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TO SLEEP IN THE BACK SEAT

John 14:1-2

INTRODUCTION

There are some conversations that stick with you for a long time. I had one that I have shared before. It was with a young man I have only spoken with one time in my life and I don’t even know his name. We were returning from vacation on a red eye flight and around midnight the flight was canceled. Chaos ensued. Most of the passengers were concerned and had questions. Where were we going to spend the night? How could we arrange for flights? What was the airline going to do with our luggage that was already on the plane? There were a couple hundred passengers and 3 airline employees there trying to deal with the upheaval. There were a lot of stressed, grumpy people. But I struck up a conversation with a young man who was in his mid 20’s, and he seemed to be totally calm, taking it all in, almost enjoying the whole thing. I said, “Everybody else seems stressed, but you are awfully calm about this whole thing. Why is that?” He explained to me that he was on the first trip he had ever taken on an airplane. It was all exciting for him, and he figured this normal and was just part of the adventure, so he was enjoying it. He said, “I know the airline will get me home at some point, so there’s really nothing to worry about.”

What was it that enabled him to be at peace when everyone else was practically melting down? He saw what was going on as an adventure, and he had total confidence in the airline’s ability to get him to his destination. So he just enjoyed the ride, whatever form it took. I have realized that young man’s perspective is an excellent way to think about the adventure that we are on called life.

Being at peace is something every human being wants. Henry Fielding, an 18th century British writer, said, “I am content, that is a blessing greater than riches, and he to whom that is given need ask no more.” I read a quote by one person who said that inner peace is our natural state. Nothing could be more wrong. Frederick Buechner wrote in his book, *Secrets In The Dark*, that emptiness and unease is part of the inner world of everyone. As a result, he went on to say peace is the gift every human desires above all else. Writer Fran Lebowitz said, “there is no such thing as inner peace. There is only nervousness and death.” Psychologist and professor at Claremont Graduate School, Mihaly Csikszmenthaly, who has made the inner world of people the focus of his study, says that “entropy is the normal state of consciousness.” In other words, our normal state is one of disquiet and lack of peace. How do we have the peace we all want when unease is our natural state? Humorist Dave Barry wrote, “My therapist told me the way to achieve inner peace is to finish what I start. So far today I have finished two bags of M and M’s and a chocolate cake. I feel better already.”

Every human being longs for peace. *We badly want peace, and everyone we know wants peace*. But how do we get it? Let’s look at John 14:1-2.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john+14&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26670a)]; believe also in me. **2**My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

