



The Fruit of
PEACE
the Spirit

by WAYNE PALMER

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DAY 1

A PEACEFUL DEATH

Read Genesis 15.

(If time is short, read vv. 13–16.)

This month we continue our in-depth look into the fruit of the Spirit that Paul lists in Galatians 5:22–23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” You might notice that these nine form into three neat groups of three. The first set of three—love, joy, and peace—treat the ways we think or behave. This month we turn our attention to peace.

When Abram (Abraham) was seventy-five years old, God called him to leave his home and promised him a son. Decades went by, and God still had not kept His promise. Then the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision saying, “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great” (Genesis 15:1).

But Abram asked what reward God could give since the child of promise had not yet come. The Lord told Abram to step out of his tent and number the stars in the sky—if he could. “So shall your offspring be,” (v. 5). Abram believed this promise of the Lord, and God counted Abram’s faith as righteousness. To reassure Abram of His promise, the Lord had him prepare a sacrifice.

Late at night, after Abram fell into a deep sleep, the Lord told him the future of his offspring. They will become a great nation, but will sojourn in a land that is not theirs. They will be servants there, afflicted for four hundred years, but God will bring them out safely. But Abram will not experience that brutal slavery. God promised, “As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age” (v. 15).

This peace is the gift of God, part of the fruit of the Spirit. It is the peace of being right with God through Jesus Christ, our Savior. We confess our sins, trust in Jesus, and no matter what happens in life or in death, we are filled with God’s peace. Even in the most harrowing, painful, shameful death, God is with us and brings us in peace to our heavenly home.

PRAYER: God our Father, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to save us from our sins. Fill me

with Your gift of peace, that I may be free to share the joy of Your salvation with everyone I meet, no matter what circumstance I may face, or whatever persecution may be poured out upon me. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 2

WHEN BITTERNESS DRIVES PEACE AWAY

Read Genesis 37.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–11.)

Often a good way to understand a term is to look at its opposite. So what is the opposite of peace? In Genesis 37:4, we read about the tense relationship between Joseph and his brothers: “But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.”

Clearly peace is an attitude, a way of thinking, a state of being in relationship to other people. Because of sin, our world is filled with hatred, jealousy, and envy. It is sin and fear that drive away peace. The problem was that Jacob fanned the flames of this conflict and bitterness. He should

have seen each of his children as precious gifts of God, each with a great worth and value of his own.

But Jacob was jaded by the wives who had mothered these children. Four sons were from two concubines, servants to his two wives, the sisters Leah and Rachel. Six sons were from Leah, the older of the two sisters. Jacob couldn't stand her, because he had worked seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage—not hers. Their father Laban had deceived him—and now Leah and her sons paid the price. Jacob's refusal to forgive his father-in-law and embrace his first wife, Leah, destroyed peace.

We can feel that same jealousy and envy when we see someone who has been given more money, better opportunities, greater popularity, nicer looks, or deeper influence on others from our heavenly Father. It is easy to be jealous and envious.

But we need to take our eyes off of them, off of our own circumstances, and focus on God our Father and Jesus Christ, our Savior and Brother. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, who suffered and died to take away the sin that separated us from God and stirred His well-deserved wrath against us. But it also provides the way to destroy the hostility, jealousy, and envy that poison our relationships with others. With His help, we can embrace our

lives, which are enriched by so many of God's blessings. Then we can speak words of deep peace and love toward others.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank You for taking my sin, guilt, and hostility upon Yourself and paying the penalty for those sins in Your innocent suffering and death. Fill my heart, mind, and mouth with words of peace and joy. Amen.

DAY 3

PEACE IN TIMES OF FEAR AND DREAD

Read Genesis 43.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–23.)

Joseph's brothers hated him and sold him into slavery in Egypt. God was with him and raised him to Pharaoh's right hand. During seven years of plenty, Joseph gathered immeasurable stores of grain to feed the Egyptians during the seven years of plague that were to follow.

When those bad years kicked in, the famine was severe—even in Canaan where Jacob was living with his other sons and daughters. He sent all his sons except Joseph's brother Benjamin with sacks of gold to buy food. When they reached Egypt, they were brought to their brother, but thinking him dead, they just thought it was a high-ranking official who had charge of the food. Joseph recognized them and treated them harshly. He

accused them of being spies and imprisoned them. For three days, they sat in prison, unsure if they would ever be free—just as Joseph had. Finally, he agreed to sell them grain, but only if they brought their youngest brother with them. In the meantime, Simeon was held in prison until their return.

As they returned with their sacks of grain, they found that their gold was all there with the grain. It looked as though they had stolen the grain—even though they knew they had been honest. They finally convinced Jacob to let them take Benjamin back with them, but their hearts were restless and filled with fear because of the gold. It took the words of Joseph's steward to settle those fears. He told them, "Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money" (Genesis 43:23).

It is so reassuring when we hear such words in a time of dread and fretting. They had experienced the fear that Joseph had suffered when they sold him into slavery. But just as the Lord had lifted Joseph's spirits by the favor of his Egyptian captors, the steward had lifted their hearts with reassuring words.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, we have all felt dread and fear from time to time when we weren't sure

whether we would receive mercy or hostility from other people. We should have felt even greater fear and dread of Your judgment, but You sent Your own dear Son, Jesus, to drive away our fears with His words of peace and comfort. Empower me by Your Holy Spirit to share those peaceful words of forgiveness with others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 4

PEACE THAT RUNS DEEP

Read Genesis 44.

