

Serenity

By Bobby Schuller

We've been on a series about the mind, and you can jump in and out of that series anywhere. If you're just joining us for the first time, it's no big deal. But today's the last bit of that series and I feel like it's been a good series for me personally. They say one of the best ways to learn something is to teach it. And certainly I've been paying attention to my thoughts, my thought life, and trying to fashion, even for myself, a better future by deciding to dwell on the things of God and on good things today.

And so on this sort of journey, I want to get to sort of the final, most important part of the mind, and that is what all of us desire so much, whether we know it or not, and that is serenity, tranquility, peace of mind. Peace of mind. To have the kind of mind where in every moment, no matter what's going on, we have a sort of rootedness in which we don't have to worry, and we don't have to hurry, and we trust our friend Jesus and share His love with the world. Amen?

We put incredible value on serenity, probably above all, one of the most valuable things we have in our life. I've often wondered like why would a criminal turn themselves in. You think about that. Some guy gets away with murder, literally, and he's been gone for ten years, and

the case has gone cold, and one day he shows up in some random town in Indiana and says I murdered whoever and I'm turning myself in. Why does that happen, do you think? I know. It's because the guy wants to have peace of mind. He's sick of every time somebody knocking on the door wondering if it's the police and wants to just have some peace.

Many people, I think, turn to substance: alcohol abuse or abusing drugs as a way to self-medicate, to deal with the anxiety, the fears, the depressions, the mind moving at a million miles an hour. And people use those things to get an escape.

But the most obvious one is the way that we so long for a vacation. And I love vacations, I think you should go on a vacation, but I think that's the main thing we think we're going to get when we go on vacation. That we're going to get serenity, we're going to get tranquility, we're going to get peace of mind. But can I tell you something that if you're not able to get peace of mind and tranquility and serenity now, you're certainly not going to have it when you go on vacation.

I remember not long ago, Hannah and I went on a trip to Hawaii. We'd saved up for a while and we went on this trip. And our lives were going a million miles an hour. We weren't even here at this church yet. Everything was so packed. And we didn't have a lot of money, so saving up to go to Hawaii was a big, big challenge for us. It took us years.

We finally went and I remember when we got there, I was just so looking forward to serenity. So we get there and like we get off the plane,

and we've got to like take a shuttle to get our rental car, and there's a big line of people, and then we're waiting for this car, and then we don't get the car we wanted, and then we have to get to our hotel, and we check in, and I just remember thinking like it took several days that I was in this mode where every minute I couldn't just relax. It was like I can't just sit on this lanai and drink a cup of coffee, right? I can't just sit here and enjoy a sunrise. I need to be doing something. I'm bored. I need to call someone at home, make sure everything is going okay at the church.

And you realize that busyness, that hurry, that stressed out, anxious mind is something that I was carrying with me in my body, that no matter where I went, I wasn't going to escape my body.

And so I realized, one of the things I learned on that trip is because it took us four days or five days to really get out of that mode, to really just simply relax and stop thinking about things at home, and all the things we needed to do, that I didn't need to go on vacation to have peace of mind. What I really needed to do was figure out how can I have a serenity of mind? How can I live in the kingdom of God right now wherever I am? Whether I'm in a prison cell, or whether I'm in Hawaii, how can I be experiencing the serenity, tranquility of the kingdom of heaven in every moment as Jesus taught us to? You can have tranquility and serenity of mind today, right now, and you should have it because that tranquility, that serenity that we have, that makes us more creative, that makes us more fruitful, it helps us bond deeper with people. We

actually become more productive when we're less busy. We're more fruitful when we're less crammed and hurrying. We become thinkers and our life blossoms into what it's really supposed to be. We have clearer vision. We're able to hear the soft whisper of God's voice amongst the clamor.

Most importantly, I think that when we're relaxed and when we have serenity of mind, we have power. There's a certain power to that. It's in leadership. They call it the non-anxious presence. That in a room where everybody's freaking out, the one woman or one man who is still strong, clear headed, she's the leader. Everybody, it's going to be okay, just in an orderly fashion go out this door and go down the stairs and it will be okay.

The non-anxious presence is the leader; it's the person of power. The person of confidence. The person with clear vision. The person with knowledge. That's you. And today, you don't need to go on vacation, you don't need anything else except the availability of the kingdom of the heavens; that heaven just opens up to you now and you receive that deep connection from the Father that helps affirm everything, that the promises of scripture tells us that it's going to be okay. You don't have to worry about tomorrow and you don't have to dwell on the past, that you can be right here, alive, living life, enjoying every moment, and have no anxiety, or anxiousness, or fear, or worry, that it will be okay because you're loved, you're called, and you're given everything you need to

endure the challenges ahead. So don't worry about them. Be where you are.

