

Reclaiming the Peace of God and Jesus Joy Amidst COVID-19

The stay-at-home mandates required by the COVID-19 crisis may make us feel as if the whole world or planet Earth has come to a standstill. With worry about paying bills, keeping a roof over our heads, and food on our families' tables, some are cloaked in severe stress, anxiety, and even depression. The rhythms and routines of everyday life have been suddenly and completely toppled, with no definite end in sight. We are in an age of a new normal which we still don't want to accept. So in order to bring back the peace of God and Jesus' Joy into our lives we must remember and practice His word, for Philippians 4:6-7 proclaims, "...Pray about everything; tell God your needs...If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus," (TLB).

Sometimes it is in your most difficult circumstances that you can see the hand of God most clearly. You might say how can this be? When you remember to begin every day and end every day with His purpose. Because as believers in God, you know that there is not a detail that escapes His eye nor a trial of yours that does not touch His heart or a single experience that you go through that is beyond His compassion. Let us explore some ways in which you can keep your minds stayed on God, on His purpose for your lives, and not dwell on your circumstance through developing a daily routine:

1) Take time to focus on Self-Care—both mentally and physically (3 John 1:2, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers," [NKJV])—this will not only help you stay healthy. It will also make it easier to maintain an optimistic attitude and stick to a regular routine. When working or studying from home on a regular basis, a key first step to staying productive is to act as if you were still heading out for a typical day. Meaning resist the temptation to stay in your pajamas all day. Rather, get up read your Bible, pray, shower, and dress. That means resist the temptation to lounge in your bed clothes all day and binge on junk food. Instead, get up at your usual time, take a shower, and dress in everyday clothes for the length of your work or study day. Call friends, family, and seniors or others you have not spoken to in a while to check on them and limit your time spent watching television and/or the news on the radio.

2) Establish a daily routine (Proverbs 13:16a, "A wise man thinks ahead;" (TLB)—it can be difficult to distinguish between work, school, and personal time, especially when you have children or youth in the home. You may find yourself waiting a little too long to start your work. Or you may work too much on a particular project and lose time for another project or miss taking a break or eating a meal. As a solution, either the night before or in the morning (after you have prayed, read your Bible, shower, and get dressed), outline your goals and priorities for the day. Once you have written down your goals, make a schedule for the day that will enable you to achieve those goals. The schedule should include blocks of time dedicated to certain tasks. Do not forget to include time with God through His word, prayer time, and meditation, then schedule time for meals, relaxation, and study breaks as well. Once you have created your schedule, be sure to stick to it as much as possible.

3) If you do not Live Alone: Start each day with a Family Meeting (Proverbs 21:5a, "The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty...")—coordinate schedules to ensure that you have access to the things you need to get your work done; thereby avoiding potential conflicts. A daily meeting during the breakfast meal is a great time to share plans for the day and manage everyone's expectations. For instance, maybe both you and your spouse or house mate are working from home. You can identify times when each of you can use Wi-Fi, the home office, or the TV in a common area. If you have children at home, incorporate their schedules into the family meeting as well. Further, this will help ensure you have the quiet time you need while providing structure for your children. This will allow all to be clear when they should be reading or doing schoolwork, handling household chores, enjoying screen time, or playing.

In addition, the children will be aware when you will be available to read or play with them or help them with their schoolwork. **Doing** this will start everyone's day on a constructive note.

4) Create a Work Place within Your Home (1 Corinthians 14:40, "But all things should be done decently and in order." [NKJV])—if you can, establish a home office where you can "go to work," just as if you were heading to the office or a coffee/tea shop. In addition to being quiet and commotion-free, this committed space helps to form structure and rhythm that can be crucial for remaining productive.

5) Quash Interruptions; stay focused (Proverbs 4:25, "Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you." [NKJV])—The home offers ample opportunity for interruptions and each distraction is an opportunity for procrastination that could undermine your productivity. Some interruptions are, unfortunately, unavoidable. Children are bound to disrupt with questions and requests. Attempt to address the children's concerns as quickly as possible with gentle regard and with patience; then return your attention to work. Other disruptive situations might require self-discipline to avoid. As you create your at-home work or study routine, think about the occurrences and temptations around you. Do your best to remove them from your workspace.

6) Refrain from buying what you want instead of what you need (Proverbs 27:12a, "A prudent man sees evil and hides himself and avoids it," [Amplified Version])—in this time of crisis, some might spend money unwisely thinking that it really doesn't matter; but, remember we are to be good stewards of all God provides us with. We are to spend responsibly, pay our tithes, and help those in need (Luke 12:15). Ask yourself the question: is this a need or a want?

7) Think on What is Good, True, and Pure (Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble...whatever things are pure...if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things." [NKJV])—the single biggest thing you can do to stay focused and productive at home is to maintain an optimistic attitude. Unfortunately, when every news report heralds the worst-case situation, that can also be the greatest obstacle to an optimistic attitude! So what can you do to stay at peace and keep your joy through the pressures of dealing with the COVID-19 crisis?

- Limit exposure to daily news: This will go a long way toward helping you be mindful about staying optimistic. For in Philippians 4:8, we are reminded to think on what is true, noble, pure, and praiseworthy.
- Allow and accept your feelings: Even as your feelings/emotions change from moment to moment, hour to hour, and day to day consciously accept them and if negative, stop, and intentionally write them down and turn each one into the affirmative. For example, the thought comes, "This COVID-19 crisis is getting worst" stop and write the thought down and then rewrite it into an affirmative statement, "The Bible says, This situation too shall pass!". For Matthew 24:35 reminds us that "Heaven and earth shall pass away" but the word of God remains the same. Know that God is the same, yesterday, today, and forever—so we can trust in Him knowing that to everything there is a season. So, trust in God and lean not unto your own understanding and in all your ways acknowledge Him (know Him through an intimate relationship) and He will direct your path, (Proverbs 3:5-6). Pin pertinent and specific Scriptures on your special wall, mirror, on the refrigerator, or your desk and read them periodically throughout the day to keep you focused on the day's objectives.
- Give yourself and those around you permission to be human: As you adjust to the changing realities of each day, it's alright to make mistakes. Do not dwell on your mistakes, forgive yourself, learn from them, move on, and be patient with yourself and others (Romans 12:12, "...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer..." and

Ephesians 4:32, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”).

- Seek to find the good in each day (Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble...whatever things are pure...if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”): When you first wake up, spend a few minutes thanking God for giving you another day and all the good you have in your life, then read your Bible for 15 minutes (attempting to build up to 30 minutes each day), then think on the meaning of what you have read, and ask God for wisdom on how to apply it (James 1:5). Before you go to bed each evening, make a list of the good things that happened to you that day in your journal and thank God for the blessings. If you cannot think of anything, thank God for the sky, the birds, the flowers in bloom, a roof over your head, and food on your table (Psalm 19:1) and the most salient fact of all that He is the giver and sustainer of life (Psalm 36:9a, “You are the giver of life. ” [New Century Version] and Colossians 1:17, “And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” [English Standard Version]).
- Make time to engage in activities you enjoy: Take advantage of down time to read a good book, take a quiet walk of gratitude being sure to stay 6 feet away from the next person walking and wear a face mask, listen to your favorite music, slow down, spend time with family, or rediscover enjoyable interests that will keep you out of harm’s way.

Please remember every moment of your life is in God’s care and continually pray that God gives you overwhelming peace that surpasses your ability to understand, that He will provide you with Jesus’ joy amidst this coronavirus crisis, and hope for today and every day to come. May God keep His hand of protection on you and yours always.

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