

I Start On Monday

By

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Introduction

Recently I found out that a friend of mine had “fallen victim” to the economy, i.e., his job had been outsourced to India and he was laid off. The timing couldn’t have been worse because the whole country was in the midst of the deepest recession since the Great Depression. This made finding another job almost impossible. Even though he received a severance package, household finances were tight. After several months, the severance ran out and tensions within the household increased. Both he and his wife began experiencing the stress and frustration that millions of families faced across the country.

When he and I would talk, I would try to be as encouraging as possible. I would occasionally ask how his wife was handling the situation and he would reply, “It’s tough.” He didn’t go into details, but I knew that there was a lot behind those two words. He and I would joke that the only thing his wife wanted to hear from him was, “Honey, I start on Monday.” “Good morning”, “I like your hair”, and even “I love you” didn’t mean as much as, “I start on Monday”.

This lesson is designed to help those who are dealing with stressful situations and need words of encouragement. During tough times we search for the “tangible” solution that will give us peace and “make life better”. But we can’t control life enough to guarantee “smooth sailing” or “little” bumps on our life’s journey. Our long term peace has to rest in the “intangible” nature of God. Just as the rain has the power to make seeds bud and grow that provide food for our bodies, God’s word is the power behind every need we have and is our true source of peace.

Scriptures Used In This Lesson

Romans 5:1 – 5

Galatians 5:22 – 23

Hebrews 11:32 – 39

Psalms 23

Romans 8:28 – 39

Joshua 1:1 – 9

It's All About Relationship

The first step to experiencing long term peace through any trial is to have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. When you accept Christ as your Savior and Lord, you become joined with Him; the same Spirit dwells in both of you, i.e., the Holy Spirit. Read Romans 5:1 – 5.

The word “peace” in verse 1, comes from the Greek word “eirene”, which comes from the root word “eiro” which means to join.

“Eirene” means:

1. a state of national tranquility
 - a) exemption from the rage and havoc of war
2. peace between individuals, i.e. harmony, concord
3. *security, safety, prosperity, felicity, (because peace and harmony make and keep things safe and prosperous)*
4. of the Messiah's peace
 - a) the way that leads to peace (salvation)
5. of Christianity, the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is
6. the blessed state of devout and upright men after death

I want to focus on #3 of the definition above. Even in the midst of family tensions, harassing bill collectors, and strained relations, we have security, safety, and prosperity. We even have *felicity*, which is the quality or state of being happy. Now you may be asking, “How in the world can I feel secure or happy, when I’m in the middle of my mess?” It’s not a matter of *feeling*, it’s a matter of *knowing* to Whom you are joined. *The first step to true long term peace comes from being joined to God (through Christ, by the Holy Spirit).* As we grow in the knowledge of Him and His ways, peace grows, a sense of security rises, and a sense of contentment is cultivated. Our circumstances may or may not change exactly as we desire, but our sense of peace begins to be more dependent on Him and not our circumstances. This is how we rise above our circumstances.

Key Point: Long term peace through any trial begins with a personal relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Key Point: Long term peace is not a matter of feeling, but a matter of knowing to Whom you are joined.

Key Point: Our sense of peace grows as we *cultivate* our relationship with God.

Like any relationship, our relationship with God has to be “cultivated” in order for us to experience His peace. Two definitions for “cultivate” are:

- To foster the growth of
- To improve by labor, care or study

The idea is that you have to put effort into the relationship in order to receive the benefits of that relationship. Farmers know that dropping a seed on top of hard dry ground won't produce a large harvest of crops. The ground has to be plowed, fertilized, planted, and watered before there can be a big harvest. The crops have to be freed from weeds throughout the growing season. In the same way, we must cultivate our relationship with God before we can experience the "fruit" of that relationship. The "fruit" of that relationship can be found in Galatians 5:22 – 23.

How much would it be worth to you to experience the following during your current trial?

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self control

As the commercial says, "Priceless".

How much effort do you put into cultivating your relationship with God? Do you make time for Him on a daily basis? Why or why not? If you read the Bible, do you meditate on what you read? Why or why not? Do you take time to stop and pray throughout the day? Why or why not? Do you show "Christ-like" love to others on a regular basis or are you focused on yourself? Why or why not? Christ-like love can be shown in the form of the "fruit of the Spirit" in our conduct or in some form of ministry.

