

The Promise of Peace

A Daily Reflection Journal
for
Christian Peace Builders

compiled for
Peace Bridges
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Winter 2007

*Let us look steadfastly to the Father
and Creator of the universe, and cleave
to His mighty and surpassingly great
gifts and benefactions of peace.*

*Let us contemplate Him with our understanding,
and look with the eyes of our soul to His long-suffering will.*

– The 1st Letter of Clement to the Corinthians

Preface

One of the most difficult balances for Christian peacebuilders is matching working for peace with being peaceful in our own lives. We often live in stressful and sometimes dangerous situations. When the pressure is up, peace in our hearts is sometimes lost in the overwhelming flood of circumstances.

But Christ's peace is not meant to be merely theoretical. It is meant to make a difference in how we treat ourselves, our families, our neighbors, our enemies, and even our God.

This journal is meant to be a resource for cultivating that kind of peace. Each day, we are offered a reading from a Christian who has made the journey of peace before us. These brothers and sisters lived from the 2nd to the 20th centuries, serving Christ in different times and cultures and circumstances, but with the same gift of peace. These readings are followed by a Scripture verse and two open-ended questions for reflecting on how God can increase peace in our own lives.

Please note that the questions are just suggestions for your thinking. If your own heart leads you to a different reflection, feel free to follow.

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With prayers for peace,

Peace Bridges
February 2008

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Week One: The God of Peace

*In these readings, we remember
that God is the source of peace
and that He gives peace to us as a free gift,
a gift we can find no where else and that
we should long for with all our hearts.*

Monday: Violence Has No Place in God

A reading about the Incarnation,
from *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*

*This reading answers the question,
Why did Jesus come as He did,
in humility and compassion?*

~~~~~

Was it then, as one might conceive,  
for the purpose of exercising tyranny,  
or of inspiring fear and terror?  
By no means, but under the influence  
of clemency and meekness.

As a king sends his son, who is also a king,  
so sent He Him; as God He sent Him;  
as to men He sent Him; as a Saviour He sent Him,  
and as seeking to persuade, not to compel us;

for violence has no place in the character of God.

~~~~~


Violence Has No Place in God, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ How does Jesus' life show that
'violence has no place in the character of God'?

A thief comes
only to steal
and to kill
and to destroy.

I have come
that they may
have life
and have it
in abundance.

I am the
good shepherd.
The good shepherd
lays down his life
for the sheep.

~~ John 10:10-11 HCSB~~

~ Compare the reading with John 10:10-11.
Make a prayer, a poem or drawing
in response to God's mercy and grace.

Tuesday: The Nature & Genius of Christianity

A reading about Peace and Faith,
from *Oration V* in the works of Arminius

The source, methods, goals, and fruits of Christ's work are Peace.

~~~~~

[Peace is] the nature and genius of Christianity,  
whose Author is called the "Prince of peace,"  
its doctrine "the Gospel of peace,"  
and its professors "the Sons of peace."

The very foundation of it is  
an act of pacification concluded between God and men,  
and ratified by the blood of the Prince of peace.

The precepts inculcated in each of its pages,  
are concerning peace and concord;

its fruits are "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;"  
and its end is peace and eternal tranquility.

~~~~~

The Nature & Genius of Christianity, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ Reflect on what one of these phrases mean:
Jesus is called the "Prince of peace," Christian doctrine is
"the Gospel of peace," and Christians are "the Sons of peace"

For the
kingdom of God is ...

righteousness
and
peace
and
joy
in the
Holy Spirit.

~~ Romans 14:17 ESV ~~

~ Reflecting on the Bible, what does it mean
that "[t]he precepts inculcated in each of its
pages, are concerning peace and concord?"

Wednesday: A Paltry Illustration

A reading on how God accepts us,
from chapter 7 of *Types in Hebrews* by Robert Anderson

This reading reminds us of how amazing a gift peace with God really is.

~~~~~

No good man would refuse to meet  
a repentant criminal or magdalen.

But [few] would bring such into his home,  
and give them a place of special nearness  
and honor in his family and household.

And yet this would be but a paltry illustration  
of what the grace of God has done for sinful men.

“While the first tabernacle was yet standing,”  
not even the holiest of the sons of the old covenant,  
not even the divinely appointed priests,  
were allowed to enter His holy presence.

But under the new covenant the worst of men  
may receive not only pardon and peace in Christ,  
but a right of access to God.

