

# **Serenity of Mind and Heart**

*By Bobby Schuller*

Well today we're beginning a new series on the power, the importance and the promise of a serene mind and a peaceful heart. We're going to spend the next few weeks talking about this thing: serenity in the storm. That whatever storm it is we're going through in life, whatever challenge it is we're facing, that God can give us a serenity, a peace of mind, the clarity of thought and a purity of heart to endure whatever challenge we're going through.

Whoever you are, today, maybe you're going through a financial storm, or maybe you're going through a health storm, maybe you've lost a loved one, or maybe your relationships are not going the way they should be, I want you to know that in the midst of it all, sometimes you might have sleepless nights, or different challenges, or things that come your way, God can give you a serenity of mind and heart that will help you get through whatever it is you're going through.

So, so often when things are, like not going well in our lives, very often we begin to fantasize about being somewhere else. We start to think what if I was in this place or that place. I wonder what kind of places do you think of when you begin to fantasize about being somewhere else? I'll tell you where I think of. It always has a dock and it always has an ocean. It looks kind of like this. I always picture like sitting and laying on

this dock in the sun, and maybe there's a boat coming, or we're going to go fishing or something like that. And whenever things are really hard: you're going through difficult times, I just think I wish I could get away from it all and be somewhere like this.

And then Hannah, I asked her one time, I said where do you think of when you fantasize leaving or being somewhere else. She said I don't know, something like the Dover Shores in England, or the Emerald Hills of Ireland. I want to be like Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* with the dress flowing behind her with absolute freedom. Do you agree with that, Hannah? Absolutely. She says yes.

We all think of these places where we'd like to go. Maybe it's a family cabin, or maybe it's a place you used to go in the woods as a child, or who knows. But for all of us, I think, it was interesting, when I was talking to Hannah about this I realized that when I was a kid, we went to Mexico a lot to go fishing. When she was a kid growing up in the Ozarks in Northeastern Oklahoma, there was a lot woods and grass and greenery and open skies.

I think very often in life when we fantasize, a lot of times we're linking a time when we were children. A time when we didn't have bills to pay. We didn't have children or grandchildren to worry about. We didn't have all of the responsibility that gets lobbed on us as we go to high school, maybe college or get our jobs. And eventually in life as adults we

get sort of used to this constant pressure pressing down on us. This constant burden we feel.

Well God wants to give you some freedom today. And the freedom doesn't mean to let go of responsibility, it means to hold the responsibility with stronger arms. That it's not you who holds it but the Lord who holds it for you and we're going to learn what that means today.

So often we forget that all of us have this need for serenity. We need serenity. It's something that drives so many of us, and we only feel it sometimes, almost like when we haven't had it long enough. How many of you have just thought oh man, this has been too hard a week, too hard a month, too hard a year. I need a vacation! And then you go on vacation and you get home and you say oh my goodness, I need a vacation from my vacation, especially if you've got little kids. Oh man, a vacation very often can make you feel more stressed. It can make your relationships worse. It can make things harder. And people will pay out the nose for these experiences because they want a sense of serenity.

You might have felt your need for serenity the last time you couldn't sleep. Anybody who's tossed and turned for hours at night, you feel tired in your body, and yet your mind is going a million miles an hour thinking about this or that, and you can't sleep. You know what that feels like. You feel like you'd do anything, pay anything, go anywhere to just fall asleep.

I remember once Hannah and I, back in the day we didn't have children, we were working with the youth group and they had these things called all nighters. And in an all nighter, you get a bunch of hormonal teenagers, high on sugar, and you take them out all night bowling and going to shows and doing things, and somehow this is supposed to help them as Christians. We haven't quite figured out how, but it's fun. It gets them to church. And you stay up until like six or seven in the morning.

