

Inner Peace

In the Red River Valley

By Roxane B. Salonen

Even the sound of the word “peace” conveys a feeling of restfulness, of being at a place of contentment and serenity. From the hard-consonant, springboard beginning comes a softening, a letting go, a sigh-like release:

Peace.

The two main types of peace include outer and inner peace. Outer peace more often refers to an absence of hostility, as in war and peace, whereas inner peace points to a state of quiet or tranquility, or, the absence of agitation.

We as individuals may have little control over the starting and stopping of conflict in the wider world, but we do have control—oftentimes more than we realize—over the smaller but just as significant battles being waged in our personal lives.

My first memory of inner peace involved an encounter with nature at my best friend’s home in the country, at age eight. We’d begun our morning at a shaded pond, sitting on a muddy bank of the water hole, watching bugs cruising along the surface. But at some point we parted ways. She found her own corner of the world and I found mine in an open field of wheat.

As I stood there watching the sun slowly descend, I realized I wasn’t truly alone. I had a clear awareness of love emanating from the source of something bigger than myself. If I could have, I might have lingered there forever, but in time I was summoned for dinner, and the humming of ordinary life returned.

Is it possible to feel peace and restfulness in the middle of a life that seems to be rolling full steam ahead? Here are some ways local people are finding peace in their own lives.

Jill has found nature to be the quickest route back to peace when life seems to be buzzing past too briskly. “I can’t think of a time when I was in nature that I didn’t feel peace. Whether it’s on a nature walk or sitting on the edge of the lake listening to sounds around me and letting thoughts empty out in my mind to just be in the moment—that is what allows me to experience peace.”

—Jill W., Fargo

Father Brian Bachmeier said for him God is the only source for true internal peace, which he describes as “a deep-seated sense of stable contentment, tranquility and serenity that is largely unshaken by the normal trials and sorrows of life.”

—Father Brian Bachmeier, pastor,
Sts. Anne & Joachim Catholic Church, Fargo

Mike works a second job in a place many might assume is far from peaceful. But working at Prairie St. John's psychiatric and chemical dependency center as a security guard does, in fact, bring him to a place of stillness that allows inner serenity. "Unlike my other job, the phone's not ringing off the hook, it's nice and quiet most of the time. Then all of a sudden, it can be bedlam and the adrenaline releases. But most of the time it's calming." Occasionally, he'll take his now-adult sons to the drag races in Brainerd to find peace. It's really the ride itself that brings peace. "It's just getting away, getting on the road and going for a drive, a change of location."

—Mike K., Moorhead

Sheila commented, "Meditation and yoga are wonderful practices, but even more simple acts of stillness peppered throughout the day add another degree of consistency." In that vein, she added, "stoplights, ringing phones and the ping of emails" can be welcomed "because they have come to serve as a reminder to focus on breath and acknowledge the present moment with gratitude."

—Sheila S., Fargo

Mary uses prayer to cultivate peace. Despite her jam-packed life as a mother of four, Mary tries to set aside time each morning to pray the Rosary, a meditative form of prayer focusing on the life of Jesus. She uses Rosary beads strung by her oldest daughter, Brittany. "She chose unique beads representing each of my children and myself. So in a special way, not only does saying the Rosary make me feel closer to God, it makes me feel closer to my kids as well."

—Mary H., Fargo

Darrell said family roots him in peace, followed closely by being outdoors. "Being out in nature is about as close to God as you can get," he said, noting that he and his son enjoy yearly hunting trips to Montana. "You get up on that Continental Divide in the Rocky Mountains, and it's like you're in the middle of nowhere. Nothing interferes with a clear thought of mind, I guess you could say. It's a nice feeling. You feel safe up there—it's a peace of mind."

Darrell's grown son, Troy, also mentioned the hunting trips with his father which started in childhood. "The awe of it, it grounds you to realize how small you actually are in the world." He also finds solace in the shorter, weekend outings, like "taking a Sunday off and going to the lake. It's the small things that encompass a larger peacefulness. I try to enjoy my weekends as much as possible."