In the questions above, I tried to outline the steps needed to "cultivate" our relationship with our Lord. We need to:

- Make time for Him on a daily basis. The time needs to be uninterrupted time, as free from distractions as possible.
- Read His Word on a daily basis. The volume read is not as important as the practice of daily reading. Sometimes I'll read several chapters at a time. Other times I will read just a couple of verses. The amount I read varies based on the next point below.
- Meditate on what you've read. When I meditate on what I've read, I think about how the people in the scriptures felt, or how it applies to my life, or the meaning of the words I've read. There have been times during my meditation that I will receive insight, direction or an answer to a problem I had that was not necessarily related to story I had read. Meditation puts me "in tune" with God. It's like dialing in on the right "station" so I can hear what He has to say.

- Pray throughout the day. Taking 30 second intervals to pray throughout the day helps keep you connected to Him, in the right mindset for making decisions and interacting with people, and allows you to *respond* to situations instead of *reacting* to them.
- Do something for someone else. When we help someone else, we are showing the “love of Christ”. Many times, as we meet the need of others, God meets our needs.

Key Point: Many times, God meets our needs as we meet the need of others.

God Is In Control

At one time in my life, the thought of God being in control was one of the hardest concepts for me to grasp or accept. My reasoning was as follows:

If God is in control, and He loves me, why is He allowing me to go through all this mess?

Read Hebrews 11:32 – 39. The first part talks about all the “good” things that happened to people who remained faithful to God; they had positive outcomes to their situations. The second part talks about people who, on the surface, had “negative” outcomes to their situations. But read the first part of verse 38. It says that, “...the world was not worthy of them...” This part of the verse made me stop and think. What I realized is that it means a lot to God when we trust Him in the midst of a “mess” or “bad” outcome. It means a lot to Him if we trust Him regardless of the outcome. I also realized that having faith in God in the midst of a “mess” means surrendering the outcome completely to Him. We should do what we can, such as study, pay our bills, cut back our spending, tell the truth, do our best at work, etc., depending on the situation, but we leave the outcome to Him.

This is hard. In the midst of a “mess” we have an outcome in mind, one we want desperately. To trust God, knowing that there is the possibility that things may not turn out like we’d wish, is difficult. The only way we can trust is for us to surrender. This is why it’s important for us to remember (and document) what God has done for us in the past. If we have a journal that we can review, our faith in Him will be made stronger with each line we read. We will realize that sometimes God delivers us *from* a mess, other times He delivers us *through* a mess. Read Psalm 23, in particular verse 4. The writer talks about walking “through the valley of the shadow of death...” Not “around”, “near” or “close to” the valley, but “through” the valley. Our faith, knowledge, and understanding of God grow the most during times of difficulty as opposed to times of ease, comfort and pleasure.

God *is* in control. He has *all* power. *All* things were made *by* Him and *for* Him. Our assurance or hope in the midst of a mess is founded in our relationship with Him. Regardless of the outcome, we will never be separated from His love.

Read Romans 8:28 – 39. There are many good points to remember in this passage:

- All things work for the good of those who love Him and who have been called according to His purpose. Our love for God is shown through our faith and obedience (not just our feelings).
- We are being conformed to the likeness of Christ. The word “conformed” comes from a Greek word “symmorphos” which:

- *describes what is the essence in character and thus complete or durable, not merely a form or outline*
- So our “mess” is a vehicle God uses to make us more like Christ.
- If God is for us, who can be against us?
- Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ. We are always loved by God, regardless of the circumstances.

Key Point: It means a lot to God if we trust Him regardless of the outcome.

Key Point: Having faith in God in the midst of a “mess” means surrendering the outcome completely to Him. We do our part, but leave the consequences to Him.

Key Point: We need to keep a journal of the things God does for us or how He interacts in our lives. This journal will be a source of encouragement during times of trials.

Key Point: Sometimes God delivers us *from* a mess, other times He delivers us *through* a mess.