(If time is short, read vv. 3–17.)

Joseph was testing his half brothers. He had been separated from them for nearly twenty years. Had they learned their lesson? Were they sorry for selling him into slavery? Would they do it all over again with his full brother, Benjamin?

Joseph extended them a great temptation when he offered them freedom and insisted on imprisoning Benjamin alone. They were free to go in peace.

But his half brothers had changed. This kind of peace was superficial, and they all knew it. Benjamin was not the guilty one—they were. No, they had not stolen the silver cup or the bags of gold—but they had committed a greater sin, a criminal sin. They had sold Joseph into slavery and certain death. They vividly remembered the look on his face when he pleaded with them and they callously turned their faces the other way.

Judah knew he would have no peace in his heart or in his father's presence if he left Benjamin behind. He offered to exchange his freedom for Benjamin's prison sentence.

Judah's greater Son, Jesus Christ, made an even greater exchange—He exchanged His innocence for our sin, His life for our death, His heaven for our hell. He died on the cross to pay the price for our sins, then rose in glory to share our life and our heavenly home. He is the source of our peace—not a false and superficial peace from covering our sins, but the true peace from taking them away from us forever.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, forgive me for the times I have sought a false peace—covering my guilt and sin and pretending everything will be okay. Thank You for the true and lasting peace that comes from genuine confession and Your grand forgiveness that takes that sin away through the life, death, and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 5

PEACE IN UNPLEASANT SITUATIONS

Read Exodus 4.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–20.)

Moses was forty years old when he fled Egypt after having slain an Egyptian who was whipping an Israelite slave. Forty years later, he was shepherding the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro, in Midian, the great wilderness around Mount Sinai. He was married with two sons. His life had taken an unexpected, yet comfortable course. But the burning bush changed all that.

God directed him back to Egypt to bring the Israelite slaves out. Moses asked God to send someone else, but God chose him. When he told Jethro he must go back, Jethro told him, “Go in peace” (Exodus 4:18).

But what peace could Moses know? He was going back to the scene of the crime. He had to confront Pharaoh—a man who had grown up with

him in the palace. He knew how proud, arrogant, and stubborn Pharaoh could be. Traveling to Egypt had to be anything but peaceful.

But Moses did not travel to Egypt alone. He traveled with the God of heaven and earth, the great Creator. He went with ten plagues and an army of angels protecting him. There would be tough times to challenge faith—but God was there with forgiveness and peace.

PRAYER: Holy Father, sometimes I have to go back into unpleasant situations that fill me with stress, worry, and anxiety. Speak Your peace to me—the assurance that my sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake and that You are with me, an ever-present help in times of trouble. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 6

A PEACEFUL COMMUNITY

Read Exodus 18.

(If time is short, read vv. 13–26.)

After God's mighty plagues, Israel was freed from Egypt. He used the pillar of fire and cloud to lead them to Mount Sinai, where they would receive the Ten Commandments and God's directions for worship and community life. Meanwhile, arguments and disputes were breaking out between individual Israelites. They came to Moses to reveal God's decisions for them. But so many were coming that they ended up standing in line for hours and hours. They grew frustrated and cranky, while Moses was getting burned out. Others saw the long line and turned away in disgust.

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, saw this and immediately recognized the harm it was causing to Moses and to the nation. He counseled Moses to delegate his authority. Set a system of trustworthy, God-fearing judges in place to decide these cases. When they faced cases too difficult to decide, they

took them up through the ranks to higher courts. The most difficult went on to Moses, who sought and received the Lord's decision.

This pleased Moses and the Lord, and with this new system in place Moses and the people of Israel were at peace.

PRAYER: Holy Father, thank You for good counsel and common sense like Jethro offered Moses. Give me wisdom first to recognize my sins and cling to Jesus Christ, my Savior, alone. Then give me wisdom to befriend those in need around me. Give peace to Your Church throughout the world. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 7

THE PEACE OFFERING

Read Leviticus 7:11–36.

During the forty days Moses was on Mount Sinai, God gave him instructions to pass along to his brother Aaron, Israel's high priest. These are recorded in the Book of Leviticus (named for Moses and Aaron's tribe—Levi). These instructions included the worship practices for Israel, at the heart of which were the sacrifices. There were actually five different sacrifices: burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, sin offering for unintentional sins and some intentional sins, and a guilt offering. Together they all pointed ahead to the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, on the cross. But individually, each revealed a different facet of that sacrifice that won our eternal salvation.

The peace offering was unique among all the offerings in Israel. The worshiper who sacrificed the animal was able to eat part of the meat with his

family. The purpose was for the sinner to eat part of the body of the sacrifice that died in his place for his sin. Eating the meat would remind him that he should have died for his sins, but another took his place. And because that sacrifice died instead of him, he was at peace with the Lord.

Clearly, the peace offering pointed ahead to Jesus Christ, and more specifically, to the meal He gives us—His body and blood in the bread and wine. As we eat and drink, we remember Him—eating the very body and drinking the very blood Jesus offered when He took our place and died that we might live. With that forgiveness, we can depart in peace.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son as the Lamb of God, who took away the sins of the world. Thank You for the precious gift of His body and blood given for us on the cross and on the altar. Deepen my desire to frequently receive this assurance of Your forgiveness, that Your peace may fill me always. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

DAY 8

“I WILL GIVE PEACE”

Read Leviticus 26.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–6.)