And then I remember, when we were done, we went home and it was about seven o'clock in the morning, we rolled into our house, we were exhausted, we slept for maybe 30 minutes or so, and then we had forgotten, we were renting the house we lived in, we forgot that our landlord had scheduled a roof repair that day. So about 30 minutes into the sleep, we started hearing (Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang) (DRILLING SOUNDS) (Bang, bang, bang) We finally went to youth house where we just were that was now vacant, turned the lights off and I fell asleep on a bean bag. There was a dry Cheerio on the bag that was pressing against my cheek, and I didn't even care.

So this is how we feel when we can't sleep, when we can't be present, when we're spinning our wheels, when we're worrying, when we're anxious, we just would do anything for some serenity, for a break, for some peace of mind, for a peaceful heart. And I want you to know it is good to seek that. It's good to want that. You deserve it and God's going

to give it to you if you follow Him and trust in Him. It's a part of His covenant promise.

It's good for disciples to seek peace, to seek a peaceful mind and a serene heart. There is so much fruit that comes from being a person who is tranquil and at peace with yourself and with your environment. People who are at peace are more merciful. They're more easy going. They're more forgiving. They're more gracious. It's easy for people who are at peace to grow because when somebody needs to confront them or challenge them on something, they receive it with open arms. It's easier for people to learn when they're at peace because they have an openness, sort of, to knowledge. People who are at peace are easier to be friends with and easier to be with, and so it's easier to be in better and deeper and more meaningful relationships. But most of all, people who are at peace and who are tranquil are leaders.

To be a leader does not mean to be anxious and to be amped up all the time. To be a leader means to be tranquil – at peace. In fact in leadership studies, they call the leader the non anxious presence in the room. Picture this: you're in a room full of people and the building is on fire, and everyone is freaking out. And one person stands, it's the least anxious person, and she stands up and says 'ladies and gentlemen, please relax, don't be afraid, in a calm and mannerly order, exit this door and take the stairs down out of the thing,' right? And everybody does exactly what she says because she's the calmest one in the room.

Because she's the non anxious presence. Not being anxious is a sign that you have wisdom or knowledge.

In fact, think of all of the wise people in our pop culture and in our films. When I was asking Hillary to put this slide together for me, I gave her a list of people that came to mind. Obviously the Fonz, Mary Poppins, Gandalf, Yoda, Sensei Wu from the Lego Movie. One of my favorite characters of all from every Disney movie is not super known, but the grandma from Moana, and the Oracle from the Matrix. And then I just said Morgan Freeman in everything he does. Just put Morgan Freeman up there in general. These are people who are always sort of proposed as being wise in these stories, and they should be. But one of the main things that they all sort of carry in common is that they're all relaxed. They're all tranquil. They all have this sort of serenity within them that makes them follow-able. Yes follow-able is a word. You know what it means, therefore it's a word.

So really tranquility, serenity is not a sign of being stupid, it's a sign of being smart. It's a sign of being wise. It's a sign of being someone that is worth following.

And by the way, serenity is a part of God's promise to us. Throughout the Old Testament, there is this theme that those who are in covenant with the Lord will enter His rest. And then the opposite is true of the wicked, right? It says "the wicked run but nobody follows." This sense that they'll have sleepless nights. Or those who are under God's

curse, one of the curses that's put upon them is "they shall never enter my rest." Isn't that interesting? That's one of the worst things you can do to someone is to take away their rest. Well I want you to know that God's promise for you is rest. God's promise for you is tranquility. God's promise for you is serenity. The world's promise to you is anxiety, worry, fear, but God is none of those things. God is good, He's only good, all the time. He's on your side and He wants to give you this gift today. Serenity. Serenity of mind. Peace of heart. And watch that when you let God do more of the doing, more will get done in less time, with less fear, and less worry, and less anxiety.

This is how Jesus is all the time. Jesus is so chilled out. Jesus is relaxed, tranquil, serene. Famous story, my friend and mentor Bill Gaultiere, his story's become famous now. He was walking with the great Dallas Willard, a great Christian author, and Dallas asked him one time, he said 'Bill, what word would you use to describe Jesus?' And he was kind of nervous, you know. This is a big question. Maybe loving, gracious, kind, sacrificial, a leader, wise. He didn't really quite answer, and he looked at Dallas and he said 'well Dallas, what would you say?' And he looked at him and he said 'Jesus was relaxed.'

