



From Coping to Cure

By Henry Brandt, Ph.D.

LESSON 2:

HOW CAN I FIND PEACE AND SATISFACTION IN THIS WORLD?

THOUGHT STARTER:

Why are Christians not in the least embarrassed over the absence of peace and rest in their lives?

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

John 14:27, NKJV

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

John 16:33, NKJV

Jesus clearly tells us that it is His intention for us to move through this world peacefully and cheerfully, untroubled and unafraid as long as we look to Him to enable us. With such a resource readily available, I am overwhelmed by the absence of personal peace and by the level of misery under which Christians are willing to live. Christians don't seem the least embarrassed or hesitant to declare:

- "I'm under stress."
- "I'm pretty anxious."
- "I'm worried."
- "I'm angry!"
- "I'm so unhappy."
- "I can't get along with him (her)."
- "I'm afraid."

Christians all too frequently and unabashedly accept the word of secular mental health people who tell us that such conditions are socially and culturally caused and relief is to be found in the world. They are correct. Jesus Himself said you can find a kind of peace in the world. But He also said that we should look to Him, not to the world He created. I see many Christians adopt, without thinking, a "So-what?-Never-mind-what-

Jesus-said" attitude and turn to the world in search of peace.

What will you do with Jesus and His words in this verse? He says you can have peace in this world by turning either to Him or to the world (your environment) that He created. The world offers the following to find peace: places, activities and events, things, and people.

Take a look at the places first.

WOW! WHAT A BEAUTIFUL PLACE!

I stepped out of the car at the Horn Creek Conference Center in the mountains near Colorado Springs and took a big breath of clean mountain air. The spectacular Rocky Mountains rimmed the valley where I stood.

We all know that feeling of traveling a long way and experiencing the anticipation and then the excitement of arrival; that's what I felt. Hiking in the mountains, walking beautiful trails, fishing in a stream, or just standing by a gorgeous waterfall are all a source of anticipated relaxation.

Recently I visited my son-in-law in Idaho. I sat in the living room and looked out over a golden grain field that extended out from the backyard. In the distance I could see the foothills rising to meet the clear Idaho sky. From the front porch you could see a pasture with sheep grazing. What a peaceful place this is!

Interacting alone with this magnificent creation can quiet one's heart. Unfortunately, conflict with one another, even in the most scenic places, will steal away that peace.

A couple experiencing serious marital problems was to go on a vacation somewhere. So the husband surprised his wife with a first-class deluxe Caribbean cruise. The drive to the boat dock was pleasant as they anticipated all the fun they would have on the ship for a week in the sun.

When they entered their small narrow stateroom, the husband quickly changed into his loudest multi-colored shirt (which his wife intensely disliked), threw the first shirt on the floor in the corner (she liked to keep a neat house), and pressured his wife with, "Honey, will you please hustle it up!" (He liked to be on time and she was always late.) On the deck, he, being an extrovert, began to loudly introduce himself to people. She, being an introvert, was embarrassed by his loudness and his awful shirt. They both wanted to accomplish something in their relationship that they couldn't do at home. Needless to say, the Caribbean cruise was a disaster because they brought themselves along.

Sadly, we all know that peace inside an individual is not determined by being in a place.

LET'S GO FOR IT!

You can feel fulfilled by being involved in study programs in a wide variety of schools, colleges, institutes, and universities. You can feel challenged by the pursuit of a career or hobbies, learning a skill, becoming involved in a cause, attending an event, helping with charitable work, becoming involved in an exercise or weight loss program, or even working long and diligent hours in Christian work. Many activities can give satisfaction and pleasure to the participants without their giving God a thought.

I met a prominent lawyer who was to introduce me as a banquet speaker. I asked him how he became a Christian. He told me he was a star athlete and the top student in high school. When he received his diploma, he was disappointed. He thought there would be more satisfaction than he experienced. He entered Harvard College and received recognition and satisfaction from playing on the varsity football team. In the classroom he was a top student. But when he received his diploma, he was disappointed not to experience satisfaction from this accomplishment. So he looked eagerly to law school at Yale, completing that program with top honors. Once again, receiving his diploma left him with a vague feeling of emptiness and the thought that there must be more to life than this. When he received an invitation to join the prestigious law firm of his choice, his career was off to a good start. Then he and his wife designed and built their dream house. They looked forward to the day they would take possession; when that day came, there was no joy. There was an emptiness that career and marriage could not fill.

He looked straight at me. "At that time I met a businessman with a serenity about him that caught my attention. In a conversation over lunch one day, I asked him why he seemed so content with life. He is the one who introduced me to the resources that are available to us from God. And that's why I am here to introduce you, Dr. Brandt."