~~~~~

A Partry Illustration, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ How does remembering how far God went
to make peace with us help us as we make peace with others?

~ Write a prayer to be 'anchored'
to your hope in God in a difficult situation.

This hope
is like a firm
and steady anchor
for our souls.

In fact,
hope reaches
behind the curtain
and into
the most holy place.

~~ Hebrews 6:19 CEV ~~

Thursday: Out of the Cellar

A reading on how peace is already available,
from *Secret Power* by D.L. Moody

Christian peacebuilders don't have to start from scratch.

~~~~~

[A] great many people are trying to make peace.  
But that has already been done. God has not left it for us to do;  
all that we have to do is to enter into it. ...

If I discover a man in the cellar complaining  
because there is no light there, and because it is cold and damp,  
I say: "My friend, come up out of the cellar.

There is a good warm sun up here, a beautiful spring day,  
and it is warm, it is cheerful and light; come up, and enjoy it."

Would he reply, "O, no, sir; I am trying to see if I can  
make light down here; I am trying to work myself into a warm feeling."  
And there he is working away, and he has been at it for a whole week.

I can imagine my reader's smile; but you may be smiling  
at your own picture; for this is the condition of many whom  
I daily meet who are trying to do this very thing –  
they are trying to work themselves into peace and joyful feelings.

Peace is a condition into which we enter; it is a state;  
and instead of our trying to make peace, let us believe  
what God's Word declares, that peace has already been made  
by the blood of the Cross. Christ has made peace for us,  
and now what He desires is that we believe it and enter into it.

~~~~~

Questions for Reflection:

~ What is the difference between
us building peace and Christ making peace?

If, when we
were at our worst,
we were put on
friendly terms with
God by the sacrificial
death of his Son,

now that
we're at our best,
just think of
how our lives will
expand and deepen
by means of his
resurrection life!

~~ Romans 5:10 ~~
Message Paraphrase

~ Write a prayer for God to 'expand and
deepen' the peace He has already made.

Friday: We Have Our Life Elsewhere

A reading on keeping faith,
from a sermon on Galatians 2:20 by John Calvin

The life of Jesus gives us reason to hope, even in difficult situations.

~~~~~

So then let us mark well,  
that whereas Saint Paul saith we live by the faith of Jesus Christ:  
it is to waken us so as nothing in the world may keep us  
from resting continually upon God's promises.

When we look upon all the things that are about us,  
there is nothing but death.

But what for that?  
God hath given us his word, that being dead in our own nature,  
we have our life elsewhere, namely in our Lord Jesus Christ,  
inasmuch as he was purposely sent to bring us from death to life.

~~~~~


We Have Our Life Elsewhere, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ In what ways do conflicts tempt us to discouragement and despair?

~ How would viewing the conflict
as an opportunity for Christ to live in us
change our perspective?

I have died,
but Christ
lives in me.

And I now
live by faith
in the Son of God,
who loved me
and gave his
life for me.

~~ Galatians 2:20 CEV ~~

First Weekend: Let My Whole Being Desire It

A prayer for Joy,
from chapter 26 of Anselm's *Monologium*

*Our journey in peacebuilding is founded on our prayers for
God's gifts of Peace and Joy to sustain us.*

~~~~~

I will receive what thou dost promise  
by virtue of thy truth,  
that my joy may be full.

Faithful God, I ask.  
I will receive, that my joy may be full.

Meanwhile, let my mind meditate upon it;  
let my tongue speak of it.  
Let my heart love it;  
let my mouth talk of it.  
Let my soul hunger for it;  
let my flesh thirst for it;  
let my whole being desire it,

until I enter into thy joy, O Lord,  
who art the Three and the One God,  
blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

~~~~~

Let My Whole Being Desire It, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ Why is having joy important for a Christian peace builder?

~ Dealing with conflict is often overwhelming. In what ways can God's joy strengthen us?

And
do not be grieved,

for the
joy of the LORD
is your strength."