EXPOSITION

PREMISE: JESUS WANTS HIS FOLLOWERS TO HAVE PEACE

1. In verse 1 Jesus told his disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” In ancient Greek there were two ways to state a negative command like this one. One meant to not start doing something, the other meant to stop doing something they were already doing. This command is in that second form. Jesus told his disciples to stop letting their hearts be troubled. In other words, the disciples were not at peace.
2. The word translated “troubled” came from a root that meant “to stir up.” It sometimes meant to boil. Have you ever watched water boiling? It is a riot of activity and tumult. That was the picture of the hearts of the disciples.
3. It is easy to understand why their hearts might have been in tumult. The situation was really tense and the disciples felt it. In chapter 11 when Jesus announced he intended to go back to the Jerusalem area to help Lazarus Thomas said, “Let’s go with him that we may die with him.” They fully understood that things had gotten so bad with the leaders of Israel that it was a life or death situation. Jesus had confronted the leaders repeatedly with the fact that they were plotting to kill Jesus. The disciples knew this.
4. Then just before Jesus commanded them to not be troubled he had said in John 13:33, “I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.”
5. Wait, Jesus was going to leave them and they couldn’t go with him? That wasn’t what they thought they had signed up for. They knew Jesus was the Messiah. The Messiah was going to be the king. He would conquer and rule the world. They had just been jockeying for position in his court. All this talk of going away meant none of that was going to happen. But if that was true, then that meant that Jesus wasn’t the expected Messiah after all. This was deeply disturbing.
6. They thought when they began following Jesus that this was a world changing movement, that it was going somewhere big. Now Jesus is sounding like it’s all over and he’s going to leave them. To make matters even worse he had just announced that one of them was going to betray him. Those poor guys were confused and afraid. There was no peace for them whatsoever.
7. As we saw at the end of chapter 13 this was especially true for Peter, because Jesus had just told him that contrary to Peter’s claim that he would even die for Jesus, that very night he would deny knowing Jesus 3 times. He was about to fail in epic fashion.
8. In that context Jesus said, “Stop letting your hearts be in tumult.” In other words, calm down and be at peace. Being at peace is something Jesus wants for all of his followers.
9. Remember the great prophecy from Isaiah 9:6-7 about the coming of Messiah. “For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.” Peace will be characteristic of Messiah, and there will be no end to his peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace.
10. Near the end of his teaching on that fateful night Jesus would say to his men in John 16:33, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace.”
11. Romans 14:17 says, “The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” The kingdom of God isn’t about rules about what we can or can’t eat. It is about peace and joy. Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that one of the results of living in the Spirit of Jesus is peace.
12. Jesus’ will for us is that we have peace. This is not an isolated message in the Bible. Earlier in his ministry Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 6:25 he said, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.” Then he said in verse 31, “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’” Then he said again in verse 34, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow.”
13. Does it help you when you are facing some potentially ominous and stressful situation if someone says to you, “Don’t worry about it”? Oh, thank you so much for that sage advice. I will stop worrying right now. You have been such a help. I feel so much better.
14. I suspect when Jesus told the disciples to stop letting their hearts be troubled that night they were thinking, “Great idea, Master. But just exactly how are we supposed to do that? Because things are looking pretty dark right now. The things you’ve said are scaring us.”
15. Later Paul would write in Philippians 4:6 that we should not be anxious about anything.” Oh, okay. I’ll get right on that. Don’t ever be anxious or stressed or worried about anything. No problem. Just give me an anesthetic that puts me to sleep and I won’t worry about anything. There might be a problem when I wake up from it though.
16. I’ve had my blood pressure taken a lot the last 10 months. I’ve had immune therapy treatments every 3 or 4 weeks, and every time I do they take my blood pressure, usually 2 or 3 times. And every time they remark that it is very good. My second to last treatment after taking all my vital signs the nurse said, “Why are you even here?” Even in a situation that is difficult, getting treatment in a cancer center, my blood pressure was low, suggesting I’m pretty calm.
17. But not always. When I had to go in for a biopsy of a nodule on my thyroid gland they took my blood pressure then too. I didn’t think I was stressed about it. I told myself it was no big deal. But rather than my blood pressure being its usual 105 to 115 at the most, it was close to 140. And my pulse rate, normally in the 60’s was 90!
18. I told myself to be calm, to be at peace. I told myself there was nothing to worry about. I convinced myself I was calm. But my body wasn’t going along with the program. Telling myself not to worry didn’t help. So how are we supposed to not let our hearts be troubled? How are we supposed to not worry and be at peace?

Fortunately, Jesus didn’t give us an unhelpful command and leave it at that. He told us how we can be at peace.

