



Leadership from the Place of Perfect Peace

The third in a series of nine leadership devotionals based on the fruit of the Spirit

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Scripture Passages

“Let me hear what God the Lord will speak; for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.” (Psalm 85:8-10)

“On that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah... Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace – in peace because they trust in you.” (Isaiah 26:1-3)

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

“I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” (John 16:33).

Theme: Leading from the place of perfect peace

Steadfast love and faithfulness, righteousness and peace; God’s glory and His peace shining once again in their land - that is what the Jewish people longed for on their return to Jerusalem after spending 70 years in captivity in Babylon, the occasion on which Psalm 85 was most likely written.¹ As had happened many times before and would happen many times again, the nation had turned its back on the God Who had always provided for them, protected them, and loved them. And, as part of the cycle of rebellion, punishment,

¹ Matthew Henry’s Commentary in One Volume, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1961) 669.

repentance, and restoration that Israel often initiated, God allowed them to feel the painful effect of their stubborn pursuit of happiness apart from Him. This time, the consequence of their sin (covenant-keeping, the Sabbath years and idolatry; see Leviticus 25:1-7, 26:27-35; 2 Chronicles 36:14-21²) was 70 years of captivity in a foreign land, Babylon. In captivity, they longed for the peace that was theirs when they followed God's laws and lived in fellowship with Him by obeying by His word. Now the Jews faced increasing uncertainty and confusion about the basic tenets of their faith including religious customs and observance of ceremonial laws as their captors forced them to worship idols (see Daniel 3:4-7) and as the influence of the pagan lifestyles, including the consumption of foods prohibited by the Law (see Daniel 1:5, 8), spread throughout the people. Their focus on God now diverted to many other gods and rituals, they lost the inner peace they had once enjoyed, the peace that had come from simple obedience to God's will and direction.³

But, amid the turmoil of captivity, four men emerge whose lives demonstrate that peace is possible even in the most difficult and oppressive conditions. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (re-named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abegnego by their captor, Nebukadnezer) remained peaceful throughout the pressures, threats, and uncertainties of that captivity, even when three of them were thrown into a furnace and Daniel was thrown into the lions' den. How was it that these four men were able to refuse to be fearful or weak and sustain such peace? The answer seems to be found in Isaiah 26:3.

Like the psalmist, Isaiah wrote of a time when Israel would be freed from her oppression, a time when peace would come upon the nation Israel once again and upon each one who trusted in God. Throughout his book, Isaiah writes of Israel's (and all of mankind's) hope for salvation, not just from human enemies, but from her sin nature as well. He points to Christ as the One who would finally bring that peace, but only to those "of steadfast mind" who have placed their trust in God; people like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abegnego. For these men, the mind, the framework on which our thoughts are created, including the imagination, literally leans on and takes hold of the things of God, therein rendering it steadfast.

As Isaiah teaches and Daniel and his friends demonstrated, it is only in this state of mind that *shalom* (peace) is found. Why? Because in the Old Testament, *shalom* refers to a wholeness, a soundness of mind and body, a state of well-being that is the result of righteousness as the Psalmist reveals (Psalm 85:10). *Shalom* is more than the absence of outward strife with others, it is an inward state of contentment that grows out of freedom from guilt that comes from righteousness, a righteousness that cannot be attained outside of a personal relationship with God. In fact, in Judges 6:24 we learn that "The LORD is peace" and realize that *shalom* peace is *only* to be found *in* His righteousness as Isaiah proclaims, "The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever" (Isaiah 32:17).

² The New International Study Bible, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1985) 1300.

³ J. I. Packer and M.C. Tenney, eds., Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson 1980) 500-502.

In the Old Testament, man was considered by God to be righteous by his intentional faith in God and promised Savior. Like Abraham (see Genesis 15:6), Daniel's inward faith was also counted as righteousness and was manifest through outward actions (see Daniel 9:23). And, in this right relationship with God, this righteous man experienced and manifested *shalom* peace.

