

God Guides Us

Session 6: Through the Experience of Peace in Our Hearts.

I. Opening Prayer

The passages that will be prayerfully read as part of the opening prayer are the Scriptural foundation for this teaching.

- “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” Proverbs 3:5-6
- “You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart” Psalm 51: 6
- “O that today you would hearken to His voice! Harden not your hearts.” Psalm 95-7-8
- “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7 (Note: peace in your heart is one clear sign that God is leading you.)

II. The TEACHING for Session 6: God guides us through the experience of peace in our heart.

This session is on the way that God guides us through the experience of peace in our heart. In developing and deepening our relationship with Jesus, we need to learn about Him through study by using our minds and the gift of reason. We also need to encounter the Person of Christ in our hearts. We will then be convinced that Jesus is real: a living, Divine Person who loves us deeply and guides us.

It is helpful to clarify the use of the word heart. In our Catholic Tradition, the meaning of the word “heart” can be explained as follows:

The heart is the deepest center of our being, beyond the grasp of our reason; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the center of our will, the place where decisions are made. It is the place of truth; it is the deepest place of encounter in our relationship with God. (Adapted from the *Catechism*, paragraph 2563)

It is important to note that in our culture today, the meaning of the word “heart” is used interchangeably with emotions or feelings and this can be a legitimate usage. However, we will never leave aside the definition of “heart” based upon the *Catechism*.

In our heart, we receive guidance from God. Have you ever experienced being moved in a different direction than advised because it didn't seem right? Have you sensed that you could



not trust someone in a situation? These feelings can be prompts from the Holy Spirit who desires to guide us in the right direction. Learning to recognize these promptings requires ongoing prayer, a practiced listening to God, to understand His leading.

St. Teresa of Avila explains in her writings how God speaks to our hearts, giving us clues that can guide us along the path He would have us follow. Our intentional times of prayer are essential.

“...St. Teresa insists that we talk to God directly during our time of prayer. And conversation, in the ordinary acceptance of the word, implies a mutual exchange of words and sentiments. She assures us that He most definitely responds to our conversation and converses with us.

We need not think, however, that God makes Himself heard in an audible manner. He answers us by sending us graces of light and love whereby we understand His ways better and burn with desire to embrace them generously. Listening, therefore, consists in accepting these graces and striving to profit by them.

Hence, if we speak to Christ, we may be consoled that He will speak to us in return... It is well to vary our verbal conversation directed to Christ with periods of silence, so that we can listen to Him and offer Him our receptivity. We speak to Christ; He speaks to us – we could expect no less of our Divine Friend” (*Conversation with Christ* by Peter Thomas Rohrbach, pages 52, 53).

Any feelings in our heart that we perceive as direction from God will always include an interior experience of peace, the primary hallmark of His guidance. We must submit this guidance to a mature thinking process and a properly formed conscience based on Scripture and Church teaching as we can be swayed by disordered feelings of selfishness, envy or anger etc. Following guidance from God that is properly sorted out and distinguished – discerned – will always manifest in an increase of faith, hope & charity. When we follow God's guidance, we may still face difficulties, even opposition. Discerning properly gives us the confidence to hold fast to the direction we have received, knowing that we are following God's guidance in this situation.

Especially in making big decisions, spiritual discernment should include ongoing prayer and waiting with patience on the Lord to confirm the guidance. Seeking the counsel of a spiritually experienced person is also essential.

We are not always going to understand God's guidance perfectly. However, if we are seeking God, He will use everything, even our mistakes, to lead us and guide us. We can know with assurance His desire to guide us and that **His peace in our heart will stand as the primary hallmark of this guidance.**

Discussion questions for small groups

Question 1. What stood out for you? or What resonated most with your personal situation currently? Why? Summarize below.

Question 2. What is the primary hallmark of God's guidance?

Question 3. Define spiritual discernment as described above. In making big decisions, what should your spiritual discernment include?

Question 4. Summarize in one or two sentences what your takeaway is from this section.

Question 5. If you were going to relate something from "God guides us through the experience of peace in our heart" to your family tonight at the dinner table, what would you tell them?

Would you

- 1) share the story with them or
- 2) mention something that was helpful to you from the teaching or
- 3) bring up something that resonated with you in connection with your own life experience?

III. A story from Scripture in which God gave St. Paul guidance in his heart. (30 min.)

Look up and read Acts 15:35 – 41 and 16:1-3 and 2 Timothy 4:11 in your Bible. The passage is included below.

