

## Where Can I Turn for Peace? Finding your own Sacred Grove

Imagine, if you can, this scenario (or, if lacking imagination, just look around a bit): You are in the midst of a scene of great confusion, bad feelings (or pretended good feelings), strife of words and contests of opinions. The cry and tumult is great and incessant, with people using powers of reason and sophistry to prove errors of others, each equally zealous in endeavoring to establish their tenets and disprove all others. Just as in the time of Joseph Smith, there is indeed a war of words and tumult of opinions that affects the whole country, with great multitudes involved and no small amount of divisions occurring. (JSH 1:5-10)

If such an environment is ours, and it is, where do we turn for peace, reflection, solace, and strength? Is there an escape? Where do we find answers and wisdom from God?

Joseph Smith's experience in the Sacred Grove is a foundational pattern for us to follow in receiving testimony and revelation, strength and spiritual gifts, and in finding peace.

| <b>Sacred Grove Experience</b>   | <b>Less Effective</b>  |
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| A <u>priority</u> – mind called up often to serious reflection (pondering) [v. 8, 10]  | Procrastinating, casual wondering  |
| <u>Preparation</u> – through scripture study, Church attendance, laboring under extreme difficulties [v. 8, 10, 11]  | Wishful thinking   |
| <u>Purpose</u> – determined to gain wisdom from God! [v.13]  | Rationalizing, justifying  |
| <u>Commitment</u> – Decided what, why, when, where [v. 14]   | No determined course of action   |
| <u>Right Questions</u> – [v. 10]<br>Which is right and wrong?<br>What is to be done?<br>How shall I know it?   | Ineffective questions:<br>Why?<br>When?<br>Whose fault is it?  |
| <u>Prayer answered by the Lord</u><br>God and Son (2 Beings-Divine Witnesses) appeared in brightness, light, glory, from above, descended <i>gradually</i> , <i>rested</i> upon him, called Joseph by name, expressed love for the Other [v. 17] | Prayer responded to by Satan<br><i>Seized</i> immediately, bound, and overcome by actual, incredible power of enemy who didn't want his kingdom annoyed or disturbed. Thick darkness, despair, abandon, destruction. [v. 15, 20] |
| Ask question, receive unexpected response...[v.18-19]  | Predictably wrong  |
| Put into practice regardless of personal cost  | Personal cost – abandonment, total misery  |

Often, like Joseph, when we come to ourselves again, we find ourselves without the strength we need to get up and go forward. We must revisit our Sacred Grove often to find that commitment and continued guidance.

Why does the Lord counsel us to pray not only publicly, but in our closets and secret places? (Alma 34:26, 33:7, Matt 6:6) Just as we have private feelings and questions for the Lord, He has personal direction just for us – private instruction to bless our lives and enable us to then bless others. In a wonderful talk given at the 1996 BYU Women's Conference, Sister Patricia Holland addressed the importance of this daily, private time:

“If it is a high priority and a fundamental goal in your life, you will find ways, early or late, to be with God. If the key to your car was lost...or a child was lost, could you take time to find it? ...If God is lost in your life and you are not going to be strong or stable without him, can you be focused and fixed enough to find him? ...Please allow yourself to take the time to go to that wilderness retreat now, that sanctuary if you will—the temple, our own homes, places of privacy and revelation, places filled with prayer and meditation and scriptural truths. Allow yourselves to turn a few things down and turn a few things off. Seek to prayerfully position yourselves in some solitude and serenity to receive the mind of God. Stop what you are so frantically doing and go into your private wilderness. Shut the door, turn out all earthly lights, set aside all earthly sights. Position yourself calmly, quietly, in humble serenity until your prayer flows naturally, lovingly. It is my personal witness that when you feel God’s presence, when you feel he is with you, you are filled with a wonderful strength and you can do anything that is needed in righteousness.

“When we are thus filled and strengthened, then we can return to the battle. We can return to some inevitable noise and commotion and, yes, even some drudgery; but we do it happier, more hopefully, more optimistically because we have communed with God and been filled with his fullness. We have been filled with *his joy*, *his charity*, and *his compassion* and we bear something of *his light* as we return. And because we are filled and strong, we can serve others.” (BYU Magazine, Winter ’96)

A wonderful and wise woman recently lamented that our society has few places of quiet and solitude where we can go to find spiritual and emotional refreshment and peace. No orchards, fields, woods, or wilderness are available to the majority of us. Where, then, is our Sacred Grove?

For each one of us in our different places and situations, we must seek a quiet place where we ponder, seek the Lord in the scriptures, and pray. Some young mothers use the time nursing babies to search, ponder, and pray. Other women find isolation amidst crowded public transportation where they withdraw into their own theater of thought, study, and supplication. For some, different rooms in the house at different times of day provide needed spiritual repose. Exercise such as walking give quiet moments to ponder and pray to some, while driving in a car or doing housework bring uninterrupted opportunities for others. Those blessed to live near Temples worship in the ultimate setting of sacred sustenance. Each of us must seek a place of testimony, a place of peace and solitude, even if only for a few moments. One busy mother mentioned that she would stitch one thread in her handwork each time she changed the laundry in the basement. Sometimes we only have one thread’s worth of personal time. What a blessing to spend that minute in the presence of the Lord!

President Faust, in the Sunday morning session of General Conference of April, 2005, said, “To fully enjoy life, all of us must find our own breathing space and peace of mind. How can we do this? There is only one answer. We must rise above the evil that encroaches upon us. We must follow the counsel of the Lord, who said, ‘It is my will, that all they who call on my name, and worship me according to mine everlasting gospel, should gather together, and stand in holy places.’ D&C 101:22” He then reminds us that the preeminent holy place is the Temple, followed by our homes and then our chapels.

As we attempt to emulate the Savior by blessing and nurturing His children, tending to the infirm and possessed, struggling against the effects of sin, like Him we get tired amidst the storms of life. Three significant questions are raised in the account of Jesus stilling the tempest that surface on such occasions. In our fright, we often seek to “awaken” Him, wondering if He even cares about us: “Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4:38). His response is a question to us in return: “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” (Matt 8:26) He then proceeds in His own time and way to still the winds and waves that bring doubt and danger. Then the last question, which I believe is one we must address on a daily basis, and perhaps, if asked and answered first of all, would make the other two questions irrelevant: “What manner of man is this...?!” What kind of God do we worship? This principle underlies Joseph’s experience in the Sacred Grove. As Joseph discovered, we are reminded daily in our own sacred grove of His infinite love and mercy and wisdom, and fear is replaced with faith and doubt with desire to come to Him and be like Him. Our ability to share his living water is increased, our happiness is multiplied, we come “to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge [and will be] filled with all the fullness of God.” (Eph. 3:19)

-Marlene Hinton