

Finding Inner Peace reflects the values of humility and prayer that lead us to that true “close personal relationship” with Christ that is talked about by many but truly experienced by few. Your time will be well spent with this guide to prayer and meditation.

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.....

Dr. Eddie Ensley is a true man of God. Here he introduces us to a new and amazing level of prayer—a level that invokes “the peace that passeth understanding.” This book will truly bless you.

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In the midst of the whirlwind of modern life, Deacon Eddie Ensley finds a peaceful center to which he invites you. A joyous mix of Scripture and personal witness, this book will help you step out of your whirlwind to find calm and peace.

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Drawing on the Scriptures and the Catholic tradition as well as on his own Native American heritage, Deacon Ensley provides moving true stories, practical meditations, and “calming prayers” so that we can encounter anew the Lord of past, present, and future, Jesus Christ.

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In this very practical book on prayer, Deacon Eddie uncovers the many facets of abiding, inner peace and shows us pathways by which we can become more fully aware of God's presence and love.

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Deacon Eddie Ensley leads us into a deep prayer life—the only true and ultimate source to overcome fear and anxiety.

DAN ALMETER, LPC, *Alleluia Catholic Fellowship Moderator*

Finding Inner Peace is a masterpiece of spiritual and psychological depth. I highly recommend this book. Pass it on, and the peace it brings.

JUDY ESWAY, *Board-certified Chaplain and Thanatologist*,
author of Real Life, Real Spirituality: A Guide to Healing and Wholeness

Those of us struggling to find some inner tranquility in this frenetic world will find a road map to serenity within the eleven chapters of this compact book. This book could only be written by one who has found that peace, one who can guide us there.

DEACON BENEDICT LOCASTO, LCSW, *Director, Online Education and Distance Learning, Pontifical College Josephinum Diaconate Institute*

Ensley helps readers understand how prayer and surrender are essential if we want to know the peace of Christ. This is a perfect resource for peacemakers and those who seek God's healing touch for their own frustrations, anxieties, and fears.

BROTHER SILAS HENDERSON, SDS, *author of Moving Beyond Doubt and Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, SJ: With an Undivided Heart*

Finding Inner Peace embraces story and prayer to show us that God comes to us in many ways to release us from fear and anxiety. Lovingly written!

ANN PINCKNEY, *Director of Faith Formation, Diocese of Savannah*

Finding Inner Peace touches the heart and calms the mind. Deacon Eddie Ensley helps us explore with compassion and understanding the root causes of the anxieties we all face. Each chapter's guided meditation offers a welcome opportunity in today's busy world to rest in the love and healing of God.

SARAH WIDENER, *Program Manager, River's Edge*

FINDING
INNER
PEACE

Easing Stress and Anxiety
through Prayer



Deacon Eddie Ensley, PHD



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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to
my spiritual director and friend,
Fr. Douglas K. Clark, STL,
whose care, wisdom, and love
have profoundly affected my life.



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The stories from this book that involve people other than the author make use of composites created by the author from his experience with real people in his ministry. Names and details of the stories have been changed, at times composites used, and any similarity between names and stories of individuals in this book to individuals known to readers is purely coincidental.

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INTRODUCTION

We all yearn for a deep-seated serenity even in the midst of storms and conflicts. We generally call this “inner peace,” or as St. Paul calls it, the “peace that passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). *Finding Inner Peace* is designed to help people today open the doorways to this peace. Christ knew this peace, lived this peace, and bestowed it on all who would follow him. His example pointed to a wisdom we can use to edge open the doors of our inmost selves to his tranquility.

If you are searching for peace, it is possible you are experiencing excessive anxiety and fear, or you or someone you care about carry worrisome burdens. Perhaps you have turned to self-help books on stress or watched TV programs for advice on worry. Some of that information is helpful, but it can only go part of the distance in helping us with our heavy loads.

True peace is found only in God. That’s a given. This book offers ways to tap into that peace and helps you tackle impediments to finding that peace, such as painful memories or fear of the future. How to find peace in the midst of hardships such as suffering or when facing death is also discussed. Finally, the book suggests ways to share that peace with others once

we have tasted it, becoming the compassionate peacemakers Christ tells us to be in the Beatitudes. Each chapter offers personal stories as well as a meditative prayer based in Scripture designed to help you find the inner peace you yearn for.