The attorney found the basic flaw in depending on activities and events: they eventually end and leave you empty.

IT WILL MAKE ME HAPPY!

This amazing world is filled with interesting things that can satisfy a restless heart and bring peace and contentment. We are all familiar with the calming effect of a pleasurable drive in a car. House furnishings, TVs, DVD players, and stereos are pleasurable adult toys.

Most of us can recall happy moments enjoying a delicious meal together. Buying clothes, looking after the hair, the face, and the body are pleasant activities. The lawn, flowers, bushes, trees, and shrubs can provide hours of enjoyment and relaxation. Alcohol is the oil that eliminates social friction. Swallowing pills can calm you down or pick you up.

I was working overseas with a gentleman who was a highly successful and prominent engineer. He invited me to his home. His driveway was a quarter of a mile long; as we approached the house, I saw the six-car garage with a car in each one. The home had a butler, a chauffeur, a gardener, two maids, a nanny, and a cook. The acreage was large and very private, with a horse stable, swimming pool, and tennis court. We had our own private accommodations in a separate wing of the house. He had everything money could buy, but his family was in shambles.

At a family life conference where I had spoken during the previous year, he realized his life was empty and that during the accumulation of all his wealth he had neglected his wife and family. At the conference he had committed to establish a positive relationship with his family.

My purpose during this visit, a year after his first conference, was to see if I could help overcome some of the barriers that separated him from his wife and family. Sadly, as it turned out, his wife was not even willing to consider a closer relationship with him at this time.

Here was the display of all the things money could buy. It was also a stark reminder that there are some things money cannot buy: the spirit of love, joy, peace, and kindness flowing back and forth between parents, partners, and children. Today he remains committed to his goal with his family, but it may take a long time.

CAN ANYTHING BEAT FRIENDSHIP?

An obvious pathway to find relief from tension and stress is to pour out our thoughts and feelings to a sympathetic listener. I've spent most of my life as a counselor, and I can assure you that you can find relief through counseling and therapy without giving God a thought.

A newspaper report on a conference for the survivors of suicides featured one mother's story. Her world ended on the day her son killed himself. She told other survivors of suicides that their feelings of anguish, anger, and guilt are normal. Eventually she allowed her feelings of guilt to wash away when her therapist helped her realize she wasn't to blame.¹

One human being helping another: a pat on the back, a friendly hug, or a compliment from someone you care about is delightfully soothing.

The sympathy and affection that self-help groups give each other is often the only source of help that keeps many a weary soul from giving up. Every Monday, a list of dozens of support groups appears in our local paper. Table I lists some of the groups.

Table I: Support Groups	
Mended Hearts, Inc.	Smokers Anonymous
Alcoholics Anonymous	Food Addicts Anonymous
Bereavement Support Group	People Who Love Too Much
Compassionate Friends	Narcotics Anonymous
Emotions Anonymous	Family, Friends, and Lovers (AIDS)
Women Who Love Too Much	Take Off Pounds Sensibly
Arthritis Foundation	Co-Dependents in Relationships
Living with Breast Cancer	Adult Children of Alcoholics
Caregivers Support Group	Rebuilders (divorced and separated)
Overeaters Anonymous	Children with Learning Disabilities
Coping with Cancer	Alliance for the Mentally Ill
Miscarriage Support Group	Hospice Bereavement Support Group
Alzheimer's Support Group	Impaired Nurses Support Group
Mothers Against Drunk Driving	Support Group for Interfaith Couples
Nursing Home Support Group	C.A.R.P. Parent Support Group (families affected by drug and alcohol abuse)

A pleasing sense of belonging and approval comes as a part of a cooperative effort, such as playing on a team, sharing a work project, sensing the appreciative response of others in the use of your talents.

And what can be more satisfying than for a young man and a young lady to meet and experience an irresistible attraction toward each other that deepens into a satisfying relationship? Finally these two, usually opposites, gradually blend their lives into a partnership.

There is just something special and satisfying about a deepening friendship between two people, male or female, which contains the unmistakable comfort of heart-to-heart talks. Teaching, learning, and serving also give you a sense of accomplishment that is deeply satisfying.

WHY DOESN'T IT WORK?

I have attempted to create a picture of the finest and best features in this wonderful world. The humanist is right: this world contains ample resources that, coupled with the best efforts of caring people, should result in a world full of satisfied, happy people. But, alas, there is a flaw in this beautiful picture.