I remember hearing a preacher I really enjoyed at the time, and he was talking about.. he was criticizing other preachers who preached on anxiety, that's me. And I remember him saying the bible never talks about anxiety. The only thing is it's supposed to be like we go to heaven. And I was like, excuse me? For like a bible preacher, that was a miss. The bible talks about anxiety a lot, all the time, actually. In fact, when we said this last week the number one command in the bible is do not fear.

And the word that's used for anxiety, sometimes it's translated as worry. We're going to see it in the text here in a moment. It's a Greek word merimnao. It means to be pulled a part into pieces. It means you're worrying about everything. That you're going in a million directions and you're being pulled and pressured in every which way. Do you ever fill that way? That's what the world wants for us. That is the world's way. But we're called to be holy. Do you know what holy means? Holy means to be set apart. It means that we don't judge ourselves in comparison to the world, but that we're supposed to be radically different; that we stand out in our posture and in our behavior and in our thinking. The world says and has convinced us even in our vocabulary that being busy is a good thing.

Imagine I said to you I wanted to get together with you for a cup of coffee or something, it would be normal for me to first begin by saying

how busy you are as a compliment. Hey Joe, let's get some coffee. I know you're super busy, and you've got a lot going on, but if you could squeeze me in, that would be great. Right? I'm complimenting that person. I'm showing him respect in a worldly way by saying he's super busy. You're cluttered, you're overwhelmed and totally busy. Aren't you special? Imagine you said the opposite. Hey Joe, I know you're not very busy. Got some time for a cup of coffee? Of course you do.

See the world teaches us that being busy, being in a hurry, and being cluttered means you're more important. And we as believers, do we buy into that? Sometimes. I think what God wants you to know is that being busy doesn't make you more productive, being busy doesn't make you more fruitful in your work, being busy doesn't make you smarter for sure, it certainly doesn't make you more creative, and it takes away from the most important thing in your life, which is a deep connection to other people, to your friends and family, and a deep connection to the Father, and to live from that place in every moment.

Jesus teaches us this, of course, and this was His way, wasn't it? I mean Jesus just was relaxed. I remember the story about Bill Gaultiere, my mentor, and he was walking with this other guy, Dallas Willard, who's like a pastor of pastors. I mean every pastor looked up to Dallas Willard before he died a few years ago, wrote these great works. And Dallas and Bill were walking along, and Dallas asked Bill, no pressure, Bill: if you had one word to describe Jesus Christ, what would it be? Just

one word. Bill's thinking, oh loving, generous, powerful, miracle-worker. That's miracle-worker, so it makes one word. And Dallas offered his own description: Jesus was relaxed. And if you could pick one word, that was the word Dallas would pick. He was relaxed.

But in a way, you see that, right? There are some times where Jesus gets angry, and He does these things, but overall His default is everywhere He goes, there's a sense of poise, quiet dignity, confidence, and a calmness that Jesus brings with Him everywhere He goes. And along with that comes His power to heal and to restore and to dish out knowledge and wisdom. Wow. And that's how God wants His disciples to be.

Jesus, in The Sermon on the Mount, begins by talking about the new availability of the kingdom of the heavens. That heaven is opening up and that the Holy Spirit is being made available in power to all who call on the name of Jesus. And I just want to interrupt here. God is here right now in this room dwelling in this space. He's here. Like if you just take a moment, can you feel it? Like can you feel the spirit of God? The Holy Spirit is moving in this place. We didn't need to ask Him to come, we didn't need to invoke Him. He is always here. He's dwelling, the spirit of God. Flowing in and out of you just with knowledge and power and life. The same spirit that is in Jesus, that power that is where serenity comes from. That is where peace comes from. It comes from intimacy with the Father. The deep, the deep, deep connection of feeling God's

power, love, purpose, and most of all, His presence is right here. It goes with you when you leave the building. It goes with you in your stressful situations. Into that hospital room. Into that conflict. Into that wherever it is that you're going, He goes with you and you fall into the easy rhythms of grace. His yoke is easy, His burden is light. Isn't that good news? And this is what Jesus is inviting us to.

