

 Discovery Series®

FINDING PEACE IN A TROUBLED WORLD



Bill Crowder



introduction

Finding Peace in a Troubled World

Where are we to find peace in this turbulent world? Some say that violence must be met with greater violence. Others say, “Live and let live.” Still others say, “Love is the answer.” Yet it seems that those with power too often wield it for their own benefit. When the strong rule the weak, does meaningful peace have a chance?

Our problem is that turmoil resides inside each of us. Our hearts churn with fear and apprehension. Peace seems impossible.

Author and speaker Bill Crowder writes about our elusive quest for peace by looking at a frame from the life of Jesus. Even as He faced His own death, Jesus comforted others. “Peace I leave with you,” He said. “My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (JOHN 14:27 NASB).

We invite you to read more about the transcendent peace that Jesus offers us.

Our Daily Bread Ministries

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COVER IMAGE: © Thinkstock/Michael Just

COVER DESIGN: Stan Myers

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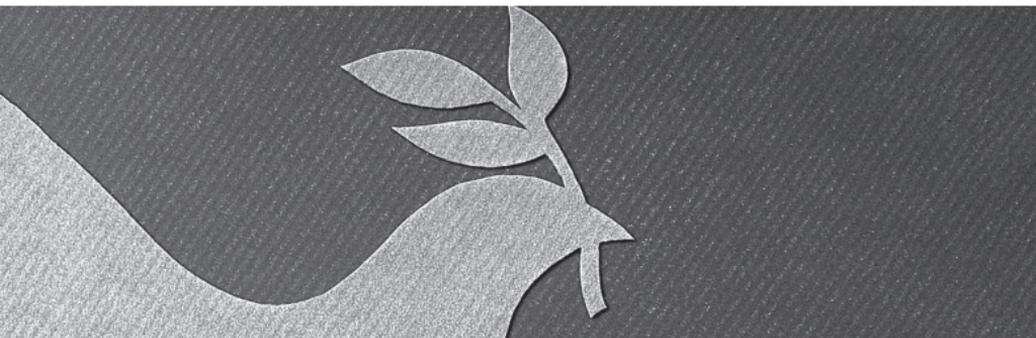
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Printed in USA



one

A World Wanting Peace

Elie Wiesel won the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize for the work he did in response to war. A survivor of the Holocaust of World War II, Wiesel's book *Night* describes his experiences as a young Jewish boy trying to survive the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp and what that experience did to his own heart and soul. Wiesel survived the camp but lost his younger sister, mother, and father to Hitler's "Final Solution of the Jewish Problem."

The experiences of Elie Wiesel are a small but intensely personal portrait that mirrors the death

and destruction characterizing the last century. Due to the nearly constant state of conflict around the world the twentieth century was the bloodiest century in human history. Technological advances only amplified the carnage, giving nations the capacity to wipe out human beings by the tens of thousands. Estimates of those killed in twentieth-century conflicts rise to almost 88 million killed. Fifty-four million of those casualties were civilians (<http://necrometrics.com/all20c.htm>).

Today, news of events around our ever-shrinking global community bombard us in an unsettling, unceasing drumbeat of violence, danger, hate, and destruction. As the stories multiply, we feel the weight of the fear and desperation.

But violence isn't the only thief of peace and security. Peace is emotional, intellectual, and physical, and it can be threatened on any of these fronts. When it is, we are robbed of something we do not know how to get back. The uncertainty that comes when our sense of peace is threatened, whether physical or emotional, can make us panic, want to run and hide, or look for that peace in places and from sources we shouldn't. It's little wonder we live in a world desperate for an end to the violence that ravages our minds, souls, and bodies.

While people strive and yearn for peace, the peace we ultimately crave and the peace the Bible describes is more than just the absence of conflict.

This peace is the wholeness of the Hebrew word *shalom*—a condition that “can refer to either peace between two entities (especially between man and God or between two countries), or to the *well-being, welfare or safety* of an individual or a group of individuals.”

In reality, we cannot separate the two. The peace we long for in our hearts is found only when we have peace with the God who loves us, enabling us to be at peace with one another. This makes peace more than just the absence of conflict; it is a quality of life that breathes of the goodness of our God. This is the essence of Paul’s words in Romans 14:17: “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Paul’s description of the kingdom speaks of the character of what is present—not what is absent. The kingdom speaks of righteousness and joy, but also speaks of . . .

peace that calms our weary hearts;
peace that nurtures our hungry souls;
peace that strengthens our personal relationships.



The peace we ultimately crave and the peace the Bible describes is more than just the absence of conflict.