HAVE CONFIDENCE IN GOD

1. In the NIV translation verse 1 reads, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.” That is a curious translation. It came about because this is an unusual instance of ambiguity in the Greek language.
2. Greek is a very structured and specific language. English has got to be the most confusing language. It has words like read. Is that present tense or past tense? Well, it can be either, and you can’t tell which it is from the way it is written. And there’s a problem with the sound of it too. When you hear the past tense, are you sure it’s the past tense or is it the color red? They sound the same. You’ve got a similar problem with the word lead. And then there are the ough words. Consider the sentence, “I thought I’d done enough, but it was tough to be thorough and think it all through.” If English were consistent and ough was pronounced “uff” as in enough, that sentence might sound something like “I thuft I’d done enuf, but it was tuff to be thoruff and think it all thruff.” Or maybe “I throoft ough should be pronounced like it is in the word throught. Then the sentence would be “I throot I’d done enoo, but it was too to be thoroo and think it all throo.” So confusing.
3. Greek typically didn’t have that kind of confusing ambiguity. You could tell from the spelling of a verb the tense, voice, mood, person and number of it. But in the case of the word translated “believe” in this passage there was ambiguity in regard to the mood of the verb. The form of this word for the indicative mood, which was used as a statement of fact, meaning “You believe,” is exactly the same as the imperative, a command to believe. So this could either mean “You believe in God” or it could be a command, “believe in God.”
4. The NIV did something that I find curious. They translated the two clauses which have the same verb forms, “You believe in God, believe also in me.” So they took the first use as an indicative and the second as an imperative. That is inconsistent. I suppose they thought that’s what Jesus meant, “Hey, you believe in God the Father. Believe in me also.” But I don’t think that’s what he meant.
5. The New American Standard, the English Standard Version and others translate both clauses as commands. “Believe in God, believe also in me.” The New Living Translation says, “Trust in God, trust also in me.” That is correct, I believe. Jesus was saying the key to having their hearts not be troubled and being at peace in the middle of an ominous situation was trusting in God and trusting in Jesus.
6. The bottom line on being at peace comes down to having confidence in God. Can we believe that God really loves us and will take care of us? Could the disciples believe that Jesus really had a plan and was able to carry it out even in a daunting situation? Could Peter believe that he could fail horribly and Jesus would still love him and use him? Peace is all about confidence in God. It is knowing that Jesus loves us, and has it all under control.
7. I remember many times when our kids were young that they gave us an illustration of this. It happened a lot when we made our annual pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Oh, wait, it wasn’t the Holy Land. It was the Happiest Place On Earth. We only went to Disneyland once a year, so when we made the trek we got there early and stayed late. That meant that when we headed home we had some very tired kids. They’d be in the back seat of the car. They had complete confidence in Mom and Dad. They never worried that Dad would lose his way and not be able to find the way home. They didn’t worry about Dad getting in an accident. They were confident that Mom and Dad would get them home safely, so it wouldn’t be long before they fell sound asleep in the car. They were at peace so much that they could sleep.
8. What enabled them to be at peace and rest was their total confidence in Mom and Dad. Trusting God is also what will enable us to be at peace. We will have peace to the degree that we are confident in him.
9. It is helpful to think about the example of the disciples. Their peace was disrupted by fear over what might happen. They wanted Jesus to be the conquering Messiah who would rule and bring about an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity. But the things Jesus was saying sounded like none of that was going to happen. There was reason to fear that Jesus would be rejected and maybe even killed by the leaders of Israel. They likely feared that if that happened, the leaders of the nation might come after them also. They might be in jeopardy.
10. Jesus talked to them in somewhat vague terms, saying things like he was going away and they couldn’t go with him where he was going. I sometimes wonder why Jesus didn’t lay the whole plan out for them in plain, clear terms. But Jesus did spell it out for them, and they didn’t get it.
11. Matthew 16:21 says, “From that day on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” That’s about as plain as he could have made it.
12. In Matthew 17:22-23 he said, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.”
13. In Matthew 20:18-19 he said, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life.”
14. Jesus on 3 different occasions spelled out for them exactly what was going to happen. Apparently their response was to say, “What do you suppose he meant by that?” We know he meant just what he said. But they consistently did not get it. Their understanding that the Messiah would conquer and rule blinded them, kept them from hearing anything else. What they wanted, hoped for and expected kept them from understanding what Jesus was actually doing for them and everyone.
15. We also have expectations about what God is going to do if we trust him. We have the same problem. Our expectations deafen us to what God might actually be saying to us, and blind us so that we can’t see what else he might be doing.
16. If we are to have any hope of peace we must have confidence that no matter what happens, God loves us and he is working a plan in this world and in our lives that is a good plan. This means to trust him requires that we give up trying to control life to make it go the way we want it to. It is to rest secure in who God is and what he is doing.
17. The disciples were shocked and devastated when Jesus was put on the cross just like he said he would be. It was only after the resurrection that they began to say, “Oh, so that’s what God is doing!” They could have been at peace if they had just trusted God, trusted that Jesus knew what he was doing.
18. When Laurie was in her senior year of high school she was like most teenagers, pursuing popularity, and succeeding. The idea of giving up control of her life and letting God work his plan was not even a little bit appealing to her. She observed the wife of the pastor of her family’s church, a woman who played the piano in church, and was certain she would never want to be like her. If she let God have his way she might end up like that woman. No thank you. She knew what she wanted in life. At least she thought she did. But then she got some of what she wanted and found it empty. Then she encountered Romans 8:32, which says, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” She saw that God had given his Son for her. What good would God withhold from her? Surely nothing. She saw she could trust him with her life. So she did. She determined to let God plan out her steps. And she ended up the wife of a pastor playing the piano in church. And she loves her life! She got the thing she feared and didn’t want, and found out God had a beautiful plan for her all along.