~~ Nehemiah ~~
8:10 ESV

Week Two: Peace with Ourselves

*In these readings, we remember
that sometimes it is our own hearts
that need peace and that
nobody else can make us peaceful.*

*The true strength of the peacebuilder
is an openness to God to weed out
the lusts of the flesh and cultivate
the fruits of the Spirit in our hearts.*

Monday: A Shoe May Be Smooth

A reading on inner Peace,
from *The Rare Jewel of Christian
Contentment* by Jeremiah Burroughs

*Building peace begins with the humility to
quiet ourselves and see what it is in our own hearts.*

~~~~~

It is not only that we do not seek to help ourselves by outward violence,  
or that we forbear from discontented and murmuring expressions  
with perverse words and bearing against God and others.  
But it is the inward submission of the heart. ...

Many may sit silently, refraining from discontented expressions,  
... yet inwardly they are bursting with discontent.

This shows a complicated disorder and great perversity in their hearts.  
And notwithstanding their outward silence,  
God hears the peevish, fretful language of their souls.

A shoe may be smooth and neat outside,  
while inside it pinches the flesh.

Outwardly there may be great calmness and stillness,  
yet within amazing confusion, bitterness, disturbance and vexation.

~~~~~

A Shoe May Be Smooth, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ We all have hearts "bursting with discontent" from time to time.
In those moments, what are some ways to slow down and heal?

~ In what ways can silence be a healthy spiritual discipline? How can we match a quiet heart with a quiet mouth?

‘My soul,
be thou silent
unto God...

Hold thy peace,
O my soul.’

~~ Psalm 62:1,5~~
Burroughs' translation

Tuesday: Touched in a Tender Spot

On letting go of failure,
from chapter 13 of Hannah Whitall Smith's
The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life

Conflict often serves as a mirror to our own shortcomings.

~~~~~

There may be something very deceptive  
in our sufferings over our failures.

We may seem to ourselves  
to be wholly occupied with the glory of God,  
and yet in our inmost souls it may be self alone  
that occasions all our trouble.

Our self-love is touched in a tender spot  
by the discovery that we are not  
so saintly as we thought we were;  
and this chagrin is often a greater sin  
than the original fault itself.

The only safe way to treat our failures is  
neither to justify nor condemn ourselves on account of them,  
but to lay them quietly and in simplicity before the Lord,  
looking at them in peace and in the spirit of love.

~~~~~


Touched in a Tender Spot, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ Forgiving ourselves is sometimes the hardest part of receiving grace.
Why is it important "neither to justify nor condemn ourselves"
in our failures? in the midst of conflict?

If we say that
we have not sinned,
we are
fooling ourselves,
and the truth
isn't in our hearts.

But if we confess
our sins to God,
he can always be
trusted to forgive us
and take our sins away.

~~ 1 John 1:8-9 CEV ~~

~ Read 1 John 1:8-9. Write a prayer
acknowledging your weaknesses and your
desire "to lay them quietly" before the Lord.

Wednesday: Somebody Else's Patience

A reading on peace of mind,
from John Cassian's *Of the Spirit of Anger*

Each person must make their own journey to patience and peace.

~~~~~

THE chief part then of our improvement and peace of mind  
must not be made to depend on another's will,  
which cannot possibly be subject to our authority,  
but it lies rather in our own control.

And so the fact that we are not angry ought not to result  
from another's perfection, but from our own virtue,  
which is acquired, not by somebody else's patience,  
but by our own long-suffering.

~~~~~

Somebody Else's Patience, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ Peacebuilders cannot make decisions for others.
What is your role in facilitating peace?

I pray
that the Lord
will guide you
to be as
loving as God
and as
patient as Christ.

~~ 2 Thessalonians ~~
3:5 CEV

~ Write a reflection of Paul's prayer for the church in 2 Thessalonians 3:5.