In the New Testament, justification comes by intentional faith in Jesus, resulting in peace with God (Romans 5:1). Imparting this peace to all who believe was so important that shortly before His death, Jesus actually gave His peace to his disciples. In John 14:27 we read that His desire was for His followers to live in true peace even though this world would give them many things to fear. He exhorted them to refuse fear and anxiety, "Let not your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid" (v 27b), facing trouble securely from within the fortress of His *shalom* peace dwelling in them, instead. Jesus wanted them to possess the wholeness brought by peace that does not depend on feelings or circumstances but only on the sure knowledge of Him, lived out in relationship with Him and with others. Jesus' *shalom* peace, rooted in love for His Father and borne of His perfect relationship with Him, was characterized by composure, quiet confidence, courage and single-mindedness throughout His ministry and would soon be exemplified for the final time as He surrendered His life. Knowing the hardships His apostles and all believers would face in this world, He wanted to impart this *shalom* peace to them so that they would not stumble (see John 16:1), so that they could see beyond the hostility of this world to understand that there is nothing this world could do to them, no circumstance they would face that was not already defeated by His death and resurrection. His peace "offers relief from anxiety, threat, self-glory, and the need for self-affirmation. It offers community rather than isolation, cooperation rather than competition, productivity rather than destruction, enjoyment rather than endless striving, and a new life which can look forward to God's future."⁴ This is the same peace He gave to His apostles and still gives to His followers today.

But like salvation, Jesus' peace is a gift that must first be accepted before it can be enjoyed, and acceptance of something new often requires a *metanoia*, or complete change of mind that produces a change of heart, as well. In this case, when Jesus first appeared to his disciples after the resurrection, He found that their minds were not still steadfast in their knowledge of Him for they were still fearful (John 20:19). Although He had already given them His peace, they did not know how to accept and appropriate that gift so that their minds would be transformed, altering their perception of and reactions to their circumstances based on a new and vibrant God-centered reality.

As a result, we see the apostles locked in the upper room, continuing to operate out of their "emotional programs for happiness," their instinctual need for survival/security, affection/esteem, and power/control (see John 20:19, 26). These needs, and not the *shalom* peace Jesus had given them before His death, determined which thoughts, feelings, and behaviors would direct their lives. The apostles' perception that they had lost

⁴ Richard Jeske, "John 14:27 and 16:33." *Interpretation* 38 (1984):410 2 Jan. 2007 First Search, ATLA Religion.

everything, that Christ was, in fact, dead, that their own deaths were imminent because of their affiliation with Him, triggered at least two of Keating's "afflictive emotions," fear and discouragement.⁵ These two, along with anger, encompass other emotions such as pride, vanity, envy, gluttony, greed, lust, and apathy, are triggered when emotional programs for happiness are frustrated in some way; when we cannot get what we think we should have or when we cannot avoid something we think we ought to escape.

It's important to think about that. When things don't go the way you've planned, do you get angry, fearful, or discouraged? What happens when you are hurt by others and can't avoid the pain? Or, if you don't receive the recognition you think you deserve or achieve the status you desire? Which of the three afflictive emotions rears up then? Are you still aware of Christ's peace within? Of God's providence over every situation you face? Or like the Israelites, do you believe you have to make your own fortune and create your own happiness?

When we, like the apostles, live from the "false self," our emotional programs for happiness are front and center on the stage and our emotions *will* cause us to react. Remembering that our human condition leads us on a search for happiness apart from God, we can easily succumb to the belief that we alone will secure peace by satisfying our goals. The New Testament author James lays it out for us rather clearly. He wrote, "Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts" (James 4:1-2). The false self and our emotional programs for happiness, if left undisciplined, *will* affect our thought-life and our actions, hindering our relationship with Christ and supplanting the peace He offers.

