

FINDING PEACE

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Chapter One:

What I Thought I Was Aiming For

For a long time, I believed peace was something that would arrive later.

Later, when the noise quieted. Later, when the work slowed. Later, when the people I loved finally understood me. Later, when the effort paid off. I carried that belief quietly, almost respectfully, as if peace were a reward life would eventually hand me once I proved I had endured enough.

At the time, it didn't feel unreasonable. I had been taught—by culture, by faith, by my own expectations—that patience was a virtue and perseverance was noble. If I stayed faithful, stayed steady, stayed kind, stayed responsible, peace would follow. Happiness might come and go, but peace, I assumed, would be the deeper prize waiting at the end of the road.

What I didn't see was how closely I had tied peace to the same conditions as happiness. I had simply given it a more mature name. Both were still dependent on outcomes. Both required cooperation from circumstances. Both assumed life would eventually soften in response to effort.

Years passed before I questioned that assumption. Not all at once. Not dramatically. The questioning arrived the way most honest realizations do—quietly, and far later than I would have preferred.

Life didn't fall apart. It simply refused to settle.

There were moments of joy, and stretches of contentment, but they never stayed long enough to anchor anything. Just as I began to feel stable, something shifted. A relationship strained. A plan unraveled. A season ended. A body aged. Expectations I didn't realize I was carrying surfaced, unmet and uninvited.

Happiness, I noticed, was always tied to movement—something improving, something aligning, something resolving. When things moved in the right direction, happiness appeared. When

they didn't, it vanished just as easily, leaving behind the quiet pressure to fix, adjust, or endure a little longer.

I told myself this was normal. That this was simply how life worked. That dissatisfaction was the cost of caring, and restlessness the price of responsibility. But beneath those explanations lived a deeper fatigue—one that didn't come from effort, but from constant negotiation with reality.

I was always waiting for life to feel different.

I waited for fewer demands. For clearer answers. For the sense that I had finally done enough to deserve stillness. Even my faith, at times, felt wrapped around that same hope—that if I trusted long enough, surrendered well enough, believed deeply enough, something would eventually shift.

What I couldn't admit then was how much resistance lived inside that waiting. I wasn't at peace with life as it was; I was tolerating it until it improved. I hadn't learned to rest. I had learned to delay.

Peace, as I imagined it, was something postponed.

I had spent years aiming for the wrong thing.

Not because happiness is wrong or unworthy, but because it was never meant to carry the weight I placed on it. Happiness was a visitor. I had asked it to be a foundation.

Peace, I would slowly learn, was something else entirely.

Peace did not announce itself with certainty. It did not correct my thinking or erase disappointment. It didn't even stay consistently at first. It appeared in fragments—brief moments where I stopped bracing for what might go wrong and simply allowed what was already happening to be enough.

Those moments were subtle. Easy to miss. They didn't feel like breakthroughs. They felt like pauses. A quiet loosening of the grip I had kept on outcomes, explanations, and timelines I never consciously chose but faithfully defended. Nothing resolved. Nothing improved. And yet, something inside me softened.

I began to recognize how much of my life had been lived in anticipation rather than presence. Even good days were evaluated against what might come next. Even rest carried a sense of borrowed time, as if it were only permissible until something more important demanded my attention. Peace had always been postponed because I was convinced something else needed to happen first.

That belief was so ingrained it felt invisible. I didn't question it because it had been reinforced everywhere—by achievement, by responsibility, by faith framed as endurance. The message was consistent: keep going, keep trusting, keep improving. Peace would come later.

But later kept moving.

The older I became, the harder it was to ignore the cost of that mindset. Not just physical tiredness, but a deeper weariness—the kind that comes from always preparing for the next adjustment. Always recalibrating. Always managing expectations, both my own and those of others. It was the fatigue of never quite being allowed to arrive.

I wasn't unhappy all the time. That's what made it difficult to name what was missing. There were many things to be grateful for, and I was. Gratitude lived alongside a persistent unease, as if I were standing in a place I had outgrown but hadn't yet been given permission to leave. Life was functioning, but something in me remained unsettled.

What surprised me was where peace finally began to take shape.

It didn't come through resolution. Some questions remained unanswered. Some relationships stayed complicated. Some losses never softened. But instead of demanding closure, I noticed a growing willingness to let things remain unfinished—without turning that unfinishedness into a verdict about my life.