Thursday: A Poor Pursuit

A reading on how sin robs us of peace,
from William Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*

Conflict, like a fire, is fed by the lusts of the flesh.

~~~~~

For all the wants which disturb human life,  
which make us uneasy to ourselves,  
quarrelsome with others, and unthankful to God;  
which weary us in vain labors and foolish anxieties;  
which carry us from project to project, from place to place,  
in a poor pursuit of we know not what, are the wants which  
neither God, nor nature, nor reason, hath subjected us to, but are  
solely infused into us by pride, envy, ambition, and covetousness.

... For if humility be the peace and rest of the soul, then no one has  
so much happiness from humility, as he that is the most humble.

If excessive envy is a torment of the soul, he most perfectly delivers  
himself from torment, that most perfectly extinguishes every spark of envy.

If there is any peace and joy in doing any action according  
to the will of God, he that brings the most of his actions to this rule,  
does most of all increase the peace and joy of his life.

~~~~~

Questions for Reflection:

~ Read Galatians 5:19-21. Reflect on how one of the works of the flesh fuels conflict.

Now the works of the flesh are obvious:

sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar,

about which I tell you in advance--as I told you before--that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

~~ Galatians ~~
5:19-21HCSB

~ What are some things we unwittingly do to nourish the lusts of the flesh?

Friday: A Little White Flower

A reading a holy, peaceful life,
from Jonathon Edwards' *Memoirs*

*The most basic work of the peacebuilder is
cultivating the fruit of the Spirit.*

~~~~~

“Holiness, ... , appeared to me to be of a  
sweet, pleasant, charming, serene, calm nature;  
which brought an inexpressible purity, brightness,  
peacefulness, and ravishment to the soul.

In other words, that it made the soul like a field  
or garden of God, with all manner of pleasant flowers;  
enjoying a sweet calm, and the gently vivifying beams of the sun.

The soul of a true Christian, ... , appeared like  
such a little white flower as we see in the spring of the year;  
low and humble on the ground, opening its bosom to receive  
the pleasant beams of the sun's glory; rejoicing, as it were,  
in a calm rapture; diffusing around a sweet fragrance;  
standing peacefully and lovingly, in the midst of other flowers  
round about; all in like manner opening their bosoms  
to drink in the light of the sun.

... My heart panted after this — to lie low before God, as in the dust;  
that I might be nothing, and that God might be ALL,  
that I might become as a little child.

~~~~~

A Little White Flower, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ Sometimes, and especially in conflicts, we do not know God's will for the moment. But we do know God desires us to have the fruit of the Spirit. How can this help us know God's will in tough times?

But the
fruit of the Spirit is

love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness,
goodness, faith,
gentleness, self-control.

Against such things
there is no law.

~~ Galatians ~~
5:22-23 HCSB

~ What is a spiritual discipline
you will use to cultivate God's garden,
the fruit of the Spirit?

2nd Weekend: True Peace of the Heart

A reading on inner peace,
from the *Theologia Germanica* (chapter 12)

*Peacebuilders can never forget that our lives do not have to be
defined by the conflicts we find ourselves in the midst of.*

~~~~~

Many say they have no peace nor rest,  
but so many crosses and trials, afflictions and sorrows,  
that they know not how they shall ever get through them.

[... But] true peace and rest lie not in outward things ....

Christ did not [promise] a bodily and outward peace;  
for His beloved disciples, with all His friends and followers,  
have ever suffered, ... , as Christ Himself said:

“In this world ye shall have tribulation.”

But Christ meant that true, inward peace of the heart,  
which beginneth here, and endureth for ever hereafter. ...

Moreover there liveth no man on earth who may always  
have rest and peace without troubles and crosses,  
with whom things always go according to his will;  
there is always something to be suffered here, turn which way you will.  
And as soon as you are quit of one assault, perhaps two come in its place.

Wherefore yield thyself willingly to them, and seek only  
that true peace of the heart, which none can take away from thee,  
that thou mayest overcome all assaults.

~~~~~


True Peace of Heart, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ What does it mean to "yield thyself willingly" to troubles?

~ Why can't the peace of Christ
be taken away?