Leviticus contains more than the laws governing Israel's religious life. It also contained statutes and rules for the community life of the Israelites. Like the Second Table of the Ten Commandments, they were intended to show God's people how to live together in peace.

God promised that if the Israelites walked in His statutes and faithfully kept His commandments, He would give them rain to sustain their crops and orchards, and He would give peace in the land, protecting it from warfare and invasion.

The wording God uses sounds a bit strange, “I will give peace in the land” (Leviticus 26:6). We might expect God to say instead, “I will drive war or violence out of the land.” But God's Word reflects our sinful condition. Peace is not something inside of us—not something we can accomplish for ourselves if we try to be good. We are lost sinners,

and there can be no peace where sin is involved. Not unless God gives that peace.

That is why Jesus came and was called our Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). He gave humanity something it could never accomplish on its own—peace with God through the forgiveness of our sins—and peace with one another.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for the peace You established for us through Your Son, Jesus Christ, and His great sacrifice on the cross. Through Your Gospel, establish peace among Your children on earth, and let that peace extend out into the world around us as we share the Gospel of salvation. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 9

THE BENEDICTION OF PEACE

Read Numbers 6:22–27.

Today's reading should be familiar words. They are the words God gave to Moses to pass on to Aaron the high priest, and all the priests who would follow after him. That same wonderful blessing is passed down to us through our pastors.

Right away, we notice it is a blessing in three parts, each part repeating the name of Yahweh, the great "I AM." It foreshadows Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28, where He commands His New Testament Church to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Each of these three blessings in turn consists of two parts—the first phrase indicates God's movement toward us ("bless you . . . make His face to shine upon you . . . lift up His countenance upon you") followed by a second phrase that indicates an activity of God that follows that movement ("and keep you . . . and be gracious to you . . . and give you peace") (Number 6:24–26).

It is a rich blessing that encompasses the full work God does on behalf of His human creatures through Jesus Christ. He keeps us—protects and guards us, provides all our needs of body and soul. He is gracious to us—forgiving our sins through Jesus Christ. And He gives us peace—by creating faith in us that receives that forgiveness from Jesus and makes our hearts right with God.

PRAYER: Lord God, heavenly Father, thank You for this beautiful benediction that wondrously reassures us of Your love and help throughout our lives—and gives us peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 10

A SPEAR THAT BROUGHT PEACE

Read Numbers 25.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–13.)

In Numbers 22–24, Balak, the Moabite king, was terrified of Israel as it passed by his kingdom. Not trusting Israel's promise to leave his land alone, he offered the prophet Balaam a large sum of money to come and put a curse on Israel. Four times Balaam tried to get the Lord to curse Israel, but he was stymied, and God forced him to pronounce a blessing instead.

Balak was furious and Balaam coveted that money. But sly Balaam knew there was another way to get his hands on that money. Since he couldn't get God to curse the people of Israel, he found a way to get the people of Israel to sin and bring a curse upon themselves. He counseled the daughters of Moab to invite the men of Israel to the sacrifices to Baal their god. Stirred by lust, the men of Israel joined them and worshiped the false god.

God's wrath was stirred against Israel. He commanded Moses to execute the chief men of Israel and put them on public display to make it clear that God was displeased because they despised Him and were misleading the people.

That is when Aaron's grandson Phinehas saw one of the Israelite chiefs defy Moses and the Lord by taking a Midianite woman into his tent. Phinehas, filled with holy love for God, rose from the congregation, took a spear, went into the tent, and killed the man and woman.

God was pleased that Phinehas boldly trusted Him and was willing to protect His people from joining in that sin against God. God promised to give Phinehas His covenant of peace. When his father died, Phinehas would become high priest and make sacrifices to take away the sins of the people and give them peace.

PRAYER: Lord God, heavenly Father, thank You for the zeal You inspired in Phinehas to glorify Your name and protect Your people. Thank You for that same zeal in Your Son, Jesus, as He drove the moneychangers and the traders from Your temple. Give me zeal and boldness to share Your name, Your love, and Your peace with everyone I meet. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

WHO CHOOSES WAR OVER PEACE?

Read Deuteronomy 2:16–37.

(If time is short, read vv. 26–34.)

The forty years of wilderness wandering were drawing to a close. Through the pillar of cloud and fire, God was guiding Israel to the east bank of the Jordan River opposite Jericho. But along the way, they had to pass through a few countries.

The Edomites (descendants of Jacob's brother, Esau) and Moabites (descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot) let them pass through. Then they approached Heshbon. Moses sent messengers with words of peace, "Let me pass through your land. I will go only by the road; I will turn aside neither to the right nor to the left. You shall sell me food for money, that I may eat, and give me water for money, that I may drink. Only let me pass through on foot, as the sons of Esau who live in Seir and the Moabites who live in Ar did for me, until I go over the Jordan into the land that the LORD our God is giving to us" (Deuteronomy 2:27–29).

If King Sihon was feeling unsure, he could ask the kings of Edom and Moab if Israel was trustworthy, if Israel had kept its word when passing through their land. Instead, King Sihon stubbornly defied the Lord and stood in Israel's way. Sihon gathered his army and came out for battle against Israel.

He was routed, his army destroyed, and God gave the land to Israel. This land came to be known as Trans-Jordan, or the land across the Jordan River. In Jesus' day, it was known as the Decapolis, the land of the ten cities.