That was new.

I had spent much of my life believing that maturity meant making sense of everything. That faith meant clarity. That healing meant closure. But peace seemed unconcerned with any of that. It

didn't require understanding. It required acceptance.

Not resignation. Acceptance.

There is a difference, though I didn't always recognize it. Resignation carries bitterness. Acceptance carries humility. One shuts down; the other opens space. Peace did not ask me to approve of everything that had happened—it asked me to stop fighting the fact that it had.

This was not a single decision. It was a gradual unlearning. A slow release of the belief that if I just tried harder, life would finally cooperate. That belief had fueled much of my effort, but it had also quietly sustained my unrest.

As that belief loosened, something else became possible.

In that honesty, something softened. Not life—but me.

That understanding didn't simplify my life. If anything, it complicated the stories I had relied on

for years—stories about progress, about arrival, about the quiet belief that endurance would eventually be rewarded with ease.

Peace asked something different of me.

It asked me to stay where I was without turning the moment into a problem to be solved. It asked me to stop treating discomfort as evidence of failure. It asked me to let go of the subtle bargain I had made with time—the belief that if I waited long enough, life would finally become manageable.

That bargain had shaped more of my thinking than I realized. I had learned to measure my days by improvement—better outcomes, clearer answers, less friction. When those markers were present, I felt steady. When they weren't, I felt behind. What I didn't recognize was how much I had been using motion as a substitute for grounding.

Peace did not ask me to stop moving forward. It asked me to stop believing forward was the only direction that mattered.

There is a quiet grief in recognizing how much energy is spent chasing relief. I saw it in myself—in the way I planned, anticipated, adjusted, and endured. Even rest carried expectations. Even stillness felt conditional, something I was allowed only when I had earned it or when nothing else demanded my attention.

Peace dismantled that hierarchy.

It did not care whether the day had been productive. It did not respond to effort or retreat at failure. It simply existed in the space where I stopped resisting what was already true. That space felt unfamiliar at first—almost irresponsible—because I had long equated vigilance with virtue.

Without the familiar framework of striving, I felt exposed. If peace didn't depend on improvement, then I could no longer use dissatisfaction as motivation. I had to confront the possibility that some parts of life would never resolve—and that I might still be okay.

That realization ran against everything I had been taught about growth, faith, and responsibility. I had

believed that acceptance was dangerous—that it would lead to complacency or apathy. But peace proved otherwise. It didn't make me passive. It made me present.

Presence, I learned, carries a different kind of strength.

It doesn't rush toward solutions or recoil from uncertainty. It stays. It listens. It allows complexity without demanding immediate clarity. In that space, something steadier than happiness began to take root—not excitement, not relief, but a grounded sense of being able to remain.

Peace did not remove longing. It changed its tone. Longing no longer felt desperate or urgent. It became quieter, less insistent. I could want things without needing them to arrive for life to feel bearable.

That distinction mattered more than I realized.

Because so much of my unrest had come from urgency—from the sense that something essential was missing, and until it appeared, I couldn't fully

rest. Peace interrupted that narrative. It whispered that nothing was missing from this moment that prevented me from standing fully within it.

That didn't mean everything was right. It meant everything was real.

There is relief in that kind of honesty. Not the relief of resolution, but the relief of no longer pretending. Peace offered me permission to stop explaining my life—to myself or to anyone else.

I no longer needed to justify where I was, or defend why certain things hadn't worked out. I didn't need to frame struggle as growth or loss as lesson. I could simply acknowledge what had been and allow it to remain part of the landscape.

Peace, I began to understand, is spacious.

It holds contradictions without collapsing under them. It allows joy and grief to coexist without forcing one to cancel the other. It does not require balance so much as honesty. In that honesty, life felt less managed—and more inhabited.

Looking back, I see how often I mistook intensity for meaning. How often I believed that if something hurt deeply, it must be important—and if it felt calm, it must be shallow. Peace corrected that assumption. It revealed a depth that didn't rely on drama.

This shift didn't happen overnight. It unfolded slowly, in moments I barely noticed at the time—a conversation that didn't need to be won, a disappointment that didn't need to be fixed, a day that didn't need to be explained.

Those moments accumulated.

And somewhere along the way, I realized I was no longer waiting for life to begin. I was already living inside it.

