

PURSUIT OF PEACE

"Seek Peace and Pursue it" - Psalm 34:14

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CHAPTER ONE -

WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

"CHRISTIANITY PROMISES A LOT that it can't deliver," blurted out a husky, blond teen-ager named Jim Bowen.

The pastor looked across his desk at the captain of the high school football team. He was certainly the most popular and well-liked boy in the high school and probably in that entire Northern Pennsylvania town. He had attended some special services held in the church the month before, and after one of the services, he had taken CHRIST as his Saviour.

While the pastor was still trying to compose himself and think of a possible answer, Jim continued with only a pause for breath. The words flowed from his lips like a torrent of water while he pounded the desk with his fist.

"I've been fooled. That preacher told me that if I would line up my life with CHRIST, I'd have real happiness and peace. He said that all my problems would be settled. That's a laugh! I've had more problems since I was saved than ever before. I did everything that guy told me to do and now I'm in real trouble. The fellows on the team call me 'sissy' because of my "religion." The girls won't date me because I won't go to some of the places we used to go. I'm more mixed up and unhappy now than I have ever been in my life. I can't just sit around and read the Bible and pray all day and go to church. If this is all there is to Christianity, preachers are a fraud!"

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Donna Farmington was a corn-silk blonde, with slanting blue eyes, high cheekbones and a generous, laughing mouth. She had a beautifully built, expensively clothed body. On first glance, one would think that the world had given her everything her heart desired. As far back as she could remember, her life had been one long daydream of love. She hadn't found this hard to achieve with her looks and her pleasing personality. Love had turned to sour grapes and one bitter refrain kept repeating in her mind, "Love is nothing but a trap."

Her days were spent cleaning house, washing mountains of dishes, keeping a tot out of mischief, diapering an infant, washing and ironing, washing and ironing, until she could scream. She might have taken it better but for the fact that her husband came home tired. All he ever seemed to want was quiet, a well-cooked meal, and a snooze in front of the television set before going to

bed.

All her dreams of the joys of love had collapsed. There was nothing for which life was worth living.

Dick Neelson was a self-made man in the fullest sense of the word. He had come from a poor but well-educated family. He had worked his way through college, and was now in business for himself. He was on his way to making a million dollars. Though he hated to admit it, even to himself, this was the goal he had set for his life. But Dick was a Christian and an officer in his church. In order to keep his business increasing rapidly, he had to compromise some of his Christian standards. He belonged to clubs and attended social gatherings that not only bothered him personally but were bringing reproach on the church which he served. He faithfully witnessed to other businessmen but seldom interested them in hearing about the Lord.

While lying in the hospital following an operation he was forced to take time to face himself. He reviewed the past twelve years. He had a beautiful home, two cars, a wife who wore furs, children who had their slightest wishes granted. He was well-known and respected in the business world, but deep inside, he was miserable. He felt guilty for neglecting his family, for talking to others about putting the Lord first in their lives when he wasn't doing it. Even more, he felt guilty for the criticism he had brought on his church by some of his business and social practices. Success and wealth had not brought the happiness he expected.

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Since early childhood, Janet Speers had been afraid of something. She had feared the dark, being alone, being away from her mother. She was afraid of school teachers and strangers. As she grew older, she feared traveling alone, driving in heavy traffic, meeting strangers and getting in crowds.

Now she was a minister's wife. She spent years listening to others' problems, counseling and giving advice. At times she realized how hollow her advice must sound because she couldn't solve her own problems. She was still beset by all kinds of fears. Some were well suppressed, others were covered by excuses or by blaming circumstances. She had been led to believe that the best way to solve her problems was to forget herself in helping others. But Christian service was not the answer to her needs.

Instead of turning Joe Roberts in on a charge of drunkenness, a Philadelphia policeman sent him to the nearest church. That is how he found himself in my husband's study one sunny spring morning. It was calm and beautiful outside but inside Joe a storm raged. Little by little the story came out. Joe had a lovely wife and three children and had once had a good job. The monotony and restlessness he felt inside was first stilled by alcohol. Even in drinking, he couldn't get away from himself. He lost his job and got in debt. Finally the responsibility of the family was too pressing so he ran away.