It was a repetition of God's promise to Abraham, "Whoever blesses you I will bless, and whoever curses you I will curse" (see Genesis 12:3). The same is true for Abraham's Seed, Jesus Christ. For those who trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, they know peace with God. But for those who reject His offer of peace, pardon, and forgiveness, there is only death and destruction. May God grant us the persistence to keep witnessing to them—that the Spirit may bring them from death to life.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, into our flesh to restore our relationship with You. Give me grace always to cling to Jesus by faith, and the courage I need to share His name with those who need to hear. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 12

PEACE BY DECEPTION AND SUBMISSION

Read Joshua 9–10.

(If time is short, read 9:1–15.)

The Israelites crossed the Jordan River under Joshua's leadership, and conquered the first two cities they faced, Jericho and Ai. The people in the nearby Canaanite town of Gibeon were terrified. They knew they could not stand against Israel's God, so they sought a treaty.

Knowing Israel could not make a treaty with any of the Canaanite nations, the people of Gibeon deceived Joshua and the elders of Israel, pretending to have come from a distant town to seek peace. Israel made a treaty with them.

When Israel learned they had been deceived, they enslaved the Gibeonites. But grateful to be alive, those Canaanites willingly subjected themselves to slavery. They thought it was better to be slaves than to lie dead at Israel's feet. Apart from Rahab

the prostitute, these were the only Canaanites who feared God—and He saved them.

The Canaanite kings of the south formed an alliance led by the king of Jerusalem and set out to attack and destroy Gibeon for having made a treaty with Israel. Joshua could have abandoned them to their fate—but instead he honored the treaty and came to Gibeon's defense. God handed the alliance of kings over to them, and Israel won a stunning victory.

By nature, we were children of wrath, deserving nothing but God's punishment. But He offers us peace through His Son, Jesus. For all who are willing to humble themselves and confess their sins, God offers more than eternal life—He makes them His own sons and daughters in Christ.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You that You offered salvation in Jesus Christ to all nations, not just to the descendants of Abraham. Indeed, every believer in every nation is blessed through Jesus Christ, our great Lord and Savior. Amen.

DAY 13

THE LORD IS PEACE

Read Judges 6–7.

(If time is short, read 6:1–24.)

God gave the Promised Land to the twelve tribes of Israel. But after Joshua's death, the children of Israel turned against God. They began worshiping false gods, so God permitted enemy nations to invade the land and make life miserable for the Israelites. When they cried out in repentance pleading for deliverance, God raised up judges for them.

One of those judges was Gideon. The angel of the Lord appeared to him and charged him to deliver Israel from Midian. He asked the angel to stay while he prepared a meal. The angel politely refused, then said to offer it to God as a sacrifice instead. When Gideon did so, the angel made the offering be consumed with fire and then went up to heaven in the smoke of his offering. Realizing it was the Lord, Gideon was terrified. But the Lord reassured him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you

shall not die” (Judges 6:23). Gideon built an altar there and called it “The LORD Is Peace.”

Gideon was still too afraid to lead the Israelites to war until God worked a couple of miracles with fleece and dew (Judges 6:36–40). Then he boldly delivered the Israelites from their captivity.

God gave us peace through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. We, too, can have boldness to serve God as we share Christ’s deliverance with our neighbors at work or at school, in our home and in our neighborhood, and at church.

PRAYER: Lord God, thank You for restoring peace between sinful humanity and Yourself through the sacrifice of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ. For Jesus’ sake, wash away my sins, remove my fear and hesitation, and make me bold to share Your great salvation. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

DAY 14

PEACE IN THE MIDST OF OPPRESSION

Read Psalm 4.

David wrote Psalm 4. Unlike Psalm 3, we do not know the circumstances behind this psalm. But it speaks to believers who are being distressed by others who are oppressing and troubling them either because they think they will profit from it, or because they believe the vain lies of those who speak against the godly.

This hardly seems like a peaceful situation, rather, one that should cause deep distress and sleepless nights. But David teaches us the key to finding peace in these situations. He turns to the Lord and prays, “Lift up the light of Your face upon us” (v. 6).

Those words should be familiar—they are the last line of the benediction God gave Aaron. “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His

face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance [that is, the light of His face] upon you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24–26).

With the assurance of God’s forgiveness for Jesus’ sake, for His providence and protection, we can rest securely and at peace. It is from this position of peace and security that David counsels his people through this psalm to repent and enjoy the blessings God promises to shower on His own.

PRAYER: Gracious heavenly Father, whenever I face ridicule, rejection, and opposition for my faith, be my strong defender and remind me of Your constant presence, that I may boldly share Your Word with others. I pray in Jesus’ holy name. Amen.

DAY 15

PLANNING FOR PEACE

Read Proverbs 12.

Chapter 12 in Proverbs gives us a list of comparisons between the godly and the ungodly. They are tremendous guides whenever the lines between right and wrong get blurry in our minds—especially when our culture sinks into our minds a bit too much.

Verse 20 speaks about peace. It says, “Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan peace have joy.” In both cases, the ungodly and the godly are living their lives with purpose, with a plan. But those plans are totally opposite. The ungodly devise evil, while the godly are planning peace.

The godly want peaceful lives and relationships. They want to be loyal and dependable children, spouses, parents, employees, and employers. They want to help other people find peace with God through Jesus Christ, and they want to help

improve the lives of the people God has brought to them.

The ungodly are not so. They devise evil because their only concern is their own selfish desires and pleasures. They are happy to use deceit to get what they want—even appearing to care about the well-being of the people they are ultimately setting up to use and then throw away.