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 ESV ~~

Week Three:

Peace with Others

*In these readings, we remember
that conflict is inevitable, but
it is also an opportunity to
share and celebrate God's grace.*

*Therefore, we must work for peace
before, during and after conflicts,
doing what we can to make peace possible
with our words, actions, and prayers.*

Monday: A Breath From Heaven

A reading on peacemaking,
from A.W. Pink's *The Sermon on the Mount*

*Christ assumed there would be conflict on earth and calls
each Christian to the joy of sharing with each other the peace of heaven.*

~~~~~

To be a lover of and worker after peace  
is one of the distinguishing marks of those  
who are followers of the Prince of peace.

That miracle of grace which has made them at peace with God  
causes them to regard their fellows with sincere benevolence,  
desiring to promote their best interests, both here and hereafter.

It is their care, so much as in them lies,  
to live peaceably with all men, ....

They are lovers of concord, promoters of unity, healers of breaches.

They delight to pour oil on troubled waters,  
to reconcile those who are estranged, to right wrongs,  
to strengthen the kindly ties of friendship.

As the sons of peace  
they bring into the fetid atmosphere of this world  
a breath from the pure and placid air of heaven.

~~~~~

A Breath From Heaven, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ Reflect on one of the descriptions of a follower of the Prince of Peace.

God blesses
those people
who make peace.

They will
be called
his children!

~~ Matthew 5:9 CEV ~~

~ Write a prayer of thanks for someone
you know who blesses this earth
with the peace of heaven.

Tuesday: A Little Pressure

A reading on embracing difficulty,
from *Sharing His Suffering* by John Henry Jowett

Building peace is not easy, but it is the path of joy.

~~~~~

We can never drift into joy.

The only people who are strangers to joy  
are the people who shirk every difficulty,  
and never contend with a troublesome task.

It requires a little pressure even to get the juice out of a grape,  
and it does seem as though the fine juices of life  
are only tasted where there is a certain stress and strain,  
a certain pressure, a certain sense of burden and task.

The precious juice of joy  
is never the perquisite of the drifter;  
it visits the lips of resistance and is the fruit of conquest.  
“Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord”;  
that is the commanding issue of prolonged strife and resistance.

~~~~~

A Little Pressure, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ Dealing with conflict requires a willingness to "contend with a troublesome task." How can we balance discernment with the temptation to "shirk every difficulty"?

[Look] to Jesus,
the founder
and
perfecter
of our faith,

who
for the joy
that was set
before him
endured
the cross...

~~ Hebrews 12:2 ESV ~~

~ What joy did Jesus look forward to while he endured the hard work of reconciliation?

Wednesday: God Will Be Present

A reading on being a peacemaker,
from a sermon by John Wesley

Peacebuilding should begin before the conflict.

~~~~~

Be not content not to stir up strife; but do all that in you lies,  
to prevent or quench the very first spark of it.

Indeed it is far easier to prevent the flame  
from breaking out, than to quench it afterwards.

However, be not afraid to attempt even this:  
The God of peace is on your side.

He will give you acceptable words,  
and will send them to the heart of the hearers. ...

“Do not distrust Him that has all power,  
that has the hearts of all men in his hand.  
Do what in thee lies, and God will be present,  
and bring thy good desires to good effect.”

~~~~~


Questions for Reflection:

~ Make a list of ways that we can build peace
even before a large conflict happens.

~ How can working for peace before
conflict also help us when conflict occurs?

So if you are offering
your gift at the altar
and there remember
that your brother has
something against you,

leave your gift there
before the altar and go.

First be reconciled
to your brother,
and then come
and offer your gift.

~~ Matthew 5:23-24 ESV ~~

Thursday: Give Me Your Hand, My Brother

An exhortation to peace with each other,
from *Christ Our Peace*, a sermon by Charles Spurgeon

Peace with each other IS faithfulness to Christ.

~~~~~

It is utterly inconsistent with grace in the heart  
to harbor malice against your fellow.  
Through our infirmity we may be, and sometimes are,  
quick of temper, and sharp,  
and this we ought to regret and mourn over;  
but to carry in our soul any enmity against any man  
is contrary to the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Give me your hand, my brother,  
for the sake of him who died for us.  
We cannot quarrel at the cross-foot.  
We cannot look up and see the streaming wounds,  
and then break the King's peace,  
I mean the peace that the bleeding, thorn-crowned King has made.

... and I do pray you, ...,  
if you would be followers of Christ,  
be ye as little children, and lay aside everything  
like enmity, hatred, variance, strife, and jealousies.  
You will have to live in heaven together, ... oh!  
live like heavenly ones together here.

