

FIVE STEPS TO SERENITY

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COME, GO, STAND, TASTE, BELIEVE

During my ministry in South Africa, I talked with a retired minister, and after discussing a very important question I said, "Well, maybe we shall have to leave this in God's hands." The old gentleman thought for a few seconds and then replied, "Maybe not. The Lord is very busy and has a lot to do." He appeared to be irreverent, but I now appreciate his point of view. We should never expect the Lord to do our work. There is a time in life when divine grace meets with human responsibility. That combination can perform miracles. Only when man has exhausted his resources can he justifiably expect the Lord to assume complete responsibility for what needs to be done. The ability of God never excuses human laziness. Perhaps Paul had that thought in mind when he urged his friends in Philippi to "work out their own salvation." They had an important part to play and were expected to cooperate with their Savior. There are five texts in the Bible which illustrate this great truth.

The Come and See of Conversion. . . Sinners and Salvation (John 1:39)

The Jordan Valley was filled with people who were relaxing between the exciting services held by John the Baptist. A meeting had just ended, but another would soon begin. Some families were enjoying a meal, others were relaxing, and many were speaking about the events which were taking place. Even the preacher was enjoying a respite as he conversed with two of his associates. "Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabi... where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and See. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day; for it was about the tenth hour" (John 1:35-39).

It was never revealed where the Lord was staying. He could have been enjoying hospitality in a friend's home or living in a tent or cave. Wherever it was, the disciples were enthralled and were completely transformed by what they saw and heard. One whose name was Andrew could not rest until he shared his joy with his brother Simon. Christ knew the future of the church depended upon that memorable visit. Those men were destined to

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become valued disciples who would preach the gospel and change the world. Had they refused to accept His invitation to "Come and see," they might have remained ordinary people. It remains a mystery how an omnipotent God can be frustrated by the closed door of a human heart. He can and does seek admittance but never forces an entrance.

The Go and See of Concern. . . Service and Sacrifice (Mark 6:3-8)

The disciples were worried; their expressions revealed the unrest within their souls. They were frustrated and disliked the attitude of their Master. The day had seemed long and difficult. They were tired. It appeared to be providential when Jesus stepped into a boat to go to the other side of the lake. At least, so it appeared, they would be able to enjoy a few hours of relaxation. It was extremely annoying when the multitude ran around the northern part of the shore to await the arrival of the Savior. Frowns upon the faces of Simon Peter and his colleagues indicated displeasure, but when Jesus began another service, their spirits became disturbed. "And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said . . . Send them away, that they may go into the country round

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about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat. He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat? He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? Go and see" (Mark 6:35-8). A similar incident is recorded in Mark 8:1-8, yet on both occasions, someone's cooperation enabled the Savior to feed a multitude of hungry people. A small boy who sacrificed his lunch enabled the Lord to supply a magnificent banquet.

Sometimes Christians are appalled by the immensity of their tasks when the achievement of their goals seems to be impossible. Despair should never replace determination, for when resources are minimal, no challenge is too difficult for the Savior to accept. He can feed multitudes, remove mountains, and walk on the water. Nevertheless, He used a boy's lunch, and on another occasion, Peter's boat.

The Stand and See of Confidence... Stillness and Safety (Exodus 14:13)

"And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew you today: for the

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Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever." Confusion and fear had spread throughout Israel, for the Egyptian army was pursuing the helpless Hebrews. Defeat appeared to be inevitable. The anger of the nation became evident when some of the people said, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou thus dealt with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness" (Ex. 14:11-12)

Their predicament seemed to be catastrophic. Enclosed by mountains and confronted by the sea they had no way by which to escape. The former captives feared they would be compelled to return to bondage. They did not possess weapons and had no military experience upon which to rely. Alone in magnificent grandeur, Moses remained unperturbed. His eyes shone as he raised his voice and said, "Fear ye not—Stand still and see—the salvation of the Lord." When the sea rolled back to provide a pathway to freedom, perhaps even the angels were elated. Then Moses and his people sang, "Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters. Who is like unto thee, O Lord among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Ex. 15:10-11).

The Lord knew how to protect His people, and it is refreshing to remember He has never lost that ability. There are occasions when He expects and demands our cooperation, but at others, the most effective way to help is to remain still. Each time God permits His people to be confronted by terrifying problems, He reveals His power to save. The Lord is never completely dependent upon us, for after all is said and done, He is still God!