But the results are just the opposite. While using deceit on other people, they are truly deceiving themselves, ignoring the God who watches over all and judges the ungodly. But the godly who seek peace receive great joy—first in their salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection, then through the valuable relationships they form in this life.

PRAYER: Holy Father, thank You for Your wise words in Proverbs. Remind me of the wisdom of serving You and living for Your glory and the welfare of my neighbor, and fill my heart with joy and peace always. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 16

PERFECT PEACE

Read Isaiah 25–26.

(If time is short, read 26:1–9.)

The Isaiah 25 speaks of Christ's victory over death. Death is the just penalty for our sins against God, but through Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave, our sins are forgiven and we have the assurance of our own resurrection when He returns on Judgment Day.

Chapter 26 picks up on that same theme and adds the wonderful proclamation of our Lord's work in us: "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (v. 3). What a glorious promise. When our minds are stayed on our holy God and Savior, He gives us perfect peace because we trust in Him.

Now that thought can create stress for us if we think it is up to us to stir up our trust from deep inside and to keep our minds stayed on God. But that is the work of the Holy Spirit. Through the Word of God and the Sacraments, the Holy Spirit stays our mind on Christ Jesus and gives us firm trust and faith. That is why worship and daily Bible reading is so critical.

Think of this perfect peace. Since we know that Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death, what should we fear in this life? What illness? What earthly circumstance can steal away our peace? All the bad things we suffer in this life are temporary—God's gift of life is eternal, and we will enjoy it in the glorious new heaven and new earth with our risen, perfected body. That is perfect peace.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus Christ, through Your suffering and death and Your glorious resurrection, You have delivered me from all my enemies and all my fears. Pour out Your Holy Spirit on me that He may stay my mind on You, and fill me with trust. I pray in Your holy name. Amen.

DAY 17

THE PLACE OF PEACE

Read Haggai 1–2.

(If time is short, read 2:1–9.)

After seventy years of exile in Babylon, it was not easy for the Jews to return to Jerusalem. They were settled and established in their various towns. It took a great deal of courage, faith, and strong leadership for anyone to return—and most Jews stayed where they were.

Those who did return faced great obstacles—a demolished city, piles of rubble, and burnt stone. They also faced organized opposition—including Samaritans who petitioned the Persian emperor to stop the work on building a new temple. The Jews grew weary of fighting and abandoned their work on the temple to focus on rebuilding their homes. God sent two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to encourage them to finish building the second temple.

When the foundation of the second temple was laid, it was a great disappointment to the older

returned exiles who had seen Solomon's original temple in their youth. This new house was so modest in comparison to Solomon's grand temple.

But God's prophets came to assure His people that the glory of this temple would far surpass the first—for the Christ would come and stand in those temple courts, and He would give peace to all believers.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for sending prophets to give Your Word of encouragement and peace. Encourage me by Your Holy Spirit, that I may faithfully carry out Your work in my family, my neighborhood, my church, and my workplace or school. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 18

THE PEACEMAKERS

Read Matthew 5–7.

(If time is short, read 5:1–12.)

Jesus led His disciples up onto a hillside in Galilee, and a large crowd gathered around them. Jesus had them sit down and began preaching His Sermon on the Mount. Perhaps surprisingly, the great majority of these three chapters is Law rather than Gospel. After the first twelve verses, it is all Law. But those twelve verses describe the relationship God creates with a believer and the faith by which the Holy Spirit equips us to do the good and loving works that the Law commands.

He began His sermon with words of repentance, “Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . those who mourn . . . the meek . . . those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matthew 5:3–6). We come before God in repentance because of our sin, which makes us poor, mourning, meek, and hungering and thirsting for righteousness. For Jesus’ sake, God forgives and restores us. So now, “Theirs is

the kingdom of heaven . . . they shall be comforted . . . they shall inherit the earth . . . they shall be satisfied” (vv. 3–6).

Then from this restored faith, we are empowered to serve God with a new heart. “Blessed are the merciful . . . the pure in heart . . . the peacemakers . . . those who are persecuted” (vv. 7–10).

One part of the fruit of the Spirit is peace. We receive that peace with God through the forgiveness of our sins for Jesus’ sake. Then we share that peace with lost and hurting sinners, sharing the Good news of Jesus’ salvation and making peace between them and God as the Holy Spirit works repentance and faith in their heart.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for bringing those people into my life who taught me about Your Son, Jesus Christ, the great Peacemaker. Give me grace to be a peacemaker for someone else by sharing the love of our Savior and the story of His victory over sin, death, and hell. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

DAY 19

PEACE AMIDST CONFLICT

Read Matthew 10.

(If time is short, read vv. 34–39.)

It must have been startling to Jesus' disciples to hear Him say, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). It is startling to us. After all, Isaiah called Him the Prince of Peace, and the Christmas angels said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased" (Luke 2:14).

Jesus reminds His disciples that His Word will bring division and remove peace. Not because God is at war with people, but because the sinful world is at war with God and wants nothing to do with the peace He sent His Son, Jesus, to bring. That hostility showed itself cruelly on the cross. We can't be surprised if we experience that hostility too.