~~~~~

Give Me Your Hand, My Brother, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ Why does Spurgeon tell us we cannot be faithful Christians and have enmity with each other?

But now
in Christ Jesus
you who once were
far off have been
brought near
by the blood of Christ.

For he himself
is our peace,
who has made us
both one
and has broken down
in his flesh
the dividing wall
of hostility.

~~ Ephesians 2:13-14 ESV ~~

~ Ephesians 2 tells us it is Christ's work that brings us together. How can that influence our approaches to building peace?

Friday: Throw Your Mantle Over Shame

A reading on not spreading conflict,
from a sermon of Martin Luther

*Conflict is made worse when we are not
careful to respect those involved.*

~~~~~

Learn from this, then,  
that our neighbor is to be sought as a lost sheep,  
that his shame is to be covered with our honor,  
that our piety is to be a cover for his sins.

But nowadays, when men come together they backbite one another;  
and thus they would show how zealous they are against sin.

Therefore, ..., do not backbite your neighbors.

Make not one face at one person and another at some one else.

Do not cut off one man's foot and another man's hand;  
make no such traffic of living flesh. ...

Should you meet with anything like this in some one's house,  
then throw your mantle over shame and wounds, and close the door. ...

Christ, too, acts thus.

He keeps silent and covers our sins. ...

Had this Gospel been nothing more than a good counsel,  
it would not have been so comforting;

but now that it has been commanded

I can recognize the mind of God in Christ, since he will have it so,  
and enjoins that we are to cover the sins of others.

Yea, what is still more, Christ himself does this,  
and to this end was he sent; ...

We are scarcely a spark amid the divine fire and light.

He is the fire of which heaven and earth are full.

~~~~~

Throw Your Mantle Over Shame, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ Why does Luther call gossip the "traffic of living flesh"?

~ Gossip "adds fuel to the fire."
In what ways did Jesus use words
to respect, protect and heal instead?

Where there is
no fuel
a fire goes out;

where there is
no gossip
arguments come
to an end.

~~ Proverbs
26:20 CEV ~~

3rd Weekend: Like a Walled Town

A reading on how peace protects us,
from John Bunyan's *Exhortation to Unity and Peace*

*Peace among Christians helps us fight
against the Enemy – instead of each other.*

~~~~~

Peace is to churches as walls to a city;  
nay, unity hath defended cities that had no walls.

... Christians are strong when united.  
Then they are more able to resist temptation,  
and to succor such as are tempted.

When unity and peace are among the churches  
then are they each like a walled town;  
and when peace is the church's wall,  
salvation will be her bulwarks.

~~~~~

Like a Walled Town, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ Bunyan compares peace to a city's walls.
Write or draw your own metaphor for peace.

~ Write a prayer for your church to be
filled with peace and unity.

But if you keep
attacking each other
like wild animals,

you had better watch
out or you will destroy
yourselves.

~~ Galatians 5:15 CEV ~~

Week Four:

Peace with Our Enemies

*In these readings, we remember
that God's peace is also meant for the 'Other,'
the outsider that we have been injured by or see as an enemy.*

*Beginning from God, we have considered how peace
reaches our own hearts and our common relationships.*

*Loving our enemies is the fruition of this peace
and the calling of the children of God.*

Monday: If the Life of God is Present

A reading about Loving Others,
from *Love Made Visible* by Ray Stedman

*Christian peacebuilding is not based on our success,
but upon God's love.*

~~~~~

It is no good claiming that you know God  
if the love of God is not found in your life.

If you cannot treat people objectively  
and see through the irritating qualities that may offend you  
to be nice to them because they are in need of love;

If your reaction to those who offend you  
is one of opposition, rejection, and instant antagonism;  
Then it is no good saying you belong to him.

That is not God's life, that is not God's love.

John's argument is,  
if the life of God is present in us,  
then the love of God will be there too.

~~~~~

If the Life of God is Present, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ How do Stedman's words apply to conflict in our lives?

Beloved,
let us love
one another,

for love
is from God,
and whoever loves
has been
born of God
and knows God.

