

All I want for Christmas is Peace

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I love Christmas! I love everything about it! As I was studying to write this devotional about peace, a family tradition popped into my brain and would not leave! When I was a kid, the celebration of Christmas for our family officially started about 3 minutes after the smell of turkey from Thanksgiving dissipated. On a Sunday afternoon, we would all load up in the HUGE station wagon and travel what seemed to be a full day (maybe more - it was a long drive) to a place called Ojai. Here in this magical place they had a County Christmas Tree Farm that was packed full of Christmas trees as far as the eye could see! We would spend hours picking out and chopping down the perfect tree. Then, off to a place called Lynnvillle's where we would all get hot chocolate and cider! We would take the tree home, play Christmas carols and decorate the tree together. Those were peaceful times.

Peace is something that we all want. If I had one request for a gift this year, it would be Peace! We want peace with others. We want peace within ourselves. We want peace with God. We want peace that passes all understanding - and as much as we want peace, it can be so hard to come by.

Sometimes, instead of peace, it feels like we are bombarded with conflict, and peace is never to be seen.

Listen to the words of Ephesians 2:14-18, talking about peace:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

In this season of Advent, peace is a significant concept. If you are having a conflict with anybody or anything, we have clear direction toward peace: "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one." Paul starts with a definition of what true peace is. True peace is oneness. It is not simply the termination of hostility, the absence of conflict; it means being one. Anything else is superficial, temporary and highly unsatisfactory. I have done this many times - I've made peace on superficial terms and have found it only to be a shallow commitment or a band aid - at best. If you simply agree not to fight, it is not peace - and in virtually every occasion, it results in a new outbreak, with all the previous hostility bubbling to the surface once again. This is why what we call "peace among nations" never really lasts--because it isn't really peace. It isn't oneness at all. It is only a fatigue of warfare and an agreement to stop it for season so we can all recover and rearm. Then war breaks out all over again, simply because nothing was ever settled.

The cool thing is that Paul tells us the secret of peace here. The secret of oneness is a Person: "he himself is our peace." When Jesus makes peace - between individuals or between nations - that peace will be a satisfying, permanent and genuine peace. What Paul is saying is that in order to live in peace, you must have peace.

The problem with most of us is that we want to start by clearing up only the results of conflict. God never starts there; He starts with the person. He says peace is a person, and in order for you to live in peace with someone else, you must be at peace with the Person of Jesus. If you have His peace, then you can start solving the conflict around you. So the place to start, the origin of peace, is the settling of any conflict between you and Jesus Christ.

Many people come to me with various problems involving conflict. Usually they are upset, anxious, worried, discouraged or angry. They explain all of the terrible things the other person has done and all the reasons they are justified in being so angry. I lovingly listen to it all and then I may say to them, "Yes, you've got a problem. But that isn't your only problem. You really have two problems. The one you haven't mentioned is the one you must start with." Then, I point out to them that their basic problem is that they don't have any peace themselves - they are upset, angry and emotionally distraught. It is impossible to solve the problem until they themselves acquire peace.

This is the promise of God to Christians: He is our peace - and once their attitude is changed, once their heart is settled, once they have put the conflict into the hands of Jesus and they see that He is active in it, that He has a solution and their own heart is therefore at peace - then, they can begin to understand what is happening and can apply some intelligent remedies to the situation that will work out the problem. There is some impressive psychological perception in the fact that Paul begins with the proclamation that Jesus is our peace. He alone can accomplish it.

So, this Christmas, we all desire peace. But that peace that we desire, it only comes through Jesus. Today, this Christmas Season, let us focus on the Prince of Peace. I pray that we find that peace we are looking for underneath the Christmas tree. Merry Christmas.