KNOW YOUR FUTURE IS SECURE

1. Jesus next said his Father’s house had many rooms. He was going to prepare a place for them in his Father’s house. When it comes to trusting God with our lives nothing is bigger than trusting him with our eternal future. Jesus said he was going to take care of that for his followers.
2. The Greek word translated “rooms” is the plural of the word *mone*. It is related to the word *meno*, which meant to remain or stay. So it literally meant a place to stay. Probably the best translation of it would be “dwelling place” or “abode.” In modern slang it might be, “I go to prepare a crib for you.” But there’s an interesting bit of history attached to that word. As the gospel was spread in the Roman empire the books of the New Testament were eventually translated into Latin. The Latin word that translated *mone* was mansiones, which meant much the same thing. But then the Latin was translated into English centuries later. When the King James Bible was translated from Latin into English they just anglicized the Latin word and rendered it “mansions.” From that came the idea that God has mansions for us in his kingdom. The word just means “dwelling place” and probably envisioned something like a suite of rooms, not an estate.
3. I may have popped somebody’s bubble there, and if so, I’m sorry. I’ll just say that when you get there, your dwelling place is going to feel better to you than any mansion or palace on earth could ever have felt. The big news, the crucial point, is that Jesus said there would be a place in the eternal kingdom for his followers. Eternal life is secure for all of us who are in Christ.
4. Sometimes people picture Jesus in his kingdom right now getting our dwelling places ready. He’s the general contractor, overseeing the building out of these lovely palaces for us to live in for eternity. But that’s not what Jesus meant. In his excellent commentary on John D. A. Carson wrote, “It is the going itself, via the cross and the resurrection, that prepares the place for Jesus’ disciples.” Our place is already prepared. Jesus prepared places for us when he died on that cross and rose from the dead. That work opened up eternal abodes for us in the best place that ever has or ever will exist, the eternal kingdom of God.
5. We will never be at peace until we have total confidence that is true, because death stalks us all. It is horrific, terrifying and so very permanent. It is almost impossible for us to be at peace with the idea that death could strike at any moment, and then that’s the end. There will be no more. We will utterly cease to exist forever. How much is it worth to know that is not the end, and that we shall live forever in a situation that Paul said is “better by far” than the absolute best this world offers? There is no price you can put on that. To lack that is to lack peace. It is, in the end, to live in terror and sorrow.
6. Larry Ellison, one of the richest men in the world, owner of the most of the island of Lanai in Hawaii, contributes $40 million a year to the search for a cure for aging and death. He said, “Death makes me very angry. It doesn’t make any sense to me…How can a person be there and then just vanish, just not be there?”
7. Qin Shi Huang was the first emperor of China and is credited with uniting China into one state. He is famous for the army of terra cotta soldiers he had built, among other things. He became obsessed with the idea of immortality. He didn’t want to die. He searched for a magic elixir that would give unending life. It has been reported that he came to believe mercury was a key part of that magic elixir and began drinking a potion containing mercury. It is believed that this is what led to his death at the age of 50.
8. Laurie and I have been on quite a journey the past year. Early on after I was diagnosed with malignant melanoma we both had to face the possibility that it could end my life, and conceivably do it all too quickly. Fortunately early scans revealed it had not spread to any organs, and that was helpful. Still, the oncologist cited statistics for the treatment I would be receiving, and they left considerable room for concern. Then when the treatments started it began with what turned into a train wreck. I felt terrible. I began losing weight I didn’t want to lose. At one point I got down to what I weighed when I was 16 years old in high school. I told Laurie that I saw no way I could survive a year of the treatments. I didn’t think I was going to be able to tolerate it, and that removed my best chance for survival. All of that gives you a vivid sense that your death is not some acknowledged thing way off in the distance. You’re looking it in the face.
9. That had a couple of effects on me. One was it made me choose to focus on today. It became crystal clear that today is the only day of which I can be certain, so I need to make the most of every day and be glad in it. But the other thing that came into very sharp focus is that the promise of eternal life, the knowledge that I have an abode in the Father’s eternal house, is the most important, most precious thing one could ever have. It is hard to go on without hope, but we always have hope because Jesus has obtained eternal life for us.
10. On July 12, 2012 Marie Isom gave in to her two teenaged daughters who were pleading with her to see the movie *The Dark Knight Rises*. A half hour into the movie a young man named James Holmes tossed two smoke canisters into the theater then began shooting innocent movie goers with a rifle. Marie’s daughters dove for the floor and Marie covered the younger one with her own body. She said, “In that moment, as the rapid fire shots continued, I truly thought I was going to die. And I realized I was ready. I have put my faith in Jesus Christ as the redeemer of my soul and there wasn’t the slightest doubt that I would be received into heaven.” She said in that moment she was drawn closer into the presence of God. She and her daughters were able to escape when the shooter reloaded. Both of her girls have said the experience made God’s presence more real to them.