The accounts of Daniel, Shadrach, Mesach, and Abednego provide an important contrast and help us see the life-saving affects of taking hold of the things of God in our minds, placing Him firmly at the center of our lives. These men consciously chose to fix their minds on His will, wisdom, and sovereignty over their lives, not on those things they might have instinctively claimed as their "right"; freedom and life, for example! So when they were taken into captivity and ultimately when it appeared that they could not avoid death, their emotional programs for happiness were not offended and they were not given over to fear or anger. Their afflictive emotions remained dormant, kept in check by the steadfastness of their minds and all of these men remained peaceful even at the moment of their apparent deaths.

And this peace is still sought after today, as evidenced by its appearance on the list of desirable "core spiritual values" at work. If ever there was a place where the foundational elements of the false self ("what I have, what I do, and what others think of me") are emphasized, it is at work. We are constantly evaluated on the basis of the education we have, the car we drive or clothes we wear, what functional role we play, what we contribute to the bottom line, what our peers, bosses, employees, vendors, customers think of us and tell us we should

⁵ Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation*, (New York: Continuum 2003) 144.

be, until we believe those things define *who* we are when in fact, those things draw our minds away from the truth of who we really are and far from God's providence over every aspect of our lives.

The false belief that we have to work for symbols of worldly success inhibits our willingness and ability to take risks or break from "social norms when it is necessary to follow Jesus." We too easily forget that we are supposed to work hard, using the gifts God has given us for HIS glory, not our own prosperity. In the process, we may become successful in the world's eyes, but that success is only a by-product of following God's call on our lives – it must never be the end unto itself.⁶ When it is, we unwittingly become slaves to the false-self, allowing our emotional programs for happiness to drive us toward more human "success" and away from Christ's peace. As a result, our workplaces become battlegrounds that breed hostility, rebellion, dishonest practices and mistrust, all of which work against creativity, productivity and profitability. In the 21st century when knowledge creation and globalization of ideas and products are crucial elements of daily organizational life, restoring peace to the workplace seems a critical pathway toward cultivating organizational health.

The French Roman Catholic theologian and Arch-Bishop François Fénelon wrote about simplicity and obedience (the willing surrender of the will to God) as the source of lasting peace. If leaders, like Jesus, are willing to simplify their lives and minds by ordering them around God and are willing to surrender their will to His, peace *will* flow out into their workplaces, calming fears and diffusing many hostilities, paving the way to the mutual trust, active empathy, help, acceptance, and courage necessary for healthy, fruitful organizations.⁷

Leadership and Organizational Development Concept

The work environment

Wisdom of the Ages

"Cultivate peace; be deaf to your too prolific imagination; its great activity not only injures the health of your body, but introduces aridity into your soul. You consume yourself to no purpose; peace and interior sweetness are destroyed by your restlessness. Think you God can speak in those soft and tender accents that melt the soul, in the midst of such a tumult as you excite by your incessant hurry of thought? Be quiet, and He will soon be heard."~ François Fénelon.

Spiritual Progress

Letter V: Peace lies in simplicity and obedience

⁶ Kent Keith, *Jesus Did it Anyway: The Paradoxical Commandments for Christians*. (New York: Berkley 2005) 16-17.

⁷ Georg Von Krogh, Kazuo Ichijo and Ikujiro Nonaka, *Enabling Knowledge Creation: How to Unlock the Mystery of Tacit Knowledge and Release the Power of Innovation*. (New York: Oxford 2000) 49-54.

Example of the Devotional

Stacy was a new sales manager at Lithoa, a large commercial printing organization that was a fierce competitor in the market. Her personality and personal goals were well-suited to this fast-paced environment, and she soon earned the reputation of running the most productive sales team in the organization. The top executives all knew her by name and considered her results to be an example for the other managers, believing that in time, she would most likely become the vice president of sales.

But, within her sales team, Stacy was known for her aggressive and demanding style. She punished mistakes and lost sales publicly, creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. She was relentless in her focus on goals and achievement, regardless of the methods used to gain business. “Pulling rank,” taking over large, high profile accounts from her sales reps, was a common practice Stacy used to stay “on top of the important clients that could not be entrusted” to others. She expected her followers to promise anything to a client in order to obtain a contract, even if the desired turn-around dates would be impossible to achieve. “That,” she said, “is not our problem. The guys on the floor will just have to figure out how to make the deadlines. You just make the sales.” If a deadline was missed, she would go to the foreman and complain about his lazy workers or his lack of skill in scheduling jobs.