My Native American grandfather, Pop, used a phrase drawn from his culture, “walk in the soul.” God’s peace comes only when we allow him to walk in our souls. His is the only peace that erases anxiety and fear. The overwhelming witness of Scripture, and two thousand continuous years of Christian tradition—Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox—tell us that in many unexpected ways, God can astound us with his power to relieve our stress and worry. Christ promises us rest. In Matthew 11:28, he says “Come to me all you who are tired and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

May the following chapters lead you to the one Source that can truly ease us, the magnificent and tender love of God.

HELPFUL THOUGHTS FROM SPIRITUAL MASTERS

God's rest and God's peace are personal and up close. As St. Alphonsus De Ligouri puts it:

As a mother delights in placing a child on her lap so as to feed and caress him, so our good God delights to treat [us] with the same tenderness, those who love without reserve and have placed all their hopes in God's goodness.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux speaks eloquently on the power of prayer:

O good Jesus, from what great bitterness have you not freed me by your coming, time after time? When distress has made me weep, when untold sobs and groans have shaken me, have you not anointed (me)... with the ointment of your mercy and poured in the oil of gladness? How often has not prayer raised me from the brink of despair and made me feel happy in the hope of pardon? All who have had these experiences know well that the Lord Jesus is a physician indeed...

Letting God Walk in Our Souls

St. John of Kronstadt, Russian Orthodox priest, wrote: "Prayer refreshes...the soul, as outer air refreshes the body. When we pray we feel stronger and fresher, as we feel physically and spiritually stronger and fresher when we walk in the fresh air."



CHAPTER ONE

What Is True Inner Peace?

Christ offers us peace, deep and everlasting peace. Even when the ocean rages and storms, stirring up swells the size of the tallest buildings, far below the surface, in the depths, there can remain an unbroken calm. This is the kind of inner peace Christ promises us.

Moreover, when the time came for Jesus to depart from his disciples, he used simple words to comfort their worried, bewildered hearts: “*Peace* I leave with you; my *peace* I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid” (John 14:27).

Peace does not mean the absence of conflict. At the time Christ spoke those words, everything was in disarray. Some

plotted to kill him. Others spoke disgusting, mocking words to him. Everything seemed unsettled around him. Despite that, the very rhythm of his words showed he possessed a deep, abiding peace. This is the peace he wishes to impart to us if we but unlatch the gates of our souls.

This peace does not take away our struggles, nor does it immunize us from the times when everything seems to fall apart. Rather, it means that in the midst of hardships and difficulties, the Peaceful One can take our hand and walk with us through those lonesome valleys.

As you read these words, are things in your life stormy? You may be struggling with problems in your closest relationships, or fear of the future may weigh heavily on you. No matter what is troubling you, Christ can anchor you in his peace.

The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*, usually translated peace but meaning far more than our English word *peace*; it represented the messianic times, what the New Testament meant by “new creation.” It meant a time when all things would be at peace. The Hebrew conception of *shalom* is to be on the road to peace which, in the words of Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, means to “live out of joyous memories and toward greater anticipations.”¹

The most common greeting in the Bible was *Shalom* or *Shalom aleichem*, “peace be with you.” That phrase is still used and held in high esteem by Jewish people everywhere. It suggests the great time when God will bring his own peace to humankind. That peace will effect the reconciliation of humanity with God as well as with each other.

God had promised a Messiah who would announce the good tidings of peace. This promise was fulfilled in the person

of Jesus Christ who, shortly after his Resurrection, appeared to his disciples and made the long-awaited proclamation.

That first Easter Sunday evening, the disciples cowered together behind closed doors because of fear of the Romans and the religious leaders. Jesus appeared among them and said, "Peace be with you" to calm their frightened hearts.

He punctuated those words by displaying his wounded hands and side through which that peace flowed. This greeting liberated the disciples from crippling fear and left them standing on their tiptoes with joy.

That peace continues to flow from his wounds to our wounds, allowing this deep *shalom* to heal our wounds and leave in their place an unbreakable inner peace.