LIVE IN THE PEACE OF JESUS

1. There’s one more important element to living in peace. In verse 27 Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” Jesus gives us his peace, and that’s a powerful thing.
2. His peace is not like what the world gives. What does the world give? It gives peace based on power, control and circumstances. We think if we have enough power to control things and force the circumstances around us into the shape we want them, then we can have peace. But that’s an illusion. It is an invitation to insecurity and fear, for we can never control things as we wish we could. We don’t have that power.
3. Laurie and I have had an interesting time trying to take a vacation to Hawaii recently. We initially planned to go a couple of years ago with Michael and Carissa to baby sit their boys. We had it all planned, then Carissa became pregnant. We had to postpone the trip. Then some time after that Laurie and I planned to go and meet Laurie’s brother Scott and his wife Karen in Hawaii for a few days, then spend some time there ourselves. Then I was diagnosed with cancer and needed to start treatment right away. That trip got scrubbed. Then earlier this year we planned to try again with Michael and Carissa, but a couple of days before the trip Carissa and her boys all get sick, and we had to postpone that trip. We eventually did make that trip, but with all the shuffling around we ended up with airline tickets to Maui that had to be used before the end of October this year. But that worked perfectly, because I will be done with cancer treatments by the end of September and this would be a great way to celebrate. Yeah, we were going to go to Maui. Then came the worst fire Hawaii has ever experienced and the total destruction of one of our favorite places on earth. Where we were going for our vacation is now closed to vacationers. Do you see how little we control? Pregnancy, cancer, sickness, natural disasters. It’s been like God saying to us, “Do you see how little you control?” Yeah, we do.
4. But even if we could control more than we do and somehow get the world to bend to our will, the minute we got the circumstances we think we want two things would happen. First, we’d find it’s not enough, and second, we’d live in fear that we might lose it, thus destroying our peace. Circumstances, no matter how idyllic, can never give us true peace.
5. We often think of peace as the absence of things. It is the absence of fear, stress, anxiety, conflict. If we had none of those, we’d be at peace. But it’s not true. Jesus said he could give us peace, a tangible thing, a powerful force within us, something that will be there despite circumstances. It is a force that can rule our hearts and minds even in situations that would otherwise cause us to fear and our hearts to be troubled. That’s what we need, peace in the midst of the fearful, the stressful, the painful and the hard.
6. Listen to Colossians 3:15. “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” Note what he didn’t say. He didn’t say let the peace of Christ come into your heart. He said “let it rule.” The reason is the peace of Christ, that powerful force, is already there. The Spirit of Jesus brings it with him when he enters our lives. So the call is to let it rule.