Still, God calls us to be peacemakers. Not by holding our peace and being silent, but boldly

sharing the Gospel so that the Holy Spirit can produce repentance and create faith in that other person's heart. When we face rejection, oppression, and persecution, we must not see those people as our enemy—but as pawns of Satan, our true enemy. But thanks be to God, Jesus Christ has won the victory for us all. In Jesus' name, we can see them as lost sheep to whom Jesus is calling through us.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, in Your Son, Jesus, you overcame Satan, sin, death, and hell—our true enemies. Give me such genuine love for all the people around me that I may never grow too tired or too scared to share the good news of their salvation. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

A GUILTY TOUCH

Read Mark 5.

(If time is short, read vv. 24–34.)

Jesus is walking in the midst of a thronging crowd. A synagogue ruler urged Him to come and save his daughter who was dying, and Jesus was on His way. But the going was tough because the crowd was pressing in on Him.

As He walked along, He felt power go out from Him. He stopped and began looking around for the woman who had touched Him.

This unnamed woman's chronic bleeding had made her unclean for eighteen years. It is likely the people in her town told her she was being punished for sinful living, and she clearly felt unworthy to come up to Jesus and ask for His healing face-to-face. But her confidence in Jesus was more bold. She believed He was so powerful she could be healed at just the touch of His garments. And she was. It was her hope to slip back into the crowd and go unnoticed.

But Jesus wouldn't stop searching through the crowd. Trembling in fear, she came up, knelt at His feet, and confessed what she had done. Fearful of

His wrath, she instead heard Him say, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease” (Mark 5:34).

And suddenly Jesus’ reason for stopping and searching the crowd became clear. This poor woman had more to be healed from than chronic bleeding. She needed to know God loved her, wanted to forgive her sins, and set her heart and mind at peace. She indeed was a daughter of God, healed by her Savior and Lord.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank You for taking the time and care to search for this precious daughter of God. Remind me that You likewise searched for me, a lost lamb, and through Your Word and Baptism made me Your own. Thank You that I may always go in peace. Amen.

DAY 21

HIDDEN PEACE

Read Luke 19.

(If time is short, read vv. 28–44.)

The last week before Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection had finally arrived. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to the praises of the crowds coming up to the city for Passover. As He drew near the city, tears filled His eyes and He said to the people of Jerusalem, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:42).

The things that bring peace are not sword, spear, and arrow. They are not the might of large crowds, money, or fame. They are not even mighty miracles of healing, stilling storms, and feeding large crowds. The things that bring peace are a crown of thorns and nails driven into a rough cross.

But the events of that Holy Week revealed just how hidden these things were from the people of Jerusalem. Seeing Jesus hanging on the cross, they falsely concluded that He had been a fraud, an impostor—and God was now making that clear to everyone. They could not fathom how God could

ever permit an innocent man to be crucified.

But Jesus was an innocent man. And He was punished for our sins, our failings, our transgressions. His nail-scarred hands and feet, His spear-marked side, His thorn-encircled brow are the things that make for peace.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank You for enduring the agony of the cross to give us peace with God. Help me to embrace Your salvation every day of my life, and share the story of Your love with everyone I meet. I pray in Your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

PERFECT PEACE

Read John 14.

(If time is short, read verses 25–31.)

It is Thursday night. Jesus is in the Upper Room with His disciples. It has been a strange night, full of sorrow and foreboding as Jesus has spoken of His suffering and death to them many times around their dinner table.

Now He tells them, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27). These are sweet words to cling to. But they are only possible because Jesus stepped into our place, took our sins upon His shoulders, and endured the wrath of God at our sins. By His death and resurrection, we now have peace with God forevermore.

And the way God gives peace is different than the way the world gives anything. The world of sinful mankind is willing to give only when it expects to get something in return. But God gives freely, graciously to sinners who deserve nothing but His wrath and eternal punishment. Instead He gives them His Son. And Jesus gives His precious life

to suffering and death so that He might win peace with God for us—perfect peace in our hearts. There is no longer anything to fear—Christ has overcome sin, death, and Satan by His death and resurrection.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank You for the peace You won for us on the cross and left to us in Your Word and Sacraments. Let me always live in that peace no matter what the circumstances of my life may be. Amen.

SO FAR AS IT DEPENDS ON YOU

Read Romans 12.

(If time is short, read vv. 14–21.)

Romans 12 is a tremendous chapter on living a Christian life to the glory of God and the good of our neighbor. It is in this context of serving our neighbor in love that Paul writes, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (v. 18).

This is a lofty goal—but notice that Paul carefully words this direction. He says “if possible”—which shows that it is not possible in every situation—then he further adds “as it depends on you.” There are two sides to any relationship—and we can only control one side of it. From our side as Christians, we should do everything we can to live peacefully. Avoid stirring conflict or pushing the other person’s buttons.

But there is another side of every relationship. If they refuse to live peacefully with us despite how loving and helpful we are, then we did all we could.

That's what Jesus found. He offered His grace, love, and forgiveness to the Jewish leaders—but they rejected Him. They repaid His kindness with cruelty, His patient forbearance with cries for His crucifixion.

But there is one other reminder here. We may be tempted to achieve peace through compromise. We often do that in our families—holding our peace about a behavior or lifestyle that Scripture clearly condemns. A life choice that will lead our loved one or neighbor away from faith and on that broad, easy way that leads to destruction. If we hold our tongue in order to achieve a civil peace in our family or our neighborhood, then we are not being the peacemakers Jesus promised to bless. In fact, we are accomplices with Satan in his plot to destroy this sheep for which Jesus Christ suffered and died.