The Taste and See of Content... Satisfaction and Serenity (Psalm 34:8)

David expressed his adoration when he wrote, "O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him." He had been delivered from great danger, but the experience had been nerve-racking. Surrounded by treacherous enemies, David had taken advantage of the superstitions of the people and pretended to be insane. "And David... was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath. And he changed his behavior before them, and feigned himself mad

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in their hands, and scabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him to me? Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? shall this fellow come into my house?" (1 Sam. 21:12-15)

There is no evidence that David had any experience as an actor, but his desperation spontaneously supplied that ability. His accusers believed insanity was the work of indwelling demons. They were afraid to execute their prisoner; the demons might be angry if their residence were destroyed. David was permitted to flee to the mountains where he reminisced and said, "This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (see the introduction to Ps. 34, and verse 6). He was overwhelmed and exultantly cried, "O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusteth in him." Praise is the child of gratitude. Consideration of God's faithfulness always leads to thanksgiving.

The Believe and See of Conquest... Sorrow and Survival (John 11:40)

Martha and Mary were filled with sorrow; their brother had died. Their hearts and home were empty. The apparent indifference of their Friend, Jesus of Nazareth, had deepened their grief. Their future was bleak! Then they heard of the approach of the Lord. "Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him" (John 11:20). Her meeting with the Lord produced results that echoed around the world. "Jesus said unto her: I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, And whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die" (John 11:25-26). The words of the Savior became immortal. "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" (John 11:40).

Faith laughs at impossibilities, but that is a lesson every Christian needs to learn. Circumstances can be threatening, but to stand with Christ in the midst of life's distress, to feel the pressure of His hand and hear His voice is the panacea for all ills.

The five steps to spiritual serenity are clearly defined. Come, go, stand, taste, and believe. They are sections of the highway that leads to the throne of grace.

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THE UNSCALABLE MOUNTAINS OF GRACE (JOHN 7:46)

Some of the towering mountains of earth represent the most majestic objects of creation. A friend of mine in New Zealand described them as "decorations with which the Lord enhanced the beauty of earth." Mount Everest and others of its type have been a challenge to intrepid climbers, and some people never rest until they have climbed to almost unreachable summits. I have seen men crawling like ants beneath protruding dangerous ledges, and have been amazed at the skill with which they drove stakes into the rocks to support themselves as they endeavored to reach higher elevations. There are mountains of grace which glisten in eternal sunshine; their purity and splendor reflect the glory of God's heaven. To reach those lofty peaks may be very difficult, but it is possible to view the dazzling heights where Christ was quite "at home."

His Message Is Unsurpassable (John 7:45-46)

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Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man." It was frustrating when the officials were helpless in the presence of the Man they were supposed to arrest. They had planned to end something considered to be nonsense. The Stranger from Galilee was disturbing the peace and could not be tolerated. Resolutely, the officials approached the meeting-place, but since there was no great urgency, they paused for a few moments to listen to the Speaker. That delay ruined their plans, for the Preacher was entrancingly interesting. The time passed quickly, and before they realized what was happening, the meeting ended. How could they arrest someone who had captivated them? That Man from Galilee had been amazingly eloquent. Later, when they returned to the Jewish leaders, they could only exclaim, "Never man spake like this man." They had seen and heard the Christ and would never forget the experience. Jesus had spoken with commanding authority, and even the scholarly people in the audience could not refute what had been said. When the Lord spoke about heaven, it was easy to believe He had been there; when He described the future, it appeared as if He had already seen it. Immense crowds were enthralled by His message, and His power to heal was unmistakable and irrefutable. Although the Savior never wrote a book, His words were destined to fill innumerable libraries. He

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never taught in a college or university, yet many who do reverently worship at His feet. His utterances constitute the greatest message ever given to mankind.

His Peace Is Unfathomable (Philippians 4:7)

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." The Christians in Philippi were intimate friends of the apostle Paul, and they more than all others appreciated his words. He had been a prisoner in their jail. The church had been formed in tribulation, for when Paul and Silas first preached the gospel in the city, they were flogged and thrust into the innermost dungeon. Their songs at midnight electrified everybody and out of that emotional tempest came a peace beyond understanding. It was unnatural for men to sing the songs of Zion when their bodies were wracked with pain. It was unbelievable that suffering prisoners could be cheerful when their blood was falling upon the floor of the cell. Yet Luke described the scene by saying, "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed" (Acts 16:25-26).