Fear is the natural consequence of living in a dangerous world. Fear robs us of joy, hope, and peace and possibly makes us part of the problem. Where can we turn for help? Where can we find the promise of real, meaningful peace? For answers, we can look to a night long ago where fear and confusion reigned in the hearts of Jesus's followers, and He offered them peace to overcome those fears.

A Night of Fear

As a boy, I delivered morning newspapers to over a hundred families on two streets connected by an old graveyard. Walking through that graveyard in the dark (at about 3:00 a.m.) made me more than a little uncomfortable. Every sound was accentuated, every movement a concern. All of us have experienced that type of fear. There is something threatening about the dark of night that takes our fears and multiplies them. Things that in the daylight would create little or no concern become worrisome in the night.

As adults, we face a very different set of fears. Fears that are not mere illusion but the terrors that flow out of a broken world where, as one writer put it, "Hurt people hurt people." Fears that call for a deeper, more abiding peace than can be achieved by turning on a light bulb.

This was the need of the hour in John 14. In an upper room, the night before the cross, the atmosphere stretched and strained by the tension

of the moment, there may not have been active conflict—but there certainly wasn't peace. On that night, sadness and fear had overtaken the disciples.

For several days, Jesus's followers had been on an emotional roller coaster. Jesus had warned them over the last few months about what awaited Him in Jerusalem—betrayal, suffering, and death. So heavily did this information weigh on the disciples that when Thomas[■] heard Jesus was heading in the direction of Jerusalem, he said, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him” (JOHN 11:16).

↪ **Thomas** is most often remembered as “the doubter.” John 20:24–29 describes how Thomas couldn't bring himself to believe in the risen Christ, until seeing Him. Yet here in John 11 we see Thomas's belief in Christ displayed with remarkable courage.

But when they finally approached the ancient city, they were not greeted by threats or angry mobs. Just the opposite. They encountered crowds welcoming Rabbi Jesus with shouts of “Hosanna!” and waving palm branches. This certainly was not what the disciples had been told to expect! But in spite of the hero's welcome of Palm Sunday, as Jesus gathered His followers in the upper room for a final Passover feast (JOHN 13), the mood had once again turned somber.

Jesus, in an act of supreme servanthood, washed their feet before taking elements of Israel's Passover and creating His new memorial meal symbolizing

His suffering and death. The meal that had once been intended to represent Israel's rescue from slavery in Egypt was now to picture humanity's rescue from slavery to sin and brokenness.

As their minds struggled to comprehend all that Jesus was telling them, Judas abruptly left to prepare for his betrayal of Jesus (vv. 21–30). The remaining disciples didn't know why Judas had walked out in the middle of the memorial feast, and that confusion likely only added to the weight of an evening that would mark them for the rest of their lives.

Finally, Jesus predicted Peter's coming denials (vv. 36–38). It was this final revelation—that even Peter, the leader and the strongest, would defect—that sent His disciples into confusion and doubt. Perhaps they murmured to one another, “How can this be? Where did Judas go? Why is Jesus leaving? Where does that leave us? Will Peter really fail? Will I?”

In this confusion Jesus spoke words of comfort that have become familiar to Christ-followers everywhere—and He spoke them specifically to Peter. ¹ And while Peter was the primary focus of Jesus's words, we, like the other disciples, find that those words can give us comfort in our own seasons of struggle as well.

¹ *If we ignore the chapter divisions (which were added by translators so that we can navigate through the Scriptures), it becomes clear that it was **to Peter** in his failure and confusion that Jesus offered peace.*



two

Peace in Times of Trouble

John 14:1

The saying, “If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is,” offers a necessary caution. If the television infomercial for the latest wonder product (that has not been tested or approved by anyone significant) offers results that seem unrealistic, be careful. For example, if a diet pill will help you lose fifty pounds in a month, you would be wise to question the legitimacy of the offer. The ability of the person making the offer to deliver on the promise is crucial to our confidence in purchasing whatever it is they are selling.

In that upper room, Jesus made an offer to His

troubled disciples. He offered them peace—and He would deliver on His promise.

As John 14 opens, Jesus reminds His disciples that they can trust Him. His words would have been a voice of calm in the midst of their confusion—and it can be in ours as well. “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me” (JOHN 14:1).