You would think you could find continuous satisfaction, peace, and enjoyment from family life, social life, friendships, school and church associates, and professional contacts without giving God a thought.

As I reflect across the last decade, the death of my first wife Eva interrupted that human fellowship. I married again and three years later my wife Marcey died suddenly. Jim Baker, one of my best friends who traveled with me all over the world, suddenly died of a brain aneurysm; he was only fifty-two. Art DeMoss, a fifty-three-year-old businessman with whom I shared ministry assignments many times, died of a heart attack on the tennis court. A college official whom I respected greatly suddenly announced that he was resigning his position, divorcing his wife, and marrying someone else. Just several weeks ago, a tearful young lady with two young children told me that her husband had announced that he was leaving her. No warning. No explanation.

Time, on September 15, 1986, reported that the health cost of drug abuse was estimated by one National Center for Health Statistics study at 59.7 billion dollars. The medical bill for alcohol abuse was estimated at an astonishing 146.7 billion dollars. [As of 2002, drug abuse costs had increased to 180.9 billion² and alcohol abuse costs to 185 billion.³]

Earlier in this chapter, I wrote optimistically about the pleasures of courtship that deepens into a happy, lifetime marriage. Present reality shatters that beautiful hope. [In 2008, there were 2,157,000 marriages and 844,000 divorces in the U.S.⁴]

I wrote of the benefits of friendship, cooperation, teamwork, and recognition. To my dismay, I listen daily to a recital of the failure of human effort, of marriage partners who have deceived and cheated each other. We have become accustomed to reports of lying, cheating, and stealing in business and politics. There is strife and discord at every level of life—from the boardroom to the classroom to the family room.

The Florida legislature has struggled with what to do to halt teenage pregnancy. About twenty-five thousand teenagers gave birth in Florida the year before I wrote this course, costing more than 125 million dollars in subsidized health care and welfare payments. More than one million teenagers became pregnant that same year in our country, and almost half chose to have abortions. Ninety-two percent of these pregnancies were unintended.

In this wonderful world, families are breaking up, incidents of child abuse and other family violence are growing, and delinquency, theft, murder and crime, escalating venereal diseases, and emotional disorders threaten our survival. There are multitudes starving to death and nations destroying each other.

Finding relief from tension is what some may think of as peace. People often turn to friendship, fellowship, challenges, opportunities, travel, and materialism, but they are as illusive as turning to drugs and alcohol. Initially there is hope, comfort, pleasure, but

sooner or later our efforts turn to ashes and result in increased loneliness, grief, tension, or bitterness.

The Humanist Manifesto II says:

Happiness and the creative realization of human needs and desires, individually and in shared enjoyment, are continuous themes of humanism. . . . Critical intelligence, infused by a sense of human caring, is the best method that humanity has for resolving problems.. . . (p. 18)

It seems clear to me that the finest human effort in a magnificent world is not enough to quiet the human heart in times of trouble and stress.

Jesus said:

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33, NKJV)

Based on all the options we have in going after peace, we should take careful note when Jesus gently tells us to turn to Him for peace. We can turn to Him, and not the world, if the peace we seek is to be deeply satisfying and lasting.

<i>Lesson: As long as you are busy, you may not notice a lack of peace. When you slow down, it can become a glaring reality.</i>

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Review the thought starter at the beginning of the chapter. What thoughts were started?
 - Review the lead Bible verse. What does it say to you? Did you observe yourself in relation to the verse? Did you observe others in relation to the verse? Did you find any additional verses?
 - What is your response to the lesson at the end of the chapter?
1. If Jesus said we can have peace in this world, in your opinion, why are many Christians living without it?
 2. How do you find satisfaction and relaxation to relieve your tension?
 - a. In a place?

- b. In activities and events?
- c. In things?
- d. In people?

3. What are the distinctions between relief and cure? Similarities?

4. When have you been most at peace with yourself?

5. How has the world disappointed you?

¹ *Fort Collins News* (Fort Collins, Colorado), Saturday, October 28, 1989, 1E.

² Office of National Drug Control Policy (2004). *The Economic Costs of Drug Abuse in the United States, 1992-2002*. Washington, DC: Executive Office of the President (Publication No. 207303)

³ Grant, B.F.; Dawson, D.A.; Stinson, F.S.; Chou, S.P.; Dufour, M.C.; Pickering, R. The 12-month prevalence and trends in DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: United States, 1991-1992 and 2001-2002. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 2004; (74): 223.

⁴Tejada-Vera B, Sutton PD. Births, marriages, divorces, and deaths: Provisional data for 2009. National vital statistics reports; vol 58, no 25. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2010.

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