Anyone who
does not love
does not know God,
because God is love.

~~ 1 John 4:7-8 ESV ~~

~ Read 1 John 4:7-8. Why is it impossible to know God but not be filled with love?

Tuesday: An Intimate Connection

A reading on forgiveness,
from J.B. Phillipps' *Your God is Too Small*

*Our reconciliation with God overflows us with love,
a love that strengthens us to forgive and be reconciled with others.*

~~~~~

We find in Christ  
an intimate connection between the forgiveness of sins  
and the existence of love in a man's heart.

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us"  
is so familiar in our ears that we hardly grasp the fact  
that Christ joined fellowship with God  
and fellowship with other human beings indissolubly.

"Except ye from your hearts forgive everyone his trespasses,"  
He is reported to have said after a particularly telling parable,  
"neither will my heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses."

Moreover, on one occasion he said of a woman  
who was apparently something of a notoriety that  
"her sins, WHICH ARE MANY, are forgiven: for she loved much."

It seems to me consonant with Christ's teaching  
to hold that love is a prerequisite of forgiveness, ....

~~~~~

An Intimate Connection, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ In your own life, how have forgiveness and love for someone been connected? What about forgiving someone you don't love?

~ Write a prayer asking God to make a safe place for forgiveness in your heart, your home, and your church.

"For if you
forgive people
their wrongdoing,

your
heavenly Father
will forgive
you as well!

~~ Matthew 6:14 CEV ~~

Wednesday: This Is Why Jesus Says Love

A reading on loving enemies,
from "Loving Your Enemies" by Martin Luther King, Jr

Only love can protect us from the destructive power of conflict.

~~~~~

We usually think of what hate does for the individual hated or the individuals hated or the groups hated. But it is even more tragic, it is even more ruinous and injurious to the individual who hates. ... For the person who hates, the beautiful becomes ugly and the ugly becomes beautiful. For the person who hates, the good becomes bad and the bad becomes good. For the person who hates, the true becomes false and the false becomes true.

... [Hatred] destroys the very center of your creative response to life and the universe; so love everybody. Hate at any point is a cancer that gnaws away at the very vital center of your life and your existence. It is like eroding acid that eats away the best and the objective center of your life. So Jesus says love, because hate destroys the hater as well as the hated.

... [But] love has within it a redemptive power ... that eventually transforms individuals. That's why Jesus says, "Love your enemies." Because if you hate your enemies, you have no way to redeem and to transform your enemies. But if you love your enemies, you will discover that at the very root of love is the power of redemption. You just keep loving people and keep loving them, even though they're mistreating you. ... Keep loving them. Don't do anything to embarrass them. Just keep loving them, and they can't stand it too long. Oh, they react in many ways in the beginning. They react with bitterness because they're mad because you love them like that. They react with guilt feelings, and sometimes they'll hate you a little more at that transition period, but just keep loving them. And by the power of your love they will break down under the load.

That's love, you see. It is redemptive, and this is why Jesus says love.

~~~~~

This is Why Jesus says Love, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ Do you see any seeds of bitterness or hatred in you as you prayerfully reflect on the tensions and conflicts in your life?

You have heard
people say,
"Love your
neighbors and
hate your enemies."

But I tell you
to love your enemies
and pray for anyone
who mistreats you.

Then you will be
acting like your
Father in heaven.

~~ Matthew 5:43-45 CEV ~~

~ Besides the life and death of Jesus,
what ways can we see that our Father in
heaven loves His enemies?

Thursday: A Magnificent Goodness

A reading forgiveness and love,
from chapter 19 of Augustine's *Enchiridion*

*God invites us to a new way of living – not just doing good,
but being filled with His goodness, forgiveness, and love.*

~~~~~

But none of these [good works] is greater  
than the forgiveness from the heart  
of a sin committed against us by someone else. ...

It is far greater  
— a sort of magnificent goodness —  
to love your enemy,  
and always to wish him well  
and, as you can, *do* well to him  
who wishes you ill and who does you harm when he can.

Thus one heeds God's command:  
"Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you,  
and pray for them that persecute you."

~~~~~


A Magnificent Goodness, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ What does our inability to love our enemies
to do our witness of God's love?