These words were *not* spoken to tranquil people enjoying a pleasant evening together. Jesus spoke those words to men like Peter who were grief-stricken, troubled, and confused. In response to their hearts, Jesus gave two thoughts of comfort:

Stop letting your heart be troubled. This is a negative command, and it is strong.▮ The word *troubled* means “stirred up, disturbed, thrown into confusion.” Literally, Jesus was saying, “Stop the shuddering and trembling of your heart.” *Heart* speaks of the seat of understanding, the private world, the part of you which makes you “you.” In the core of who we are, Jesus says to stop being troubled.

▮ *Although Jesus makes a strong declaration here, John 14:1 should not be seen as Jesus instructing His disciples to do something. We err when we turn grammatical imperatives into commands that burden us with unnecessary guilt where God intends freedom. Jesus is not establishing a new moral requirement with corresponding obligations; He is exhorting the disciples with **encouraging instruction** that will free them from worry.*

Why were their hearts troubled? Fear of the unknown, of the future—perhaps most of all fear of themselves. Jesus told them to stop allowing fear and confusion to reign in their hearts. It is important to notice, though, that Jesus didn't simply say, "Don't worry, be happy; everything will be just fine." He gave them a reason to stop being troubled. He gave them Himself as their reason for peace.

Believe in God, believe also in Me. Jesus didn't simply tell them to buck up, keep a stiff upper lip, or get over it. He gave them a starting point for peace—trust. He challenged them to allow their confidence in Him to overcome their fear and despair. Jesus's words challenged them to believe in Him in the exact same way that they had been taught to believe in God.

Swimming in their fear, these words were a lifeboat. Words that offered rescue and safety. It was as if Jesus were telling them (and us), "You will fail, but I never will. Believe in Me and trust Me during the dark hours ahead. I will not fail you or abandon you, even though you will abandon me. You can trust Me—no matter what you are facing." His promise of peace is directly linked to our trust in Him and His ability to bring us through.

For followers of Christ on this side of the cross and resurrection, this confidence is even more profound. We *have* experienced the reality of the victory won by His resurrection. The One who conquered death has never failed, and He won't

NOW. (SEE 1 CORINTHIANS 15.) We can have peace— His comfort is real and His promise is trustworthy (ROMANS 5:1–2).

It is important to remember that Jesus doesn't offer us an empty faith free of problems or troubles. He acknowledges the reality of heartaches and failures and calls us to see that He is greater than any and all of that.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. He not only promises peace in the coming trials, He goes on to tell them of a place of peace that will be eternally removed from the trials of this broken world.



three

A Place to Belong

John 14:2

Michael Bubl 's powerful ballad "Home" tells the story of a weary traveler who laments the fact that he is *not* home. He longs to go home, to be home, and, in some sense, to be able to stay home.

The emotional strength of the song is rooted in what we long for home to be and for what home, at its best, can be for us. At its best, home is a place where we feel safe and secure. A place where we are welcome. A place where we belong. Admittedly, our homes here are imperfect and all too often fall short

of our desires for them. But in its best moments home awakens in us a longing and a hunger for a home where we will be accepted and never disappointed.

Jesus taps into that deep desire by using the imagery of home—a home unlike any we have ever known. It is the home that awaits us in the life to come. Sometimes it's difficult to remember that this life is not all there is and that there is a life ahead. While this future home must not be seen as an escape hatch from life, it offers us certainty as Jesus explains: “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you” (JOHN 14:2).

In the disciples’ unfolding threatening circumstances, Jesus speaks of this ultimate provision for them:

“My Father’s house”: Ironically there was no room found for Him here on Earth. At His birth, there was no room for Him at the inn (LUKE 2:7), and in His adulthood, Jesus was essentially homeless (MATTHEW 8:20). There was no room for Him here, but He makes room there for all who will come to Him. This is the Father’s house with a bountiful table where all are invited to come and dine.

“Many dwelling places”: In the Father’s house, there are eternal homes for once-weary pilgrims to dwell—that is, to settle in and be at home.

“I go”: As one writer put it, Jesus is essentially saying, “My mission is to go, and I must do it

alone. I didn't train you to help Me do my work, but afterwards to tell the world what I have done."

"To prepare a place for you": This element of our hope is not *here*, it is *there*—for He is preparing a place of never-ending for us just as clearly as He was going to prepare a place for them.

It is unlikely that the disciples could have heard these words without thinking of Jewish marriage customs. Upon betrothal, the groom-to-be would have a year to prepare a home for his new bride. In many cases, that place would be an addition built onto his father's home. There he and his bride would join the family in sharing the burden of work and the joys of life. Once that dwelling place was prepared, it was time for marriage and the celebration of life together.