In his book *In the Grip of Grace*, Bryan Chapell tells us about that kind of peace-bestowing love:

On Sunday, August 16, 1987, Northwest Airlines flight 225 crashed just after taking off from the Detroit airport. One hundred fifty-five people were killed. One survived: a 4-year-old from Tempe, Arizona, named Cecelia. News accounts say when rescuers found Cecelia they did not believe she had been on the plane. Investigators first assumed Cecelia had been a passenger in one of the cars on the highway onto which the airliner crashed. But when the passenger register for the flight was checked, there was Cecelia's name. Cecelia survived because, as the plane was falling, Cecelia's mother, Paula Chican, unbuckled her own seat belt, got down on her knees in front of her daughter,

wrapped her arms and body around Cecelia, and then would not let her go.²

Christ brings us peace just like Paula did. He protects by being wounded and killed for us. He enfolds us in his protective embrace, which can summon peace from chaos. This love that pierces straight through the soul can ease our anxiety and fear.

The most important peace we can experience is the peace of God's presence. We cannot be at peace in the very roots of our being unless we are at peace with God. On the surface there may be times of delight, storms of energy, but unless we allow God to soak our inner being with his tranquility, we won't have peace deep down.

God's peace can thrive despite the external battles. Take, for instance, a fortified castle under siege. The besieging fighters, who outnumber the defenders, make fierce noises, ranting out threats. However, in the center courtyard of the castle there is a flowing, sparkling fountain, with water fed from the high mountains that makes its way to the courtyard through a subterranean channel that no besieger can block. God's peace can be like that.

We can be jangled by turmoil, inside or out; we can be overcome with sadness. Darkness can surround us, but the light of Christ's peace can shine like a lamp within us.

The pledge and source of our peace is a deep fountain of God's love, the Paschal Mystery: the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. That fountain can pour into us a tranquility that the best minds cannot fathom. His peace is the very ground on which our life can calmly rest if we but lean on him.

Then the changes life brings cannot pull us away from that resting or rob us of the sweetness of our kinship with God. Even death cannot break our peace or our awareness of it. As Alexander Maclaren puts it, “We shall but pass from an outer to an inner abiding place.”³

As in the scene in the gospel where the boat carrying Jesus rocks and spins from a raging storm, we should not hide our anguish but, like the disciples, yell out to the one who can say to the inward and outward storms, “Peace. Be still.”

God has blessed me with wise mentors. I have earned two graduate degrees and read hundreds of books on spirituality, both scholarly and popular. Yet, when I search my soul for words and images to describe inner peace, it is not to this wealth of wisdom I first turn, but rather to the memory of a white stucco cabin, not much more than a shack, sitting atop a bluff overlooking the swirling waters of the Chattahoochee, where my Ensley grandparents lived for decades.

Pop, my grandfather, never went to school and could neither read nor write. Granny never went to school either, but through an adult literacy program learned to read some. She would silently read the big white Bible that lay on the coffee table in front of the couch. At times she read aloud for Pop and me, parsing out each syllable slowly. Granny possessed an irrepressible wit and often left me holding my sides in laughter. Pop loved long silences and was the wisest and most peaceful man I have ever known.

Perhaps they were so special because of their Indian ancestry; Pop was half-Cherokee, and Granny also had some Native American blood. Perhaps it was because the two of them loved that book that occupied a special place on the coffee table, and

the beautiful picture of Jesus knocking at the door on their living room wall. Likely, it was a combination of all three. Their cabin, for me, in the midst of a tumultuous growing up, was my refuge, my safety, and my strong fortress.

A Baptist Christian, Pop had likely never heard the word *contemplation*, the prayer of the deep silences. Yet contemplation, as I would describe his silence today, poured forth from throughout his personality. He could sit in his easy chair for an hour or two absorbed in holy stillness. Pop's time in the silences emptied him of fear, tension, and stress, while opening him to the nudges of the Spirit, making room for the peace of that white Bible on the coffee table in the inner recesses of his soul. Nor did Pop's prayer of quiet end when he got up from his chair; it followed him throughout his day.

Pop's calm set at peace those near him; his peace brought peace to me. When worry twisted my stomach, just being in his presence hushed the murmurings of my soul. Even when I was a very young boy, Pop could easily tell if something troubled me, and something often did. Pop's son, my father, was a wonderful and loving father when he was well, but unfortunately, he was often not well. My father had a mental illness that would come and go: paranoid schizophrenia. When Daddy was in the clutch of his delusions, he confused and terrified me. I didn't know how to express the turmoil it caused, but Pop always sensed when I needed to be calmed. He would say, "Let's go take a walk," and take my hand and walk with me along the bluff. At times, he would sing to me some chants in Cherokee, accompanied by the rhythms of his gourd rattle. Perhaps they were Cherokee lullabies. Their soft rhythms glided inside me, bringing me a tranquility that unruffled my emotions.