7. The Greek word translated “rule” means “to decide” or “to act as umpire.” The umpire is the one who decides. I get irritated often when I watch baseball games on TV because I see so many pitches outside the strike zone called strikes, and pitches that are clearly strikes called balls. I learned a lesson when I was in college. My freshman year I rarely got to play. One game the coach put me in because we were getting blown out and I couldn’t make it any worse. I only got one at bat, one chance to prove to the coach that I could hit. It came with 2 outs, no one on base in a game we were losing by 12 runs. The pitcher got 2 strikes on me then threw a pitch that was so low it almost hit the plate. It clearly was ball 3. The umpire yelled, “Strike 3, you’re out, game over.” I immediately reacted and said, “What? That wasn’t even close to a strike.” He took off his mask, looked at me and said, “This game is over. It’s late and I want to go home.” It wasn’t a strike. I knew it. He knew it, everybody in California knew it. But it was a strike because the umpire decided it was a strike.
8. Paul tells us the peace of Christ is in us. Now all we have to do is let it be the umpire. Let it be the decider in all things. Christ says through him we have peace with God. That’s a settled issue by his grace. We have peace with ourselves because he says we are loved and valuable just as we are. We are not mistakes, we are his work of art, every one of us. We have peace with circumstances because Jesus said in John 16:33 “I have overcome the world.” He is at work in our lives, so we can be at peace about that.
9. When we live by his truth, we let his peace rule in our hearts. We will have that peace we long for. We will exude it, and be able to bless other people with it. When we live as he tells us, we will even be at peace with them as we wash their feet and love them.
10. There is a little key to peace at the very end of Colossians 3:15. It is only 3 words. “And be thankful.” A key to letting the peace of Christ umpire our world is being thankful and giving thanks to God. The more we give thanks, the more we will experience peace.

CONCLUSION

Our son, Toby, is an emergency medicine physician. He works in the Emergency Department mostly at Palomar Hospital at night. He has nights where what he is doing is literally a matter of life and death. Sometimes it is not dire, it’s just horrifying like stitching up the head wound of a toddler who fell and hit his head on a table and opened up his scalp right down to the skull. But sometimes it’s like the night where he had to deal with 3 cardiac arrests, and one of them died and had to be resuscitated multiple times. He says that generally things in the Emergency Department are hectic, and often it is chaotic, as you can imagine. He has told me several times that one of the keys to being good at his job is managing the chaos. To be a good emergency physician one has to be able to stay calm and manage all the craziness that is going on.

It occurred to me that this is what peace is all about. It is not about always having peaceful circumstances, because that’s something we don’t control. It is about being calm and managing the inevitable chaos of life.. We have the peace of Christ in us through faith. We can let it be the umpire. Let it rule, and we can be calm in the middle of the chaos.

The key is confidence in God. In this book, *Ruthless Trust*, the late Brennan Manning told about a conversation he had with the most brilliant student he ever had, a man named Augustus Gordon. At one point in the conversation Manning asked him if he could sum up the Christian life in one sentence. Gordon said, “I can sum it up in one word. Trust. The supreme need in most of our lives is often the most overlooked, namely, the need for compromising trust in the love of God.” To trust means to let God do it his way, not our way. That’s hard sometimes, but the way to peace is wanting what God wants more than what we want and trusting him to bring it about.