If you love only those
people who love you,
will God reward
you for that?
Even tax collectors
love their friends.

If you greet only your
friends, what's so great
about that? Don't even
unbelievers do that?

But you must always act
like your Father in heaven.

~~ Matthew 5:46-48 CEV ~~

~ How can we be honest
about our emotions, about injustice,
and about needs for healing, but still
nourish forgiveness and love in our hearts?

Friday: In Behalf of This Grace

A reading to encourage us in peace,
from *Twelve Topics on the Faith*
attributed to Gregory Thaumaturgus

*Peacebuilding, then, is ultimately an act of worship
in response to God's grace.*

~~~~~

In behalf of this grace let us glorify the Father,  
who has given His only begotten Son  
for the life of the world.

Let us glorify the Holy Spirit that worketh in us,  
and quickeneth us, and furnisheth the gifts  
meet for the fellowship of God;

and let us not intermeddle with the word of the Gospel  
by lifeless disputations, scattering about endless  
questionings ..., and making a hard thing  
of the gentle and simple word of faith;

but rather let us work the work of faith,  
let us love peace, let us exhibit concord,  
let us preserve unity, let us cultivate love,  
with which God is well pleased.

~~~~~

In Behalf of This Grace, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our peacebuilding?

~ What small work of peace can you do today to show gratefulness to God?

May the God of hope
fill you with all
joy and peace
in believing,

so that by the power
of the Holy Spirit
you may abound
in hope.

~~ Romans 15:13 ESV~~

4th Weekend: The Peace We Should Keep

A reading on inner peace,
from a sermon on 1 Timothy 2:2-4
by John Chrysostom

*Our strength in building peace and loving enemies comes from God –
a power within us that cannot be defeated.*

~~~~~

For what advantage is it,  
that the world enjoys  
profound peace,  
if thou art at war  
with thyself?

This then  
is the peace  
we should keep.

If we have it,  
nothing from without  
will be able to harm us.

~~~~~

The Peace We Should Keep, continued

Questions for Reflection:

~ Why can we remain peaceful in a world full of conflict?

Little children,
you are from God
and have
overcome them,

for he who is in you
is greater than
he who is in the world.

~~ 1 John 4:4 ESV ~~

~ Give thanks to God for a situation
where He has proved Himself greater
than the troubles of the world.

Guided Scripture Meditation: The Peace of Christ

This scripture meditation is based on Colossians 3.

~~~~~

## I.

May the peace of Christ rule in my heart this day.  
May I be clothed with compassion and kindness.  
May I be free from malice, slander, and abusive words.

## II.

May the Word of Christ dwell richly in me.  
May I be clothed with humility, gentleness, and patience.  
May I be free from complaining and lying.

## III.

May the forgiveness of Christ overflow me this day.  
May I, over all these things, put on love.  
And whatever I do in word or deed, may I do all in the name of Jesus,  
giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

~~~~~

Guided Meditation: The Peace of Christ

Begin by praying these verses for yourself. You are opening your heart to God. When distracting thoughts come, just return to the scripture without judging yourself. You simply return to the promise of Christ's peace.

You can take as long as you want to sit with these words, but this is not a time to analyze them. You are praying, just indicating your willingness for God to bring peace into your life.

When you are ready, return to the beginning of the prayer and extend it to others. Think of someone who is dear to you, someone that you love. Meditate again, placing your loved one in the peace of Christ.

Return a third time to the beginning and think of someone who you don't know well at all, an acquaintance or someone you see but have never taken the time to know. Hold them also before your mind as you pray.

The fourth meditation on the peace of Christ is the hard part. Pray for someone who irritates you, someone who is hostile toward you, someone who makes you sad or angry, someone who has hurt you, or someone you cannot forgive. Pray for your enemies, as Christ commanded us.

You could keep praying like this indefinitely for family, friends, acquaintances, enemies, government, etc. When you are ready to end, though, return to the beginning and pray for yourself one last time.

This is an excellent way begin a day, prepare for (or deal with) a difficult situation, or close an evening. If you meditate like this consistently, you will find that you naturally have a calmer disposition, more open to the love of God and the love of others.

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