1 Jn. 1:9). Do it now!

3. If your lack of peace comes from work- or family- related issues, try to improve your perspective. Think about the worst thing that can happen in your job, family, etc. Get fired? Have no money? Kids get in trouble? These are serious matters, but not soul-destroying. Nothing can take your salvation away. And, no matter what happens, God will see that you eat and have clothing and shelter (Mt. 6:33). And the "worst" will probably never happen, especially if you're praying constantly for wisdom, which God gives "liberally and without reproach" (Jas. 1:5).

4. Examine your ego. Some of us are not as concerned about "going broke" or even losing our kids to the world as we are about people knowing about it! We are much too concerned about how we appear in other peoples' eyes. We'll never have peace as long as we entertain the false notion that our acceptance with God is dependant upon our approval of others. "For if we live, we live to the Lord; if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:8). Ultimately, it makes no difference what other people think, as long as we are doing the right thing. Jesus only did the right thing and was crucified.

5. If we want peace, we must get in the dual habit of prayer and study, along with meditation. I know of nothing that is more peace-inducing than the regular practice of these disciplines. A person who is rarely at peace is probably not praying and studying on a regular basis. So, set aside some quiet time and get in touch with God, who "gave

His only begotten Son" and if He "did not spare His son, but delivered Him up for all, will He not freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

Brother or sister in Christ, "in all these things, you are more than conquerors through Him who loved us"! (Rom. 8:37). Through Him, you can conquer anxiety, stress and inner conflict. Believe it, and pray.