I recently told this story to comfort some grieving friends who had lost a loved one, a young man, and it just came to me, this story because it's always been such a source of peace for me. When I was like a teenager, I was just a kid, and I was maybe eleven, something like that, and we were at this thing called Indian Village. And there was this teepee, and in the teepee, all the boys slept in like these little beds in a circle, and then we had like a youth counselor or pastor and he was reading from Acts chapter two. And he's reading this story about how the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples in power, and this amazing miracle that happens where they're all given different languages, we say tongues, to speak in the languages of the people visiting for the Passover feast. And this amazing thing happens and this incredible move of the spirit, and I like look around and it's late. All the boys have fallen asleep. And I ask this counselor, I was like I want that power. I want to experience that.

And I went outside on this rock, and it was a hard time in my life. In many ways, I had a great childhood, but in some ways I had kind of a difficult childhood. And I won't get into that now. But I remember it was

during that time and I just sat on this rock and I said, God, I want to experience you in that real way. And it was late at night and the stars were out, and trees around me, and I just began to pray. And I had this incredible experience where I don't even know how to talk about this; there's not even language for it. But it was like I had this incredible experience where I was overwhelmed by the presence of God. I remember at the time I think I told somebody that it was like I was almost like in a white room being hugged by God or something. And it was such an abundance of peace and joy, and it was like being more awake, as weird as that sounds. I was like awake for the first time in my life, and this just incredible touch from God.

And this counselor wakes me up and he says, Bobby, you've been praying for four hours. We have to go to bed. But for me it felt like moments; it felt like thirty seconds, a minute, so brief. That really happened to me. It really did and it's the only time it's ever happened to me, but I remember it vividly like it was yesterday.

And that is, it's that same place, its heaven. Not heaven just when we die, but heaven being poured out on us now. The real presence of God in our trials, and our difficulties that helps us just put everything into perspective and say I am a ceaseless being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe. I'm loved by Him, I'm called, I don't need to worry. God's got this. God's got that.

I did this in the last service. I should start my sermon, don't you think guys? I should get to my scripture here. Jesus is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and this was such a wonderful gift of wisdom to our modern world. He says, "Therefore, I tell you, don't worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food and the body more important than clothes?" Wow that is true isn't it? Listen to that, it's such wisdom. "Look at the birds of the air. They don't sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" In other words, yes, how many birds are you worth? To your Father who loves you, His beloved child.

"Can any one of you, by worrying, add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about your clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow? They do not labor or spin, yet I tell you that not even Solomon, in all his, splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you, oh you of little faith."

Do you hear that comparison? It's like if I was growing lilies in my backyard, and I had like a little bird fountain that I used to put like seeds for the bird, and my daughter says, dad who do you care more about, me or these birds, or me or these flowers? And I'd be like I love these flowers, I love these birds, but they are nothing compared to you.

We fall into the trap sometimes thinking that God loves us because of what we do for Him, or because of our achievements, or because we're doing a B minus or better on our morality report card or whatever. And can I just tell you I don't love my children because of their drawings and their crafts that they make for me, although I enjoy those things, I love my children because they belong to me. They're my children.

God doesn't love you because of your works, He doesn't love you because of your achievements, He loves you because you're His beloved child. You belong to Him. He's going to take care of you whether you want Him to or not. He's going to take care of you no matter what. He loves you.

So Jesus just simply says to us: Do not worry. Do not be merimnao. Don't be pulled and stressed out in pieces "saying what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear for the pagans run after all these things and anyway your heavenly Father knows you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these other things will be given to you as well. So don't worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." I can give an amen to that.

We must become the kinds of people that live from the soul, that feel connected as much as possible to the easy rhythms of grace, to the opening up of heaven.

There's this one prayer called the serenity prayer. If you've ever been through AA or something like that, you've probably heard it. It's an adaptation of a Deaver prayer. Let's show the first prayer, the serenity prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." That's a nice prayer, I like it, but I like the original better from Niebuhr, who is one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century, and it goes a little more like this, and this is where true serenity comes from: "God, give me the grace," see the grace, abundant favor and power from God. "God give me the grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other. Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardship as a pathway to peace, taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it, trusting that you will make all things right if I surrender to your will so that I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy with you forever in the next. Amen."

I think the two greatest enemies to a serene mind are the myths of control and perfectionism. First of all, let's just establish those are myths. You are not in control of your life. Any aspect you believe you are is a myth. You are carefully held in the hands of God. So you do your best, you forget the rest. And it will not be perfect. It never has been, it never will be, and even if you get there, it will be so fleeting, it will be

imperfect again. Somebody will come along and mess it up. So perfectionism, the need for things to be perfect, the need for things to always go right, and the need for control, those are myths, and they are wreaking havoc on your mind. What God gives us instead is trust. We trust Him. We do our best, but we trust. We trust. I trust God. These are words that bring serenity. I trust God.