Additionally, it is important to understand that this imagery of a prepared place in the Father's house was not a New Testament idea first unwrapped in that upper room. This same thought brought comfort to Israel's shepherd-king, David, who sang, "Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (PSALM 23:6).

Like Jesus's words in John 14, David's words carry both a present reality and a future hope. The present reality of a life resting in the goodness and lovingkindness of the Father (PSALM 23:6) is directly linked to trusting Jesus in life's storms (JOHN 14:1).

And the forever promise of a place in the house of the Lord is there to offer us hope when despair might become overwhelming. This is the rich sense of *home* that can be so wonderful.

As Augustine in his *Confessions* wisely wrote of God, “Our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.” In the same way, we will never fully and completely know the peace we long for until we find ourselves at peace in Him. That is why the Father’s house is so important. C. S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain* wrote:

There have been times when I think we do not desire heaven; but more often I find myself wondering whether in our heart of hearts we have ever desired anything else. . . . It is the secret signature of the soul, the incommunicable and unappeasable want, the thing we desired before we met our wives or made our friends or chose our work, and which we shall still desire on our deathbeds when the mind no longer knows life or friend or work.

I have to wonder: Do I long for the Father and His peace in that way? Yet, as wonderful as the Father’s house will be, that promised home is not the most important aspect of the life to come.



four

The Power of *Together*

John 14:3

Work takes many people away from family and friends for days or weeks at a time. Thankfully, we can stay connected with home through Skype, Facetime, and other technologies. It's amazing to be able to see and talk with loved ones in real-time, and that connection can help to carry us through the long days when we are away. But we're still away from home. The technology is great, but it isn't a substitute for sitting across the table from our loved ones and talking about our day or thinking *together* about the situations we may be facing.

Together is a unique word because nothing can adequately substitute for it. That is why Jesus made it clear that His return is not just to provide us with a truer and better home, but a place where *together* is our ultimate reality. He said, “If I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again and receive you to Myself*, that where I am, there you may be also” (JOHN 14:3, EMPHASIS ADDED).

Here the imagery of Jewish wedding customs again is in view. Earlier we saw that the groom was responsible for preparing a home for his bride. However, having completed the preparations of that home, he would then arrive at the home of the bride’s parents to take her home to be with him. This is the imagery behind Jesus’s words—a return that produces *together*.

Many have wondered about the nature, location, and context of “heaven.” Some see our eternal home as here on a new earth, others place it in the New Jerusalem, and still others prefer to think in terms of the presence of the Father in the third heaven (SEE 2 CORINTHIANS 12:4). I’m pretty sure that the debate will not be settled until we are finally there—wherever *there* will actually be.

↪ *The Greek and Hebrew words used for **heaven** in Scripture typically held one of three meanings: 1) the skies; 2) the expanse of the universe; and 3) the dwelling place of God. It is this “third heaven” to which the apostle Paul refers in 2 Corinthians 12:2–4.*

However, the *location* of our eternal home in the Father's house is not where our focus should be. Jesus's words offer us the most important thing about our eternal home: It is *where* He will be. It's Jesus who makes it the only place we will want to spend forever. He said He would come for us, "that where I am, *there* you may be also."

The key to the peace Jesus offered His men in the upper room, and which applies to our own seasons of trouble, is that our separation from Him is not permanent (nor was the disciples' defection). What greater thought can there be at a time of painful parting than the thought of reunion? The disciples were given permission by Jesus to look beyond the present trials to the future—an eternal future with Him.

That's it, isn't it? Our comfort is not in a place, but in a Person—Jesus Himself. We long to be with Him. You see, for the follower of Christ, the Father's house is not a state of mind. It is being where Jesus is. We can speculate about what our eternal home will be like, but really it is enough to know that He will be there and we will be with Him forever. That is why we



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offer us the most
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It is where
He will be.*

have hope for then and peace for now—because we anticipate being together with Him.

How real is that? Hear the words of the apostle Paul:

But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better (PHILIPPIANS 1:22–23).

To be with Christ—that's it. He's what makes our eternal home *really* home for us. Our eternal home will never lose its meaning because Jesus will be there forever. And we will be with Him.



five

Rescue That Brings Peace

John 14:4–6

Pace that will last forever, but peace we can know now. As we look forward to the Father's house, the hope of being with Jesus in that place of perfect peace can give us the strength to endure in the here and now. Because He is there, preparing a place for us. For me. For you. Forever.

Jesus's next statement explained what would happen next. "And you know the way where I am going" (JOHN 14:4).

In telling them they knew "the way" He was

going, Jesus seemed to be reminding them of what He had been telling them for months—He was going to the cross. At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His men who they thought He was, and Peter responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (MATTHEW 16:16).