That's an interesting thing, isn't it, to think about that one of the most defining characteristics of the Son of God was relaxed. Being relaxed makes sense because being relaxed or at ease or serene is the

fruit of faith. When you have knowledge that things will be okay, even though they're not great right now, you receive a type of serenity.

And so today, I think Rabbi Jesus wants us to inherit this. This idea that we don't need to go on vacation to be relaxed. We don't need money to be relaxed. All we need is Jesus Christ. That if we are with Him, everything will be okay in your life.

So Jesus was relaxed. He really was, by the way. One time, there was this mob that was trying to stone Him to death, and He was just like nah, and just very calmly walked through this raging mob of people. Another time people wanted Lazarus to be healed because he was sick, and Jesus, I guess just thought oh I'll take my time; I'll just raise him from the dead if he dies. And most importantly, and this is so endearing to a middle aged American man like yours truly, Jesus loved to take naps. I love naps. Jesus loved naps. Therefore, I'm Christ-like. No, Jesus loved naps.

And it was actually astonishing the most famous story of Jesus taking a nap, of course, is when Jesus sleeps in the storm. They were parting from a crowd of people who were trying to get close to the Lord, and so they all got on this boat to cross the Sea of Galilee when a raging storm erupted.

In Matthew chapter 8 verse 23: "Then He got into the boat and His disciples followed Him. Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was taking a nap. The

disciples went and woke Him saying ‘Lord save us! We’re going to drown!’ He replied, ‘oh you of little faith. Why are you so afraid?’ And He got up and just rebuked the winds and the waves” – how dare you, and it was completely calm. “The men were amazed and asked what kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him.”

For these men, this was a very scary thing. We forget sometimes that actually in the first century, even though they were boats men, they were fishermen, most sailors, fisherman and people in the water didn’t know how to swim, as crazy as that is. They just never learned, it was not a part of their training, and particularly in a storm, they knew if their boat sank, they would die. So this is very scary and in their cosmology, they have this sort of odd way of viewing the world. They believe that large bodies of water are sort of the gates of hell. They’re afraid that there’s rumors of this Loch Ness monster type thing in the Gennesaret, too. Maybe that’s what this is. There’s all of this stuff going on, and they just can’t get to shore, and the storms are raging and the waves are crashing over, and of course Jesus is taking a nap.

One of my favorite paintings, actually, was the depiction of this story by Rembrandt, the famous Dutch artist. We actually have this hanging on our wall at home. This painting was stolen from Boston in 1990, and it currently hangs in our kitchen. The two are unrelated. Full disclosure: we paid someone in China \$200 to paint this for us. Anyway,

it's on our wall, and it actually was stolen, which is very sad. But it's an amazing painting. I love all of Rembrandt.

But every morning I'm drinking my coffee and for years, I've looked at this painting, and it's been maddening because there must be some really good scholarship worked on it, but I can't find any online. I haven't looked in a library, but it seems that there's no consensus about who is whom in this group of people. And there isn't even a consensus on how many people there are in the painting. Almost everyone, almost all of these scholars say there are 14 men on this boat, but I clearly see 15, and I will get to that in a minute. So that alone to me defies credibility for some of the people who are commenting on this painting.

So here you'll count there are 15 men on the boat. There's Jesus, and first of all, one of the interesting things is like here's Jesus, and there are some guys up here trying to fix everything, there's a guy down here. So this is the question: this man right here is looking right at you, is he not? He's looking right at you. He's holding onto this rope and holding onto his hat. That is a self portrait of Rembrandt. Rembrandt paints himself into the story. A man who endured incredible suffering as a Christian. He lost three of his four children, his wife died, and his mother died. And he just endured an incredible amount of suffering. And here he paints himself onto this boat with Jesus, almost like he's the only one that knows you see what's happening.