Soon the sales reps who had once enjoyed a collaborative relationship with the press operators would no longer associate with the men and women who actually produced the work as the tension within the sales team spilled over into those relationships. Arrogant and aloof, Stacy didn’t seem to mind the growing discord, and she continued to drive her team harder. As the bitterness spread, Stacy’s team noticed that their jobs were getting bumped from production so jobs from other teams could take precedence. Stacy flew into action, asserting her power as leader of the most productive team to get the other sales managers and foreman punished for “sabotaging” her team.

She grew intolerant of other sales managers or reps she considered less motivated than she was, which included almost everyone. When the quarterly bonus checks were issued, Stacy walked by each rep’s desk, tossed their envelope at them and commented that they were lucky she didn’t set the bonus structure because this group certainly wouldn’t get anything. The sales they made were “nothing special” and were “part of your job.”

It didn’t take long before many of her employees started appealing to other sales managers for help. They liked the company and wanted to stay, but couldn’t endure Stacy’s divisive, demeaning ways. Several were granted transfers and others left to work at Lithoa’s biggest competitor, confirming Stacy’s beliefs that these people didn’t belong on her team in the first place. The executives saw it differently, however, and fired Stacy.

Application of the Devotional

How quickly fear, anger, and bitterness spread. Stacy's lack of personal peace, her lack of inner satisfaction and focus on something larger than herself, quickly infected her sales team, the production workers, and eventually the entire organization. Unable to be at peace within herself, always striving for more sales and notoriety, she was unable to create and maintain a peaceful, collaborative environment for others. The possible explanations for Stacy's dominant demeanor are many, including fear of failure, an exaggerated sense of self-worth, a deflated self-image or even self loathing are less important than their deleterious effects; one person, driven by the need for power, approval, accomplishment and/or success, can dismantle an otherwise viable unit like a virus passed from one person to another that soon causes an epidemic.

And, what about the executives? How could they not have heard or seen the disharmony that was brewing? As the leaders of leaders, they were responsible for everything that happened in their organization, including Stacy's development. It was incumbent on them to teach her how to work with people, not against them, by modeling peace. Instead, they ignored the hostility she spread until valuable employees started transferring or leaving. In the end, everyone lost because of one leader who didn't understand or appreciate the power of a peaceful workplace.

Practical Exercises

Take time to reflect on your reasons for being a leader. Do you lead because you believe it is God's calling on your life right now or out of financial need, ego gratification, or career-goals? Does His peace allow you to make unpopular but moral decisions? If you didn't get the next promotion or bonus, would you still rest secure and be content inside?

Reflecting on the group you lead, would an outsider coming in for the first time feel a sense of peace in the midst of the activity? Are the relationships between your followers and others in the organization collaborative or fiercely competitive? How often do they hear you speak about and model harmonious and collaborative behavior? Does your sense of inner peace spill out to others? Consider speaking openly with your followers as a group and individually about the current environment and seek to understand their level of peace versus fear and anxiety.

From the examples we have seen in Scripture, peace needs to be cultivated through continually focusing our minds on Jesus. If you want to remain aware of His peace in every aspect of your life and leadership, the spiritual discipline of prayer may be a practice that trains your mind on Him. If we learn to pray continually as Paul exhorted (see Ephesians 6:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Colossians 4:2 and 1 Timothy 2:1), our minds will be filled with the things of God, not of men, and we will rest in His peace, regardless our circumstances or ambitions. His will and direction for our lives will become more easily discerned, enabling us to simply obey

His call free from guilt and doubt and worry, and our followers will be blessed by His peace flowing out from within us.

Suggested Further Reading

The Arbinger Institute. Leadership and Self-Deception: Getting Out of the Box. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2002.

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