

Peace that Exceeds Understanding (Monday)

⁴ Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! ⁵ Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. ⁶ Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. ⁷ Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

⁸ From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise.

⁹ Practice these things: whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us. The God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:4-9 (Common English Bible)

When my daughter was 2 years old, she began running. One morning we went to the park, and I sat on a bench while she was practicing her new skill of running. At one point she turned around and found herself further from me than she expected. It worried her and she came running back to the bench with concern in her eyes. Once she was close again, she calmed down and returned to the joy of playing.

These words from Philippians remind me of my young daughter who was discovering the beginnings of independence. When I look back and realize that I have moved further from God than I intended, I know to run back. It is when the Lord is near that I experience the peace that exceeds all understanding. I feel safe in Christ Jesus. If you are looking for a way back to God, focus on prayer and the attributes of God: justice, purity, loveliness, praise.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for drawing near to us and bringing your peace. Help us to focus on all that is holy and worthy of praise. We love you! Amen.

Peace with Others (Tuesday)

¹⁸ If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people. ¹⁹ Don't try to get revenge for yourselves, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. It is written, *Revenge belongs to me; I will pay it back, says the Lord.* ²⁰ Instead, *If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink.*

Romans 12:18-20a (Common English Bible)

The saying goes that “hurt people, hurt people”, but the author of the book of Romans gives us a different choice. We have all had the experience of being hurt by someone. Recently a friend confided in me about one of their colleagues who was intentionally harming their reputation. Due to the rumors, others were distancing themselves from her. The words stung but the loss of relationships was what really hurt. My friend talked about her temptation to fight back with equal damage but knew that she should seek peace instead. In the end, because she chose the path of peace, the truth was slowly revealed, and the relationships restored.

As Christians we are called to live at peace with others to the best of our ability. When we do, Romans says that it leaves room for God's wrath, but we also know that it leaves room for God's love. This love works in difficult situations between people. God's love also works to soften our own heart, so that we can be patient.

Prayer: God of peace, give us patience and perspective. Increase our ability to live in peace. Make us people of your peace, through service to each other. Amen.

Multiplication of Peace (Wednesday)

To those who are called, loved by God the Father and kept safe by Jesus Christ.

² May you have more and more mercy, peace, and love.

Jude 1:1a-2

The book of Jude begins with naming the audience. The audience is those who are loved by God, that is you and me. To be called is more than being summoned into a belief system. It is to be held in God's love, embraced and kept safe.

In the world today it often seems as if there is not enough peace. We crave peace in our homes We look for missing peace in the community. We desire peace for the world. The blessing that Jude bestows on the early church and on us is one of more peace. Peace is not finite; because peace is of God, peace is infinite. This means as we join in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our homes, communities, and the world we can be a part of this replicating peace.

Tomorrow we will meet in small groups online to discuss how we have witnessed peace and can continue to be beacons of peace. Our small groups will consist of members of the two churches: University UMC in North Carolina and Cristo Obrego in Buenos Aires, Argentina. What a gift to share in conversation and hear how the Holy Spirit is working in both places.

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for calling us and keeping us safe in your arms. Give us the creative vision to see the multiplication of peace and the courage to join in! Amen.

Questions for small group discussions (Thursday)

- How have you experienced God's peace in a difficult situation?
- What does the phrase "peace that exceeds all understanding" mean to you?
- How can we invite a multiplication of peace in our community?

Blessing from Numbers 6:24-26 (Common English Bible):

²⁴ The LORD bless you and protect you.

²⁵ The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

²⁶ The LORD lift up his face to you and grant you peace.