Very often people will say this is Peter, but this is not Peter. I believe this is Judas Iscariot. This is why the rope is hanging around his neck. Judas is a reflection of when we try and control our situation. Here's Judas, he's at the thing, he's at the Orb, he has the illusion that he's in control, that he has power, that everything's okay, but clearly he's wrong. These men up here are trying to fix everything. They know everything's bad but they feel that they have the power to fix it and boy are they wrong. The more they're working on it, things are getting worse. This guy's maybe going to go overboard. I believe this guy up here is Peter because he's the oldest one. You have a guy here and maybe you feel that way when you're going through your storm. You're like I can fix this, I can fix this, but you just can't.

Maybe you feel like this guy. You just want to throw up. This couldn't get worse. The worst ever. These guys here are sort of angry at God, angry at Jesus, they're yelling at Him how dare you sleep in this storm. One man is praying. Perhaps that's John the disciple Jesus loved, I don't know. And here's the 15<sup>th</sup> one that nobody seems to notice right here, hiding in the shadows. It's clear to me that's Satan. So you have Jesus here bringing light in the dark part of the painting, and Satan here bringing dark in the light part of the painting.

Rembrandt truly was a genius, but what he's telling us is that whenever we're going through a storm, these are the many types of things we try to do, but our salvation is in one place and one place alone,

that's right here. We run to the Lord. We wake Him up. We trust Him. And He wakes up and He says oh this is my storm. It's no problem. Be calm.

See at the heart of everything, this is how we attain serenity as disciples of Jesus. It's not by believing in the illusion of control, it's not by trying to fix everything, it's not by throwing up, it's not by getting angry, it's by coming to the Lord and just saying Lord, here it is, and trusting that being with Jesus on a boat in a storm is the best place to be. I'd rather be with Jesus on a boat in a storm, than on the shore by myself. I just believe that if the storm is where we're supposed to be right now, it's the best place to be. That if that's where He is, that's where I want to be, amen? I want to dwell on the boat with Him.

And by the way, this isn't the last storm story. The next one comes when there's another storm and Jesus walks on the water and Peter says Lord if you can walk on the water, I can, too. Ask me to come to you and I will. And this is what Jesus is trying to teach His disciples; that they can have the peace in the storm that He has all the time. Because He knows, He knows, He knows, He knows that God is good, always good. That He loves us, He cares for us, He's merciful and kind.

You are not under a curse. You are not abandoned by God. You are loved by Him. Trust that whatever storm you're going through, God will carry you through and He will calm the storm. Run to Jesus. It's the best place to be.

I think Jesus was calm because He had power – that’s true. Jesus was calm because He practiced the disciplines that keep a person calm. He spent a lot of time in prayer; He went to lonely places. But most of all, Jesus lived in the Father’s love. Jesus constantly lives both in the Father’s love and the hatred of His neighbors. Think about that. At the same time, so many people around Jesus just hate Him, especially religious people. People who should know who He is. People that should believe what He’s saying. People that should see that all that He’s saying is good and only good, and is totally Jewish and totally godly, and yet His neighbors and His rivals, they hate Him, and yet He abides in the love of the Father.

Sometimes you can’t live in both the Father’s love and your neighbors love. Sometimes in order to be loved by the Father means to be hated by religious people or to be hated by your neighbor. And part of peace and tranquility is coming to terms with that and believing that it’s okay; that the most important person in the universe loves you, and that I love you, and that we love you here at Shepherd’s Grove and Hour of Power.

So I want you to know that part of being a disciple is to inherit this covenant promise of His peace. That’s why Jesus says in the departure sermon in John chapter 14, He’s about to go to the cross, and He’s promising the Holy Spirit, and He says, “But the advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name will teach you all things and will

remind you of everything I've said to you." And then He says, "peace, peace I leave you. My peace I give you." Think about that. He wants you to have the same kind of peace that He has. So much serenity in the storm you can take a nap. You just are so confident and trusting of God's goodness and faithfulness in your life, that even though you may be confused, and even though things may be going on around you, you know this will be okay. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not be afraid." Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. It will be okay. You can trust in the Lord.