Introduction to the Scripture: Paul and Barnabas made their first missionary journey together. Barnabas brought John Mark along. John Mark, also called Mark for short, eventually wrote the Gospel of Mark. At a certain point, Mark leaves Paul and Barnabas during the missionary journey. Then on another journey, Barnabas wanted to bring Mark along. Paul said no as he believed that Mark was not committed. At this point, Paul and Barnabas split, as they chose other people to travel with them on their missionary journeys. It was a difficult experience but God used this difficulty to form two teams and a greater number of missionary journeys were made as a result of this split.

Later, Paul writes Timothy and says to bring Mark with him. Mark had worked hard and long and been a good servant of the Lord. Paul had a change of heart and accepted and embraced Mark, giving him a second chance.

Acts 15: 35-41

³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord. ³⁶ Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, ³⁸ but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. ³⁹ They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Acts 16: 1-3

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. ² He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him.

2 Timothy 4:11

¹¹ Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.

Question 1. Summarize what is happening in this Scripture passage.

Question 2. What guidance did St. Paul receive from God regarding Mark?

Question 3. What stood out for you? Why?

Question 4. Does this remind you of something or someone in your life?

Question 5. What word or phrase from this passage had special meaning for you?

IV. A true, modern-day story illustrating how God guided a person through the experience of peace in their heart

One story has been provided. This story reveals how the Holy Spirit still gives guidance in a person's heart. Discussion questions follows the story.

Story One **'Failure Was Not On The Menu' by Jonathan Byrd.**

My whole dream seemed to come crashing down one hot August evening four years ago as I slumped, dejected, at an old picnic table in the middle of the construction site. Dark steel structural girders loomed over me, seeming to overshadow any hopes I had for making a go of the cafeteria I was building.

I had been in the restaurant business most of my life, and for years I had dreamed of building the best cafeteria in the world. Yet now many people were predicting it would fail.

Why? Because I did not plan to put alcohol on the menu.

It wasn't that I had anything against other restaurants doing this; *I simply felt God didn't want me to do it.* One evening long ago when I was eighteen, I made a church call with our minister on the grieving kin of a whole family who had been killed outright. Their car had been struck head-on by a drunk driver. In the silence of that sad living room, I knew that all the money in the world wasn't worth being in any way responsible for such a tragedy.

But a lot of knowledgeable people had a different view.

"Jonathan," advised a business friend, "here you're planning a restaurant with big function rooms for weddings, banquets and other celebrations. If you won't serve liquor, why, you're writing your own ticket for bankruptcy."

When I explained that I felt the banquet rooms would be used by church groups, he snickered. "You probably won't make enough off them to pay your light bill."

"Well," I said, "I guess I'll have to leave that in God's hands."

God hadn't failed me in my thirty-six years. But that didn't mean life had been easy. Mom and Dad weren't well off, and to help make ends meet I started working as a youngster selling a skin salve door-to-door. Next I sold tomatoes, then raised sheep, and by the time I was nine I had a thousand dollars in the bank.

Meanwhile Dad and Granddad had started a small ice-cream stand on U.S. 31 in Greenwood, just south of Indianapolis. Eventually it grew into the Kitchen Drive-In, and soon I was flipping burgers, making shakes and greeting customers.

I loved the restaurant business. It touched me to see folks enjoying good food the way I did. Mom said I had a big hole in my stomach that no amount of food could fill. Still, back then I was so skinny I had to wear suspenders to keep my pants up.

I was impressed by how many significant biblical events involved people eating together: Jesus feeding the five thousand; His grilling fish on the beach for the disciples; and the most intimate gathering of all, those awed men sitting down to a meal on the eve of Jesus' crucifixion.

The summer I was fifteen, Dad became ill, and I took over the responsibility of our restaurant and its sixty-some employees. I worked eighty hours a week, convinced this was my calling in life. Dad eventually retired and I went on to Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration. I got a Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise and through the years expanded that into seven KFC restaurants. All the while my dream of opening a cafeteria was growing.

Why a cafeteria? When we were kids my folks often took us to a local cafeteria after church. I loved being able to pick out just what I wanted from the foods displayed before me. Even my little sister Janeen, a finicky eater, always found something she liked.

[Later on], the dream became more persistent as it took shape in my mind. I wanted to serve delicious food with the greatest selection possible at economical prices. For quality assurance I planned on modern kitchens with computer-controlled menus, which had never been tried in a restaurant before, only in hospitals and institutions. Since I wanted to offer at least two hundred items each day, I figured the cafeteria line would be almost a third as long as a football field. I began to see I was thinking about what could well be the world's largest cafeteria.