It is better to seek peace between that loved one or neighbor and God—even if we risk the anger and rejection of the other person for the rest of our life on earth.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank You for never compromising with lies and falsehood, but standing firm for the truth. You are the great Peacemaker, who restored my relationship with our heavenly Father. Bless me to be a peacemaker, even when it

costs relationships with those who refuse to listen to Your Word. Send Your Spirit to bring them to faith through Your words that I speak. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 24

CALLED TO LIVE IN PEACE

Read 1 Corinthians 7.

(If time is short, read vv. 12–16.)

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul dealt with an adulterous situation in which a man was having relations with his father's wife (his step-mother). The congregation prided itself in showing how loving it was by accepting this behavior. St. Paul revealed it for the sin it was and charged the congregation to excommunicate the brother to show him how serious his sin was and move him to repentance. (In 2 Corinthians, we learn that this excommunication worked precisely as Paul said—the brother repented, and Paul directed them to now receive him back into full fellowship.)

As he continues on in 1 Corinthians, Paul writes an entire chapter on marriage and gives some guiding principles. The Scripture tells us not to be unevenly yoked (Deuteronomy 7:3; Joshua 23:12). Paul addresses the case of a man and woman who married when neither were believers, but later one

came to faith. Such situations raised the question if the believing spouse should seek divorce from his or her unbelieving partner to fulfill God's will.

Paul wrote that the believer should not seek divorce. If the unbelieving partner consents to remain together, they should do so. Then the believer can continue to share the Gospel with the spouse, with the hope of conversion to faith.

But if the unbelieving spouse seeks divorce, the believer is not required to fight that divorce. They are not enslaved to an uneven marriage because God has called us to peace.

If there is to be any obstacle for that unbelieving spouse to come to faith, that obstacle must be the offense of the cross alone, not the coercion or pressure of their believing spouse.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, be with every couple where a Christian is married to an unbeliever. Grant wisdom and discretion to these Your children, that they may live in love and by Your grace, in answer to their prayers, grant their spouse repentance and faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 25

UNIFIED IN PEACE

Read Ephesians 4.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–16.)

Do you want to know God's vision for your congregation? St. Paul lays it out here in the fourth chapter of his Letter to the Ephesians. Try to picture how your own congregation would look if everyone lived together as St. Paul describes.

You all live together in true humility—each counting the needs of others as more important than your own. You are all gentle with one another, especially when you have differences of opinions regarding church matters. You are patient with one another, not rushing or hurrying one another—or getting angry with small provocations. You bear with one another's shortcomings and faults with great love. And you are all eager to maintain the unity you share—the unity created by the Holy Spirit through the bond of peace.

Does that sound like an impossibility? The only thing that gets in the way is our sin and selfishness. Yet Christ calls us together and gathers us into one for this very purpose—to confront our sin, move

us to repentance, and then grant us forgiveness. His Word and Sacraments bind us together as His Bride, the Body of Christ. Yes, we each have a different function in that body, but that is the beauty of the Church. God unites us all together to carry out His mission of sharing the story of His love in Jesus Christ, that He might call sinners to repentance and faith.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Your plan and design for Your Church is grand and glorious. Sadly, by reason of our frail, fallen nature, it is impossible for us to live together in peace and love by our own strength or determination. But thank You for Your Son, Jesus Christ, who took our failings and sins upon Himself and suffered their punishment on the cross. And thank You for sending Your Holy Spirit to gather and unite us into the one Bride of Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DECEPTIVE PEACE

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:28.

(If time is short, read 5:1–11.)

In these chapters, St. Paul writes about the Last Day, the day when Christ Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. He uses several word pictures. One addresses the unexpected nature of that day. His statement about the thief in the night comes directly from our Lord Jesus Himself, “But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into” (Matthew 24:43).

For those who are not aware of His coming—for those who refuse to believe—it will be as completely unexpected and devastating as the flood of Noah’s day. The people were buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, and suddenly the deluge burst forth and swept them all away. In our day, the world is lulled to sleep by the delusion of peace and security, and Christ’s coming will take them completely unaware.

Worldly peace is deceptive—the peace between nations or between peoples. It gives the veneer of security, but things can never be secure when people are driven by selfish ambition and unbelief. One moment you think they are on your side, the next they are trampling you underfoot trying to raise themselves one rung on the ladder.

Worldly peace is a delusion, but peace with God is the key to security. That peace is not anything we could accomplish by our determination or efforts. It is a free gift won by the suffering and death of God's own Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Having the peace of faith guarantees that we will be ready when Christ returns to judge the living and the dead—even though it will fall on a day we do not expect.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son to win peace for all of us by the forgiveness of our sins. Empower and inspire us to be busy sharing the Gospel of His salvation with everyone we meet, that many may join us in awaiting His return in faith and joy. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

DAY 27

PEACE FROM UNEXPECTED SOURCES

Read 1 Timothy 2.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–4.)

St. Paul writes to Timothy, the young partner and pastor whom he has left in Ephesus to organize the church there, preparing pastors to lead God's people.

In the second chapter, he provides important instructions for the congregational prayers. They must have sounded strange, though. Especially when Paul urged Timothy to pray “for kings and all who are in high positions” (v. 2). The Roman emperors for whom Paul wanted them to pray were ungodly men—many of them wicked and immoral. Some of these men would even persecute the Church in a few years, including one who would execute Paul himself.

But Paul reminds them that with God's blessing,

the good governing of the emperor and others in high positions would benefit the Church. When the emperor and high authorities ruled well, the Christians could lead peaceful and quiet lives, serving God and one another. The Church could be free to preach the Gospel and call the ungodly to faith and eternal life. Such a life is godly and dignified in every way.