So the first step, we're going to continue to talk about this over the next few weeks, and we hope that you'll keep coming back to church and watching on television and online, and follow us through this, but there are many disciplines we can practice to train our minds and our hearts to be serene.

But the first and the most important thing is to trust your life and your death to Jesus Christ. If you don't do that step, nothing else matters. So many of us, maybe here in the church, or many watching around the world, have been on the fence about the Lord. We've been on the fence about becoming a Christian or being a disciple of Jesus. Today is a great day to give your life to Him. Think about how our fear of death and our fear of hell, or our fear of all of these things drive so many of the foolish things we do in life. Drives so much of our lack of serenity. And so trust your life to Jesus.

And finally, I just want to close with some tips. Now one of my favorite people in the whole world, I'd love to meet him someday, is Charlie Munger. You may have heard the name, it may sound familiar. You probably know the name Warren Buffet. Charlie Munger is the ying to Warren Buffet's yang. They are the two partners who run Berkshire Hathaway. And Charlie Munger loves to give these graduation lectures. But one of his things is he says: "the great teachers of the world, they invert." And so for him, for example, he says you shouldn't teach people how to be rich. You should teach people how to be poor. If you want to be wretched and poor and miserable, here's what to do.

And so I'm going to borrow from his axiom always invert, and I'm going to just close with his final comments, not how to be serene, but how to get rid of serenity and peace in your life. It's not as hard as you think. You can do it. I believe in you. You can get rid of your serenity and your peace today. Here are some tips.

To get rid of peace and serenity, first and most importantly, always dwell on the opinions of others. Learn that the opinions of other people is the most important thing in your life. And you need to make sure your reputation is well managed.

Never let go of offenses, ever, especially if the offenses are coming from people you've never met in your life. If someone online says something about you, make sure you really take it to heart; it's probably true.

Never let offenses go, and always worry about what other people think about you. Control people. Control your kids. Control your parents. Control your spouse. Control people and you'll definitely lose serenity and peace of mind. And if they try to get out of your control, control harder. Be perfect! All the time. Look perfect, sound perfect, be perfectly religious, everything you do should be perfect.

Maximize your time! Always make sure that you never, ever waste a minute or an hour of your day. Never be early to anything. Always try and be like with razor sharp precision on time.

Never be present ever. Always be somewhere else. If you're here, make sure you're also getting work done, or that you're texting or emailing someone. Make sure that you're always thinking about tomorrow or next week, you're never thinking about the person you're with, and you're never thinking about this moment or today.

Always, always, always follow the news. The news is the most important thing in your life. If you want to lose peace and serenity, be up to date with what's happening in every branch of the government. In your local schools. What's happening in South America, I don't know. Know what's happening in Mongolia. It's important. And then worry about it. So always follow the news and always be up to speed. And when you're not reading the news, do something entertaining and then go back to the news. This will for sure help you get rid of your serenity.

And finally and last and most importantly, if you really want to get rid of serenity and peace of heart, make sure you remember that you are what you do. Do really amazing things and make sure everybody knows about it, and never stop doing those amazing things. You are what you have. Make sure you have the nicest things; that people see all the nice stuff that you have.

And most important, this is the most important thing: make sure you constantly dwell on what people are saying about you. You can record it, you can write it down, think about it, dwell on it, and I promise you, you will lose your serenity. That's a promise from me to you. You can do it. I believe in you.

Isn't it good that we don't have to worry about those things? This world will keep spinning after we're gone. Our families will be okay. Our world will be okay because its Father's world and He loves it, and He's going to redeem it and save it. Amen? So we trust it to God. We trust it to the Lord.

Father, we thank you and I pray, Father for everyone under the sound of my voice that you would send your Holy Spirit to bring serenity, tranquil mind, peaceful heart, that we can receive from you all the promises that you've made available to us. Help us to be like Jesus. Help us to relax and to rest and to trust in you. Help us to be present, to be here today and not anywhere else. Lord, we love you and we thank you, and it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.