When the evangelists heard the rumble of the earthquake and saw the doors swinging on their hinges, they probably smiled. Their God was still on the throne; their safety was assured. To describe that peace is sometimes difficult. Men in pain do not laugh. People enduring torture and death do not sing unless they are living above unpleasant circumstances. Then they resemble the ocean; the surface may be tempestuous, but in the depth of the sea calm remains undisturbed. Trusting saints know they are hidden with Christ in God and can say:

Oh, the peace the Savior gives:
Peace I never knew before;
And the way has brighter grown
Since I've learned to trust Him more.

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It is worthy of attention that Paul began his epistles with the words, "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:2). The Lord was always the source of everything wonderful. The peace of God revealed a safe

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standing before the Lord. Peace with God indicated the tranquility of the soul indwelt by the Holy Spirit. That blessedness cannot easily be expressed in words. It is indefinable and almost inexpressible. It is the rare atmosphere that belongs to God's highest elevations.

His Joy Is Unspeakable (I Peter 1:8)

The apostle Peter wrote to his friends saying, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." It is significant that the readers of this letter could have found many reasons to complain. They were "strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bythia" (1 Peter 1:1). James also sent a letter to the "twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1). That situation could have been related to the persecution that overwhelmed the early church. Luke wrote, "And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the region of Judaea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1). For some unexplained reason the twelve apostles remained in Jerusalem, but the majority of the early Christians were forced to leave their homes and begin a new life in strange surroundings. It was truly significant that "they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The Christians never complained about their misfortune. They turned scars into stars and, when they met strangers, made known the glorious news of Christ's death. Their happiness surpassed anything known by other people. Their joy was unspeakable and full of glory! Joy is the hallmark of the Christian, but as an old Scottish woman said, "It is better felt than telt!"

His Riches Are Unsearchable (Ephesians 3:8)

Paul said, "Unto me who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Perhaps the text is related to "the riches of his grace" mentioned in Ephesians 1:7. The apostle was an expert in the use of superlatives, and yet he realized the difficulty in trying to explain the abundance of wealth found in Christ. He was a man breathing fresh air, but there was always more oxygen in the atmosphere! He resembled a thirsty soul drinking water from a vast lake—his thirst was quenched but there remained enough refresh-

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ment to meet the need of the world. He was a prospector taking treasure from a vein of gold that ran through eternal hills. However much Paul discovered, it was nothing compared with the inexhaustible riches of the Prince of Glory.

God said, "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." That claim would be staggering to an ordinary person, and yet it was an understatement since Jehovah owns the universe. Every creature and gem belongs to God, for it was His ability that created the gold, diamonds, rubies, and everything else of value and placed them where men eventually discovered them. He made trees to grow, flowers to blossom, birds to sing, and rivers to flow. He produced color schemes and arranged that man should control everything that had been made. Hurricanes may be the breath of His anger, and earthquakes the shaking of His hand. "Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in

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holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Ex. 15:11). Jehovah is almighty, and His riches are unsearchable. Humans have been privileged to discern a little of His wisdom and grace, but to know and understand everything about the Lord would be impossible.

His Love Is Unknowable (Ephesians 3:18-19)

Paul prayed for his friends in Ephesus requesting that they "May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." It is not easy to know something that defies comprehension. Perhaps it is possible to know, in part, the mysteries of all these extraordinary texts, but to exhaust the wealth of the wisdom of God would be impossible. The poet was correct when he wrote:

Could we with ink the ocean fill
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
Though stretched from sky to sky.

Man is only able to comprehend God as He reveals Himself. The writer to the Hebrews said, "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the

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prophets. Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. 1:1-2). The most effective method by which one can understand the love of God is to become acquainted with the life of Christ. He touched lepers, welcomed small children to His arms, and claimed that God saw every injured sparrow falling to the ground. He fed hungry people, shared the grief of a widowed mother, and asked forgiveness for the enemies who crucified Him. Jesus saved a criminal who had nothing to give in return. John explained this when he wrote, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Paul agreed with his colleague, for he wrote, "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:7-8). The Lord's words—love, peace, joy—and riches shone brilliantly against the background of human guilt. Together they resemble mountain peaks which reach the precincts of heaven. It is beyond comprehension that sinners are to be made like Him, but that indisputably is God's plan for His people. "We shall be like him" (1 John 3:2).

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