So we, too, are called to pray for our governmental leaders—no matter who they are or what they might stand for. Where they are in error and are misleading our country, we ask God to show them the error of their ways and call them to the righteousness of faith. We pray for God to give them wisdom and discretion to exercise the authority God has entrusted to them for the benefit of the Church and its global mission to make disciples of all nations.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, You created all of mankind, and You hold in Your hands the leaders of every nation under heaven. Give wisdom and strength to our leaders, and all the leaders in the world, that they may rule in peace and integrity, and Your Word have free course to be preached for the salvation of the world. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

FLEE AND PURSUE

Read 2 Timothy 2.

(If time is short, read vv. 14–26.)

In St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, he knows the end of his life is drawing near. He gives fatherly advice to his young partner in the ministry.

Paul's word of advice is for Timothy to flee youthful passions. Think a moment about the strength of that word *flee*. What are some things we might flee from? A raging fire, a devastating F5 tornado, or a category 5 hurricane. This is a desperate flight to escape deadly peril. Paul urges Timothy to think of youthful passions in that same way. While the vast majority of teenagers and young adults are pursuing ways to indulge their passions, we are to run in the opposite direction for our lives.

How do you flee these destructive passions? By pursuing their opposites. Think a moment what the word *pursue* entails. Consider an athlete pursuing an elusive goal—the championship trophy, perhaps. These championships are not won by luck; they require strenuous exercise, self-denial, and persistence.

So while we are fleeing youthful passions, we pursue the virtues God sets before us in Christ Jesus. In fact, by pursuing these godly virtues we are fleeing ungodly passions. We pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. And we don't seek those virtues alone; we search "along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). That again is the beauty of Christian congregations where brothers and sisters in Christ encourage one another and together pursue God's precious gifts.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, when I feel the pull of youthful passions, sinful passions, turn my heart to despise and flee them and instead pursue the wonderful life to which You have called us and for which You have prepared us by Your Holy Spirit. Thank You that You paid the price for these sins on the cross. Now fill me with a hunger and thirst for Your righteousness. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 29

PEACEMAKERS SOW A HARVEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Read James 3.

(If time is short, read vv. 13–18.)

In this passage from his letter, St. James does a masterful job of exposing the fact that we are each sinner and saint simultaneously. He asks us to take a hard look at how we relate to other people to see if we are living by the wisdom of heaven or by the sinful desires of our hearts.

He writes, “Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13). James brings meekness to the limelight—that same meekness Jesus showed by not insisting on His way, but bowing His head to His Father’s will and going to the cross to save us.

In opposition to this heavenly wisdom, the sinner is animated by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. Where meekness looks outside of itself to rejoice in God's gifts to others, jealousy looks at others only with bitterness—wanting for itself the gifts God has given others. Selfish ambition seeks to receive recognition, glory, and praise for who we are and what we have done—often at the expense of our neighbor.

Instead, James holds out to us the wonder of heavenly wisdom. “The wisdom from above is first pure” (v. 17). The first thing God's wisdom does is cleanse away our sin that our hearts may be pure—pure of all sin and selfishness. That is the Gospel at work. Once purified by faith, we can truly bear the fruit of the Spirit. Then God's wisdom makes us “peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere” (v. 17). In this way, we peacefully sow a field of righteousness that will soon be ripe for harvest.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for purifying my heart, mind, and soul by the blood of Jesus Christ, Your Son. Now send me out in Your strength, that I may share Your Gospel and the Holy Spirit may plant the seed and make it grow for a bountiful harvest of souls. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DILIGENT TO BE AT PEACE

Read 2 Peter 3.

(If time is short, read vv. 1–14.)

In the third chapter of his second letter, St. Peter writes about Judgment Day, the Day of the Lord. He warns his readers to beware of those who hear the warning of Christ's coming judgment and scoff at it as utter foolishness. It had barely been thirty years since Christ's ascension, and scoffers were already saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?" (v. 4). If He had not come in thirty years, they falsely reasoned He would never come. It was as if God was not powerful enough to overturn the continuity of the created order.

Peter points out some facts they deliberately overlook. First is that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing by His Word alone. They are not eternal, as many of the nations assumed. God is in complete control of the days, seasons, and years.

Second, God demonstrated His mastery over times and seasons when the waters erupted in

violence and covered the earth, wiping out all the living who had despised Noah's warnings.

Since that day, the heavens and the earth are stored up for the final judgment—destruction by fire. Yet the scoffers of our culture laugh at such warnings. They place all their trust in the regular, orderly workings of the universe. They assume the natural processes we see today are the same processes that have been going on in the past forever and will continue into the future forever. When they are reminded of Noah's flood, they laugh too—just as they laugh at the warnings of Christ's return.

But God has taught us the truth. And we are waiting for that Last Day when Christ returns. Since we are waiting for these things to take place, St. Peter exhorts us to “be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace” (v. 14). That is, when Christ returns, may He find us pure and holy through His Word, which cleanses us in the waters of Baptism, and may we be at peace with God through the forgiveness Jesus won on the cross.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, when many people hear about Judgment Day and the warning of Jesus' second coming, they laugh in scorn. Help me never to be swept up to join their scoffing and

mockery. Instead, make me diligent to grab hold of Him who grabbed hold of me, and share with others the warning so they may escape the wrath to come and live in Your peace now and forevermore. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.