There will always be a missing tile. Remember Dennis Prager, this was one of the wisdoms that he gave in his book on happiness. He called it missing tile syndrome. He had a friend and they were looking at a mosaic on a ceiling, and he said look at that mosaic, isn't that great? And his friend says yes, it's great, it's missing a tile. And so his friend, all he could do was see that one tile that was missing. He couldn't see everything else. He talks about how whenever we're missing something in our life, all we see is that one thing we're missing.

But it's so easy in life for us to get caught up on these things, just little things that are missing, that make our lives imperfect, the ways in which you just want them to be better. And in some ways, God cares about those things, He really does, even the little things, He does care about those things. And in the midst of it, we can just say I trust in God. I'm not going to worry! Hey look, smile. You can smile today. You don't have to be anxious, you don't have to be sad, you don't have to be bummed out, you don't have to be filled with regret. Today, just be here and enjoy every moment you have.

Man, take deeper breaths. Did you know that you only need six breaths per minute, and the average person breathes in twelve breaths per minute, and the average American breathes in twenty times a minute? So we're like (PANTING). I mean this is because for many of us as believers, we're out of synch with eternity. We're out of synch with our lives. That what we're experiencing here is just the beginning. There's so much more to your life and it goes forever. And so we depend on Jesus Christ to walk every day in the easy rhythms of grace. You want a serene mind, you need to walk at a walking pace. You want to walk with God, you walk at a walking pace. Amen?

So, here are some quick tips for a serene mind. Number one: be holy. Do whatever you can to do the next right thing. Again you'll never be perfect, but at the very least, be honest. Don't lie, don't hide things. Make sure that there are at least one or two people who know you just for who you are and they love you just as you are. Be set apart in that away.

Don't hurry. When we hurry, we're trying to manufacture things, when really we want God to be the one who's doing it. St. Vincent De Paul said "the one who hurries delays the things of God." I want you to just take a moment and hear that. I think this is so important. "The one who hurries delays the things of God." Like when Abraham slept with Hagar to hurry his destiny, he actually delayed it.

And so when we are able to walk in the easy rhythms of grace and not hurry, we're able to have fresh vision, and hear from God, and have a serene mind. Be here. Be where you are. And I know that seems so obvious, but in a world in which we're always on our cell phones, or watching TV, or thinking about our kids who are not here with us, or our parents, or whatever, we're always somewhere else. Be here; be where you are, be present. Don't be dwelling in self-pity about yesterday. That's not going to make it better. And it's unchanged. It's there forever - let it go.

And the future, we can't really control the future in the ways that we'd like, so make your plans, do your things, but then let it go. Be here. Be where you are. Look people in the eye. Listen to them. Talk to them. When you're alone, be with the Lord. Be okay just sitting on your couch having a cup of tea and not watching TV or doing anything else. Be where you are and watch the Lord meet you there.

And most of all stay connected to the power of heaven. And I know that sounds so mystic, but that is the thing. Just waking up and seeking God with all your heart and wanting to know Him, to feel Him, to be with Him personally. If you don't have that, you can't just manufacture serenity. It comes from really experiencing Jesus Christ.

This is one of the big beefs Jesus had with religious people in His day. He says "you study the scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life, but these are the scriptures that testify

about me. Yet you refuse to come to me and have life.” How many of us do that? We get caught up in religion and all these things in our life and all we really need. Those are all meant to be tools to draw us closer to Jesus. And when we’re close to Him, when we dwell in His presence, especially in our tragedy and our difficulty, that’s where we get the serenity, the peace of mind, and the power to live every day as Jesus did. Amen?

And so let me just pray over you: Father, in Jesus’ name, we take a moment to be here where you are. We thank you that we are in heaven right now. Heaven is everywhere you are, God. So heaven is in this room. And so we receive the peace of Jesus Christ. Lord, thank you for the cross. Thank you that you’ve cleansed us of our sins. Thank you that you’ve given us this kind of access that we can come boldly before the throne of the Father. We love you, and I pray in Jesus’ name just everyone under the sound of my voice would receive an incredible sense of confidence serenity, tranquility, peace of mind. We could say with one voice we trust God. We do, Lord, we trust you, we love you, in Jesus’ name, amen.