—Darrell and Troy D., West Fargo

Although child-rearing duties kept Ann from joining her mother on a recent pilgrimage to Medjugorje, Bosnia, hearing of her mother's experience has helped her consider inner peace anew. Included in the apparitional message imparted by Jesus' mother, Mary, at the site is the encouragement to strive to live peace in our heart through praying with love, she said. "Mary revealed that through prayer, we begin to desire reconciliation with ourselves, God and others."

—Ann R., Fargo

For Jill, peace begins with self-care. Choosing to exercise, eat healthy foods and make right choices—including seeking nurturing friends—all help form a strong base for inner peace. "You need to follow your gut," she said. "Sometimes when you're with certain people, they don't make you feel peaceful, so definitely spending time with healthy people who have the same belief system as you do can help."

Music is another tool she uses to trigger peace. "Sometimes when I'm feeling stressed or anxious, I'll sit down at the piano, and once I start playing the stress just goes away," she said. "I also sing a great deal, and when my children were babies I would sing to them and it would help relieve their stress."

—Jill P., Fargo

Pastor Jerry Protector said he grapples with outer and inner peace on a regular basis, both through his work on peace initiatives at church and through the ongoing process of trying to heal from the loss of his stepson, Robert Rasmussen, a victim of the World Trade Center terrorist attack. "Our whole family has been among those affected by the breaking of peace in the world," he said, noting that faith has been central for helping the family work through its grief and strive toward inner peace.

—Jerry Protector, assisting pastor,
Peace Lutheran Church, Fargo

Walking is one way Sarah draws out inner peace. "Walking outside allows me to clear my head and think through things, and I often get ideas for things while walking," she said. "Walking can be meditation too—taking in the sounds and sights around you as you walk."

—Sarah M., Fargo

Betty heard that a mother's love is like peace—it need not be acquired nor deserved. The mother of three young boys, when Betty needs a reprieve from chaos she finds it in her place of worship. "Surrounded by candles, incense and complete quietness, I empty my worries, even if for a few minutes, and find myself in a place of comfort while praying. That gives me inner peace."

—Betty G., Fargo


When considering what moments in her life have brought the greatest sense of peace, Mary Kay recalls the simplest moments mothering her children. "While holding, rocking and cuddling my three children, especially when they were infants," she said, "I felt an overwhelming peace knowing that is exactly what I was created for."

—Mary Kay S., Fargo

Although peace can be found in a specific location, like a health club or church or spa, it also can be found in the recesses of one's mind in the middle of a busy day at work.

If I could have bottled up that feeling of being out in that open field as child, I would have doses of peace at the ready. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way, and in the midst of family life the pathway to peace can seem muddy at times.

When I hear my children bickering and lose my resolve to not get swept up in the little tornados that regularly swirl throughout our home, world peace seems far away, too. But I'd like to believe, like Mother Theresa did, that if peace can be achieved to some degree in our homes, then it can be attained in the wider world as well. Every day I have the chance to make better choices, and with each diverted argument, quelled moment of fury and softened tongue, I can chalk up a victory mark for peace.

If rocking chairs could talk, perhaps they'd be saying, "Peace-peace...peace-peace...peace-peace." 

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Symptoms of Inner Peace

- A loss of interest in judging self based on past experiences.
- A loss of interest in conflict.
- A loss of interest in judging others.
- An unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment.
- Frequent overwhelming episodes of appreciation.
- A loss of interest in interpreting the actions of others.
- A loss of ability to worry, (this is a very serious symptom).
- Contented feelings of connectedness with others and nature.
- Frequent attacks of smiling through the eyes of the heart.
- Increasing susceptibility to love extended by others as well as the uncontrollable urge to extend it.
- An increasing tendency to let things happen rather than make them happen.
- A tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than from fears.

—Marianne Williamson