That moment was, in a sense, the tipping point in Jesus’s ministry. The first half of His public ministry was to irrefutably prove His identity—and, with Peter’s answer at Caesarea Philippi, that mission had been accomplished. From that time forward, however, Jesus’s primary focus was not on proving His identity but on preparing for Calvary. And He immediately began preparing His disciples for those coming events.

↗ In Matthew 16 Jesus had asked His disciples who the people were saying He was. The disciples replied that they thought He was John the Baptist (who by this time was dead) or one of the long-dead prophets (vv. 14–15). But Peter boldly declared that **Jesus was the Christ**.

Following the questioning at Caesarea Philippi, Matthew tells us: “From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day” (MATTHEW 16:21).

This is what Jesus had been telling them, and this is why by this point they should have known the way He

was going. It was essential that He go to the cross. He was going to the cross to make a way to the Father for them—and for us. This reality is wrapped up in His response to Thomas who said that, in fact, he *didn't* know the way Jesus was going (JOHN 14:5). Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (JOHN 14:6).

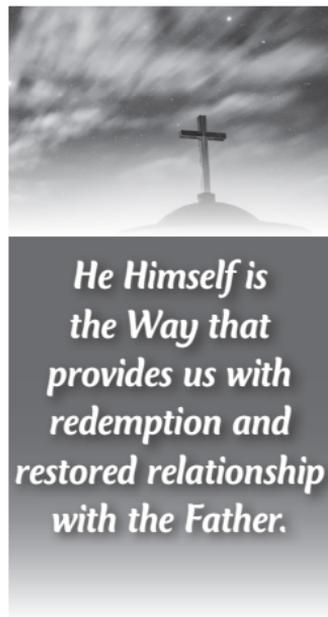
By providing a way for us to be rescued, Jesus was also preparing *us* for the place He is preparing *for* us. In other words, He Himself is the Way that provides us with redemption and restored relationship with the Father. His own death created the path to this peace.

That was why He had to go alone—to make a way through His death, resurrection, and ascension. He told them He must die so that they could live. How? By way of the cross. There, in the upper room, the shadow of the cross fell over the memorial feast they had been celebrating. The only way is the way of the cross. Jesus essentially was saying . . .

I go that way so you don't have to.

I go that way so you can follow.

I go that way to prepare you for the place.



Jesus had to withdraw from them, for He alone could prepare the way of the cross—the only way home. The cross of Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father’s house of forever peace, and it’s the only way to have meaningful peace in the here and now.



six

Peace in the Here and Now

All of this talk of a future home and a promised hope, however, should not be mistaken for a simple evacuation to the “great beyond.” This hope is not simply a far-off dream or an escape hatch to disconnect us from life in this present world. In the next chapters of John, Jesus explained to His followers why they had so much reason for hope in the here and now—concluding His teaching time with one of

the most expansive promises in the New Testament: “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (JOHN 16:33).

John 16:33 affirms that the hope we have for eternity found in John 14 is connected to the peace that enables us to endure the trials and challenges of life here. Paul affirms this present peace in two of his letters and tells us how that peace comes to us in the anxieties we face. In Philippians 4:6–7, the apostle points out that this peace is, in part, the byproduct of the privilege of prayer:

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 comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Prayer allows us to access our greatest resource—the God of the universe—who is more than sufficient for any of the trials we wrestle with. This underlines what Jesus told His disciples in John 14:1, “Do not let your heart



His promise of peace is not only for the next life—it is very much for the present life.

be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.” It is our relationship with the Father through His Son that gives us that very access (JOHN 14:6), so that His promise of peace is not only for the next life—it is very much for the present life.

Additionally, Paul told the churches at Galatia that peace was also the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christ-follower: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (GALATIANS 5:22–23).

As we walk in the Spirit (GALATIANS 5:16), He works in our lives to bear the fruit that represents the heart of Jesus. As a result, we not only have the promise of an eternal home where we will know peace forever, we also have the privilege of prayer and the presence of the Spirit to provide us with the daily peace that can carry us through the dark, difficult days when life seems to go spinning out of control.

How can we be sure? The Prince of Peace has gone to the cross and defeated the grave to make it so. In the words of Vivian Kretz’s classic hymn:¹



*The Spirit . . .
works in our lives
to bear the fruit
that represents the
heart of Jesus.*

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on Thee.
When the shadows come and darkness falls,
He giveth inward peace.
O He is the only perfect resting place,
He giveth perfect peace!
Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on Thee. ☸

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