Peace hadn't changed my circumstances.

It had changed my posture toward them.

That was the beginning—not of happiness, but of something far more durable.

I began to notice how posture shapes experience.

Not physical posture—though that matters—but the inner stance I brought to each moment. For years, my posture had been forward-leaning, braced, anticipatory. I stood in life as if something were about to happen—something I needed to be ready for, something that would finally determine whether I could rest.

That posture felt responsible. It felt alert. It felt like engagement. But it also meant I was rarely settled where I stood. Even in calm moments, part of me was already preparing for what might disrupt them. I didn't fully inhabit the present; I hovered just ahead of it.

Peace adjusted that stance.

It invited me to stand upright where I already was, without leaning into the future or recoiling from the past. That subtle shift changed how everything felt. Problems didn't disappear, but they no longer defined the entire horizon. They became part of the landscape rather than the whole view. Joy didn't intensify, but it felt cleaner—less desperate to be preserved, less burdened by the fear of its ending.

I began to see how often I had confused peace with relief.

Relief comes when pressure is removed. Peace comes when pressure no longer controls you. Relief is temporary. Peace is stable. One depends on circumstances. The other depends on alignment—on how you are standing in the middle of whatever is happening.

This distinction reshaped how I understood faith.

I had always believed faith was strongest when it carried me through difficulty. And in many ways, that's true. But I hadn't considered how often faith had been framed—by others and by myself—as endurance with expectation. Hold on long enough, and something will change. Trust long enough, and the answer will come.

That framing had quietly shaped my posture as well. Faith had become another form of leaning forward—another way of waiting for resolution to justify rest.

Peace introduced a different form of faith—one that did not lean on eventual outcomes for its legitimacy. Faith that did not demand reassurance. Faith that remained even when the silence continued. Faith that did not interpret delay as failure.

That kind of faith felt quieter. Less impressive. Harder to explain. But it felt honest.

There was no longer a need to narrate my life as a story of becoming. I was already here. Already shaped. Already carrying both what had been gained and what had been lost. Peace did not ask me to minimize either. It did not ask me to romanticize struggle or dismiss joy.

It asked me to stay.

Staying, I learned, takes courage. It's easier to chase what's next than to sit with what is. Easier to imagine a better version of life than to engage the one unfolding in front of you. Peace removes the escape routes. It invites you to inhabit your life fully, without editing or rehearsal.

This was not always comfortable. There were days when old patterns returned—days when I caught myself bargaining again, waiting again, measuring again. But even then, something had shifted. I noticed the habit without being consumed by it. Awareness itself became a form of grounding.

Peace doesn't eliminate the impulse to strive. It softens its grip.

I could still care deeply. Still work. Still hope. But hope no longer felt like a condition for survival. It became an offering rather than a demand. Effort no longer carried the same urgency. Rest no longer required permission.

Looking back, I see that what I had called restlessness was often grief—the grief of unmet expectations, of imagined futures that never materialized, of identities I thought I would inhabit by now. Peace didn't erase that grief. It gave it room to breathe.

And in that space, grief changed. It lost its urgency. It became something I could carry without being bent under its weight.

This is what peace does.

It does not fix the past or guarantee the future. It steadies the present. It teaches you how to stand without armor, without agenda, without the constant need to arrive somewhere else.

I hadn't set out to find peace. I had been aiming for happiness, stability, reassurance—anything that promised relief from uncertainty.

Peace arrived only when I stopped aiming altogether.

Only when I allowed the striving to loosen.

Only when I realized that being satisfied with where I was did not mean abandoning who I was becoming.

That understanding did not come with clarity about what was next.

It came with permission to remain.

And that was enough.

I didn't know, at the time, that this shift would change the way I looked at nearly everything.

Not immediately. Not dramatically. It worked its way in slowly, altering the lens rather than the landscape. Situations that once felt urgent now felt workable. Conversations that once needed resolution could simply exist. Silence no longer felt like something to escape.

Peace didn't make me wiser overnight. It made me more patient with not knowing.

That patience was unfamiliar. I had spent much of my life believing that clarity was the goal—that understanding would finally settle the unease I carried. But clarity, I learned, is often overrated. It satisfies the mind while leaving the heart restless. Peace does the opposite. It quiets the heart even when the mind still has questions.