For a little while the freedom seemed exhilarating; he thought that he had found peace. A girl, equally as restless and unhappy as he, helped him enjoy his fling. But the unrest and guilty nagging around the corners of his mind wouldn't be stilled. He returned home sick at heart, and desperate. He knew that nothing the world had to offer in its pleasure and sin could satisfy the hunger and emptiness of his heart.

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"Ma" Evans, as she was affectionately called by all of her friends, was 71 years old. Her life had been hard. Her husband died before their son graduated from high school. Later she remarried and had three children. There was never quite enough money for all of their needs. "Ma" took in washings, cleaned neighbors' homes, and helped with special dinner parties. Her summers were spent raising a garden and canning fruits to stretch the food budget. She had been able to "grin and bear it."

Now her body was broken and she couldn't work any longer. The hours of each day seemed to double as she rocked in her chair. All her life she had attended Sunday school and church. She had entertained many ministers and helped in the manse, but nothing she had learned seemed to give her the inner quiet and serenity to help through the declining years of her life.

Each of these people were living lives of desperation.

They were sick with longing for something to satisfy the deep needs of their hearts. "Peace, peace; give us peace," was their cry. Each one of them had a different idea of what peace is, but believed that it was what they needed. They had looked in varied ways for their desired goals but had failed.

What are you looking for? Peace? What is your idea of peace?

The first idea that comes to mind is that peace is the absence of warfare or enmity in the case of two nations.

That is carried over into the idea of harmony with our neighbors, with our business competitors and others. But when thinking of personal peace, we think of being at rest with one's self, or the absence of warfare within the heart or mind. This leads us to the conclusion that what most of us are looking for is the state of no inner conflicts, and that is what is meant when we speak of "peace of mind."

This would be an ideal situation, but is probably impossible for most of us! Just being alive brings conflicts. The business world, home life, personal relationships, and physical and emotional conditions all contribute to some extent to friction in our lives.

This goes even a step further in the life of the Christian. We were born with an old sin nature. We were given a new, divine nature when we were saved. It is inevitable that these two natures will be at war (Galatians 5:17).

The Bible states that the Christian's enemies are the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Here is another realm of conflict that cannot be avoided. The old nature gives us that natural pull and tug toward things of the world, the things of self. The Devil joins the battle to ensnare us in a worldly, self-centered life. The new nature, controlled by the HOLY SPIRIT, is constantly urging us to live a godly life.

Many people, like Jim Bowen, teen-age football hero, do not know what real peace is because they have never experienced it. They have seen the result of it in other lives but have never really known peace in their own. They want what they think is peace. They are like the bachelor lecturing on marriage. Only those who have known love can truly understand what it is. Just so only those who have had GOD's peace can know what it is.

Some have a confused idea that peace is the result of having perfect circumstances in their lives. They think peace is never living under strain, never having trials or sorrows, and never being disappointed or discouraged. For them peace is a negative thing. It is the absence of difficulties and depends on pleasant happenings. If your idea of peace is the absence of all conflict in your life, then like Jim you are doomed to disappointment. There will be only brief periods of calmness and serenity, disrupted by longer periods of frustrations and despair.

Janet Speers also had the wrong idea of peace but she made an important discovery. While she was searching longingly for peace, she had it all the time. She thought that GOD's Word promised a feeling of tranquility and calmness. The fear in her life had become a set pattern from childhood. It was an emotion over which she had little control. In thinking that peace also was only a feeling, she saw the constant struggle of two emotions in her life. The one of fear was often stronger than the other. Because of this, she concluded that her life was not peaceful. She lived in a sense of spiritual failure because she had not found what she thought was described in the Bible. All the time her confidence in GOD and in His promises to care for her gave the strength and courage she needed to face life. She had peace without recognizing it.

The difference in the personality, temperament and background of a person will greatly affect the absence or the feeling of peace. Poor health and trying circumstances are also hindrances in creating calm, and repose in one's heart.

Some people are naturally cheerful and happy. They have the disposition that lets them see the bright side of life. There are others who struggle with depression, morbid thoughts, and pessimistic outlooks. Janet knows that fears will still come but also that peace is higher than the emotion of fear. Peace controls our emotions and our reactions to them. She cannot help having fears, but she can keep them from having dominion over her.