Ritual, too, was a contributor to Pop's profound peace. Each morning he would hike down to the river bank and chant songs to greet the first sunlight and honor the water. Cherokees call this ritual "going to water."

When I was five, Daddy started stringing incomprehensible phrases together while on a ladder at work. The plant nurse rushed him to the hospital so this episode could be treated; it was his first hospitalization. Mother chose to be by his bedside day and night and entrusted my care to my grandparents. That first night away from home my whole body tingled with a frightened numbness as I lay there between Granny and Pop. I remember not sleeping at all. When early morning came, after a quick breakfast of oatmeal, Pop took me walking on the bluff. He stopped and we both looked down at the water, greeting it.

Then he said, "Let's now greet grandmother sun," and he had me pray these words after him.

Good Morning, Grandmother Sun, Good Morning,
I stand in the middle of your sunrays,
I stand in the middle of your sunrays,
And by the Creator I am blessed.

That ritual grounded me, planted me solidly on this earth at a time when my life seemed to be flying apart. Pope St. John Paul II met with 10,000 Native Americans in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1987. A native medicine man and third-generation Catholic led the pope through a blessing ceremony and the pope told those present to hold on to their culture and sacred ceremonies. I wish Pop had been alive to see this.⁴

Most of us yearn for inner peace and seek it in many ways. All too often we turn to addictions, sex, money, or drugs to bring us a false sense of inner peace by numbing us. We may hold lots of baggage from both the present and past, perhaps a fractured and untrue self-image, which leads us to disparage ourselves and hold tight to a picture of ourselves as inferior. Perhaps we have a need to control others, hoping that a sense of superiority will make us feel tranquil and protected. Perhaps we hold tightly to unforgiven hurts from the past.

There seems to be a shortage of peace in our culture. Part of the reason for this comes from the frantic pace of modern life. We often stay connected 24/7. We can become addicted to our constant bombardment of cell phone rings, frequent messaging, and the screens of smart phones, computers, and tablets. We leave little room for stillness.

Most of us know what living without inner peace is like. It's living with our stomachs tied up in a knot, having a speeding heartbeat, sighing instead of breathing in rhythm. Perhaps we suffer from a hammering headache. Lack of peace tightens all of our muscles. We need to turn to God in prayer in order to find the true inner peace we so desperately seek.

≡ **TIME FOR CALMING PRAYER** ≡

A Prayer ✧ *Dear Lord, you are the fountain of peace, rich everlasting peace. In Jesus, you uttered Shalom to all creation. Help me open my heart right now to your peace. I give you my baggage, my resentments, my fears, my worries. In your midst, stress flows out of us like dishwater down a drain. You are the*

water that wells up into everlasting life, peace that settles all discord and quiets the raging wars within us. Enable us to say a strong resounding yes to your calm.

Scripture Reflection * Read the following Scripture slowly so that it sinks in. Let the words find a hiding place in your heart. If part of the passage really touches or speaks to you, slowly read that passage over again, savoring it. Let the Scripture lead you into the stillness of God.

The apostle Paul was beset by troubling anxious cares as he went about his ministry but maintained inner calm. The New Testament word for peace, *irene*, literally means wholeness, integration, and being totally alive. Paul captures the real meaning of the word in this passage:

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers (and sisters), whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. PHILIPPIANS 4:5–8

Guided Meditation ✨ Take time to relax and be still. Let your attention move over your body. Notice any physical pain or discomfort... Become aware of the emotions you are feeling... What fears are you feeling?... What guilts?... What anger?... What feelings of affection?... What are some of the thoughts you are thinking?... Don't judge or try to change what you are feeling or thinking. Just notice and acknowledge.

When you have noticed where you are right now, give yourself as you are, where you are, to God.

Pray this prayer or a similar prayer: *Here I am Lord. This is me right now. I place myself as I am in the sunlight of your calming, stilling care. I open myself to the unfathomable mystery of your peace, a peace that surpasses all understanding.*

Rest in the stillness several minutes. Pause in silence before God's quieting love.