There were things I would never fully understand. Decisions—mine and others'—that would never make sense. Seasons that ended without explanation. Peace didn't demand that I reconcile

all of it. It asked only that I stop letting the unanswered define my inner state.

This was not indifference. It was discernment.

I began to choose where my energy went with more care. Not everything required a response. Not every discomfort needed to be addressed. Not every thought deserved my attention. Peace sharpened my sense of what mattered—and just as importantly, what didn't.

I noticed how often I had lived as if my worth were still being decided. As if the final verdict on my life hadn't yet been delivered. Peace interrupted that waiting. It suggested that nothing was pending. That the life I was living—unfinished, imperfect, unresolved—was already valid.

That realization carried a quiet relief. Not the relief of accomplishment, but the relief of permission.

Permission to be present without performing.

Permission to rest without justification.

Permission to accept without explaining.

This did not make life smaller. It made it more honest.

There were still moments when happiness appeared—moments of laughter, connection, beauty. I welcomed them without clinging. And when sadness came, I met it without panic. Peace had widened the space in which both could exist.

I no longer needed happiness to guarantee my well-being. I no longer feared its absence as failure.

What I had been seeking all along—stability, grounding, rest—had never been hidden at the end of the road. It had been waiting in the place I kept postponing: the present moment, exactly as it was.

That realization didn't end the journey.

It changed how I walked it.

I stopped asking when life would finally feel right. I stopped measuring days by improvement alone. I stopped postponing peace for a future that kept moving.

Instead, I learned to remain.

This chapter is not a conclusion. It's an acknowledgment. A naming of the shift that began quietly and continues still. Peace is not something I possess. It is something I practice—again and again—by choosing presence over resistance, honesty over expectation, and acceptance over argument.

Everything that follows grows from that place.

Not from answers.

Not from certainty.

But from the simple, steady act of standing where I am—
and no longer demanding that it be somewhere else.

Even now, I hesitate to frame this as a turning point, because that would suggest something definitive happened—something clean and complete.

It didn't.

There was no moment I could point to and say, *this is when peace arrived*. There was only a gradual recognition that the internal struggle I had normalized for years no longer needed to be my constant companion.

I had lived as if tension were proof of engagement. As if calm meant I had stopped caring. Peace challenged that belief at its root. It showed me that care does not require anxiety, and commitment does not demand restlessness. I could remain invested in life without being internally unsettled by it.

That realization was both freeing and disorienting.

Without the familiar urgency to fix, improve, or explain, I had to confront a quieter question: Who am I when I'm not striving to become someone else? That question lingered longer than I expected. Much of my identity had been built around effort—being responsible, being faithful, being dependable, being strong. Peace didn't erase those qualities, but it loosened their grip on my sense of worth.

I began to see how often I had equated value with usefulness. How often I measured my place in the world by what I contributed, resolved, or carried for others. Peace did not diminish my desire to give. It simply removed the pressure to justify my existence through constant doing.

There was humility in that.

And relief.

I also noticed how peace reshaped my relationship with time. The future no longer felt like a verdict waiting to be delivered. The past no longer felt like something that needed to be redeemed through better outcomes ahead. Time softened. It became something I moved through rather than something I raced against.

This did not mean I stopped caring about what came next. It meant I stopped letting what came next determine whether this moment was livable.

Old habits still surfaced. Especially under pressure. There were days when I caught myself bracing again, waiting again, quietly bargaining again. But

now I noticed sooner. And noticing, I learned, is often enough.

Peace is less about mastery and more about recognition.

Recognition of when I've drifted.

Recognition of when I'm resisting.

Recognition of when I'm asking life to be different so I can finally be okay.

Each recognition is an invitation—not to fix, but to soften.

What I carry out of this chapter is not confidence, but clarity. Not answers, but orientation. I can see now how often I confused effort with faith, movement with meaning, happiness with peace. Seeing that did not fix my life—but it freed me from chasing the wrong thing.

Peace did not promise ease.

It promised steadiness.

And steadiness, I have learned, is enough to face what comes next.

This chapter ends without resolution because resolution was never the point. It ends with posture—with a way of standing that no longer depends on circumstances cooperating or questions being answered.

I stopped aiming for happiness.

I stopped waiting for peace to arrive later.

I learned to stand where I am.

From here, the journey continues—not toward something better, but deeper.