Key Point: Our faith grows the most during difficult times.

So to directly answer the original question, “Why is God allowing you to go through a mess when He is in control?”, there could be many reasons, i.e., to test your faith, you were disobedient, you didn’t ask God first before you took a step, you tried to please others, your deliverance will come over time, etc. A more important question is, “How will you respond to God through this mess? Will you remain faithful, or will you walk away from Him?”

Are you ready to walk away from Him? If so, why? List all the reasons. Where will you go instead? Will it give you the deep-seated peace that only He can give? Will your solution last? What will be the long term costs for going your own way? Are you ready to pay that price? Are you sure?

He Is With Us

A study of the scriptures reveals that one of the most comforting things a Christian can know when they are facing a trial is that God is with them. Whenever God said that He was with someone, at least two characteristic were also evident: His faithfulness and His power.

Read Joshua 1:1 – 9. God speaks to Joshua after the death of Moses. Joshua has been chosen to lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land after 40 years of wandering in the desert. As you read verses 1 – 5, several things are evident:

- God was the one who gave them the land.
- The land God gave them was not a small restricted plot, but a large expanse extending for thousands of square miles.
- With God with them, no one would be able to stand against the Israelites
- Just as God was with Moses and demonstrated His supreme power, He would be with Joshua.

- He would not leave them nor forsake them.

We know from reading the rest of the book of Joshua, that Israel did indeed take possession of the land and God did demonstrate His faithfulness and power.

What does this mean to you in the midst of your mess? As a Christian, God is always with you...even in a more intimate way than He was with Joshua; He dwells *inside* you through the Holy Spirit. And since God's character does not change, He will remain faithful to you and demonstrate His power. How will He demonstrate His power? Probably in ways you haven't thought of...just like He did for Joshua and the Israelites. You will experience internal peace by knowing that He is with you...always, and will never, ever leave you or forsake you.

Now what's the key to making this work? Read verses Joshua 1:6 – 9. First of all in verse 6, God give Joshua a command, not a suggestion. The idea is that we must be obedient to what God is instructing us to do. The second idea is that sometimes it takes courage to be delivered *through* a mess. Courage is sometimes a decision to move forward when our feelings tell us to retreat. Knowing that the one who created all things dwells inside you, makes moving forward in courage and faith much easier.

The next crucial point is that we must not only read the word of God, but *meditate* on it. The word "meditate" comes from a word that means to:

- meditate, speak, imagine, utter, devise, plot

God's word has to be an integral and active part of our lives...throughout each day. *Reading a verse once in a while will not be sufficient.* Not meditating on the Word is like going into battle with a stick, when your opponent has guns, tanks, mortars, and bazookas. You'll likely get "blown away" by your situation. But to have victory over your situation, you have to have the word of God deep in your heart and mind. Meditating on the Word:

- Builds the relationship between you and God
- Opens your mind and heart to receive specific instructions
- Supernaturally strengthens you
- Supernaturally provides you with peace
- Provides you knowledge and wisdom
- Glorifies God

So why wouldn't you want to meditate on God's word daily?

Remember, He is more than "with us", He dwells *inside* of us. He can't get any more closer than that. We need to be cognizant (aware) of this fact and do our part: be obedient and meditate on His word.

Key Point: God dwells inside every believer by the Holy Spirit.

Key Point: God's character never changes.

Key Point: Two characteristics we can depend on are His faithfulness and power to work in our lives.

Key Point: Meditating on the Word of God is crucial to our victory.

What keeps us from reading God's word daily? What keeps us from meditating on what we've read? Name some obstacles and then come up with ways to overcome each obstacle.

Summary

Sometimes during trials and tribulations we look for a specific solution to give us peace. If we are unemployed, we feel that our peace can only come from the phrase, "I start on Monday." But God has provided a way for us to have peace in spite of our circumstances. It starts with a personal relationship with Him. In that relationship, we will find everything we need to be delivered *from* our trial or *through* our trial. The key is that we not only have to establish the relationship, but to *cultivate* it. So make a decision to cultivate your personal relationship with God by not only praying and reading His word, but by meditating on what you've read. If you do, then your joy can truly "start on Monday".