But would there be enough customers? Jesus told a parable advising that a man who builds a tower should count the cost so he knows he can finish the job (Luke 14:28-30). I had done my homework. Indianapolis was a fast-growing city, and I had picked out a good location near one of America's major crossroads – just off Interstate 65 in Greenwood – where we would serve not only the local community but also many travelers passing through.

After a lot of prayer, I burned my bridges by selling the Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants. On March 1, in a dedication service, we turned our first spadeful of dirt on what would be a colonial-style building covering one acre of ground.

But from then on, it seemed every worldly thing set out to stop us. We figured on spending twenty-five thousand dollars for permits; they ended up costing ten times that. Then we had to truck a huge load of dirt off the site to bring it to proper grade. This cost another eighty-six thousand dollars. The contractor advised me to cut back on the quality of materials, such as the raw oak trim throughout the vast dining room.

"No," I said, "I'm putting my name on this place. My wife, two boys and I are going to eat here along with, I hope, a lot of other people. I want it to be right."

The concrete was poured, the structural steel erected, and the walls started going up. But a big storm hit us in July and blew down most of the roof trusses.

Then, in August, came the worst day of all.

My pastor showed up at the work site and passed on a prediction from a fellow church member who was in the restaurant food-distribution business. "He is terribly worried about you, Jonathan, and so am I," he said. "He says you'll go broke in six months, and I thought I'd better come down and warn you." My pastor felt the same way I did about liquor, but he was also sincerely concerned about my well-being.

As he drove away, I sat down at the splintery old table and began calculating my extra costs. By now I was five hundred thousand dollars over budget. Early dusk had fallen as I sat alone in the tomblike silence of the unfinished restaurant. Then other headlights flashed across in front and a car

door thumped. A man in a dark business suit strode up the wooden plank into the building and began peering around. I rose and approached him. "Can I help you?"

The man eyed my old work clothes. "Oh, just looking around," he said. "I own a chain of funeral homes, and I hear the owner of this place isn't going to serve alcohol." He cocked his head. "He'll be bankrupt in six months. With all this space, I figure this could be the biggest funeral home in the Midwest." He shot me a quick smile. "I just wanted to see it now because I figure I'll be buying it from the fool who's building it."

After he left I slumped down at the picnic table and put my head on my arms. An evening breeze blew an old newspaper around my feet. "Oh, Lord," I groaned, "is there any good news?"

At that another car pulled up. *Uh-oh*, I wondered, *now what?*

Two men and two women stepped out of the car. One man began telling the others, "There will be a dining room seating five hundred, an eighty-eight-foot cafeteria line, and some beautiful banquet halls seating six hundred . . ."

He stepped around the corner, and his face lit up. "Jonathan! I'm just showing my friends your place."

It was Dr. Gene Hood, pastor of the Nazarene church in nearby Beech Grove. "What's the matter?" he asked. "You look down. Had a tough day?"

"Well, you kind of picked the worst day of my life." I recited my troubles, ending up with the "funeral" the local undertaker had just conducted.

He laughed at the story. "Well, I'm excited about your plans," he said. "I can just see all the Southern gospel singers in your banquet halls."

Gospel singers? What was he talking about?

Dr. Hood leaned across the table. "If you have enough faith to build this place, I have enough faith to help you keep those banquet halls filled with great gospel-singing groups."

That was the encouragement I needed. Three months later, on November 7, we opened our doors. Customers began streaming in, and they have been crowding Jonathan Byrd's Cafeteria and Banquet Hall ever since. Dr. Hood was true to his word; every six weeks our banquet rooms were quickly booked up, and churches began reserving them far in advance.

So the naysayers were wrong. We're thriving. All of which, I guess, proves that if you count the cost, stick to your principles and leave everything in God's hands, you'll have a menu that can't fail.

From How to Listen to God by Doug Hill, pages 103-107.
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Discussion questions

Question 1: Underline the place/places *where* the person received guidance. Briefly describe *how* the person received guidance from God through the experience of peace in their heart?

Question 2: How did this story affect you?

Question 3: Does this story or anything contained in it remind you of something in your own life?

Question 4: Did you find this story consoling, challenging, comforting? Why?

Question 5: In reflecting on this true, modern-day story, what is the take-away for you?

V. Closing Prayer: The 12th Grade Prayer Card

Using the "Seeking God's Guidance" Prayer Card, pray the front side together as a group. Visit diolc.org/prayer to download a Prayer Card.