Donna Farmington and Dick Nelson thought only of peace as the feeling of contentment and happiness through achievement. They thought that this would come from a self-gratification in the things that the world had to offer. To be loved and to be a success are not wrong in themselves. The Lord allows many of us to enjoy these things in His will. The harm is done and peace is withheld when these things are sought apart from the Lord and as a means to selfishness. Their way was directly opposed to GOD's way for peace. They were merely adding to their frustrations and unhappiness by the very methods they hoped would bring them serenity.

Often we work so hard trying to make peace for ourselves that it becomes the reason we never

succeed. We search in our own ways in order to satisfy self. We want love, success, fame, health, and other things first and then we want peace to go with them. We are so anxious for these things that we will pay any price to achieve them. The price is usually inner conflict and loss of peace. We try to find it in our own worldly ambitions instead of finding it through a proper adjustment to the Lord. We want the result without the Agent. Seek God first and peace will follow, is GOD's method (Job 22:21). When we become occupied with peace, it will escape. When we are occupied with the Lord, peace is automatically ours. The center of our attention should be on the GOD of peace instead of the peace of GOD.

Joe Roberts found that the peace he was looking for could only be found in a Person - the Lord JESUS CHRIST. That spring morning he asked CHRIST to save him and forgive the past sins. There was an instant feeling of release from his tension and guilt. Peace flooded over him. It was not always easy for Joe afterwards, as there were many things that had to be straightened out in his life. He was discouraged and unhappy at times; there were many trials and adjustments in his life. In being with the pastor he had learned that first day how to have real peace.

He trusted GOD to work out the circumstances of his life even when his feelings of peace were at the lowest ebb. He found joy in the Lord when there was no happiness to be found in his daily routine.

"Ma" Evans' philosophy of life, was to take whatever GOD sent because she had no choice. Her "grin and bear it" attitude had been little help. As long as her hands and mind had been kept busy with the duties of life she found life bearable. In her declining years, she needed something more to sustain her. Peace was what she longed for. To her it was an attitude or state of mind that produces a cheerful, optimistic disposition. When things worked differently, she felt that GOD was not keeping His promises to give her peace.

Frankly "Ma" still has not found the rest of heart that she so sorely longs for and needs. She is still fighting her battles alone and finding it hard to make GOD's will her will. Until she can willingly accept GOD's will without chafing, and learn to trust Him for her every need, she will not have the peace GOD promises.

Peace, then, is often accompanied by the feeling of quietness and calm, but not always. It is possible for our physical feelings to keep us from a sense of tranquility. Even CHRIST "**sweat... as it were great drops of blood**" as He suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane. "**Now is my soul troubled**" were the words He used as He faced the Cross. No one would believe that CHRIST did not have the peace which He offered to us in John fourteen. How could He give us peace if He didn't have it Himself?

The Apostle Paul once said, "**I had no rest in my spirit.**" In another passage, he mentions being "**troubled on every side, . . . perplexed, . . . cast down.**" "**In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness,**" characterized much of Paul's life. In another verse, he tells that he had "**conflict**" in his heart. It would be hard for us to think that Paul did not have the peace about which he wrote often in the Epistles. So, never judge whether or not you have peace just by your feelings, as they can fool you. Peace is more than a feeling of tranquility.

It is more than an attitude or state of mind that produces a cheerful optimistic disposition toward life. This can be present sometimes and lacking at others, even though the person is truly experiencing the peace of GOD as presented in the Bible.

If you are looking for the feeling or the attitude of peace alone, it is well to admit that peace is not possible nor promised for everyone. These are things that depend largely on health, circumstances, and personality. If we go one step further, and let GOD into the picture, then we find true peace. Peace is full confidence that GOD is Who He says He is and that He will keep every promise in His Word.

What then is the real peace that is promised to Christians in GOD's written Word?

The peace of GOD is more than an emotion. It is more than an attitude. It is the result of a quiet assurance that all is well in spite of circumstances because one trusts in a sovereign GOD and in His ability to keep His promises. This confidence comes from believing that GOD is too good to do us any harm; too wise to make a mistake; and too powerful to let anything go wrong.

~ end of chapter 1 ~
