

“Peace at All Times in All Ways”

2 Thessalonians 3:16, Psalm 46:10, Mark 1:35, Proverbs 27:17, Romans 12:5-6, Genesis 2:18-23, Galatians 6:2 & 10, & James 2:15-17

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Prayer for Understanding from the Czech Republic. Holy Spirit, grant us openness and give us understanding of what each one of us needs to receive through Holy Scripture. When we are facing a difficult choice between the easy and the right decision, help us to choose the narrow path. We also pray for all who are about to set on an adventurous journey of faith anywhere in the world. Amen

2 Thessalonians 3:16 “May the God of peace grant you peace at all times in all ways.” Peace at all times, in every situation is the Apostle Paul’s prayer for everyone. We are to nurture inner peace with our self and outer peace with all people. We are created to enjoy the unforced rhythms of grace. Introverts are energized by being alone and extroverts are energized by being with people. Peace flourishes when each person enjoys the unforced rhythm between being alone and being with others that is ideal for them.

Scripture advises us to be alone. **Psalm 46:10 “Be still and know God” Mark 1:35 “Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray.”** Scripture advises us to be in community. **Proverbs 27:17 “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. Romans 12:5 “Each person belongs to all the others.” Romans 12:6 “Live in harmony with one another.”**

Genesis hints at the peace that comes when one lives the unforced rhythm of alone and together. God created space, nature, beauty for a person to be at peace alone. God created each of us to be a helper for one another. **Genesis 2:18-23 “Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.” So the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. God brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man’s ribs and closed up the opening. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man. “At last!” the man exclaimed. “This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called ‘woman,’ because she was taken from ‘man.’”**

Each person is made equal, in the image of God to be a helper for everyone. The Hebrew word for helper is most often used to describe God as being a helper of human beings. Such a helper is always loving, working to save and to rescue. God has created us for community, to help and support each other. God has created us to love, save, and rescue one another.

I have numerous helpers in my life. Leslie helps me live the unforced rhythm of alone and together. Without Leslie, I am quite certain I would be living as a hermit in a remote mountain shack. Leslie encourages me to be with others, and she tells me to be alone to go for a bike ride or a hike. Leslie is my helper who knows me well and helps me be alone and together in the proper rhythm. I am fortunate to have a long list of helpers, parents, children, friends, colleagues who love, save, and rescue me, that give me peace.

Who are your helpers? Who loves, saves, and rescues you? Who do you help?

Since we are all created in the image of God, each person gives us a unique view of God. I think of this truth as a jigsaw puzzle. Each person I know reveals a unique piece of God. The more people I know the more complete the puzzle, the more complete my perception of God.

2 Thessalonians 3:16 “May the God of peace grant you peace at all times in all ways.” For me I need the energizing peace of being alone, so I have the energy to be with others, to be non-anxious, to listen, to be at peace with others. What fills you with peace? Living the unforced rhythms of grace fills one with inner peace enabling them to seek peace with all people.

A part of our spiritual journey is to transform, to be at peace with everyone. When Jesus physically walked this earth, he instructed us to love our neighbors. An expert in religious law asked who is my neighbor? Perhaps each of us is still asking that question today. Who do I need to love? Do I really need to live in peace with everyone? We are struggling with this question as a country in numerous ways. We are to love and live in peace with all people regardless of their politics, culture, color, sexual identity, place of birth, education, religion, care for the planet,

occupation, sexual orientation, amount of stuff they possess, their view on an issue and on and on. We are to love everyone and live in peace with everyone. Jesus knew this religious leader telling a story where the hero, the person they are to emulate, is the person they most despise; a person from a different culture, with different skin color, different religion, different occupation, different way of life; the good Samaritan. This story also featured people who were just like this religious leader, those people made excuses, failed to help, failed to love, failed to be at peace with others.

In the parable of the good Samaritan, a Jewish man is attacked by robbers, who strip him and beat him. A Jewish priest sees him and passes by on the other side. Then a Jewish leader spots the beaten man and walks around him. But then a Samaritan comes across this Jewish man, and he is moved with compassion — even though the bloody man is not a member of his faith or nationality. The Samaritan bandages the man's wounds, brings him to an inn, cares for him, and then pays the innkeeper to continue his care.

When the expert in religious law admitted that the Samaritan was a true neighbor and helper, one who crossed boundaries to love, save and rescue others, Jesus gave him a simple command, "Go and do likewise".

Variety, different views, different likes, different lifestyles are wonderful gifts God gives us. We are created to be in community with everyone, enjoying the diversity. Sadly, many limit their peace by surrounding themselves with like-minded, similar living people. Sadly, some become obsessed with getting others to agree with them instead of appreciating diversity.

Peace often grows when we start our conversations with things we have in common. After a relationship is built it is easier to debate, to agree to disagree, while remaining at peace with each other, a helper for each other, loving, saving, and rescuing each other.

Paul O'Sullivan sensed that this was true, so he went on Facebook and searched for his own name. What popped up was a seemingly endless list of Paul O'Sullivan profiles living all around the world. Paul decided to reach out to three of the strangers who shared his name, and they all responded. Although the other Pauls were skeptical at first, a bond was quickly formed. Beyond their shared names, the four had a common love for music. "We should start a band," said the first Paul. The others agreed, even though they lived in Pennsylvania, Maryland, England, and The Netherlands. In 2016, they began to rehearse and make music together virtually. They became good friends, helpers for each other. They have discovered they have very different world views and remain at peace with each other. If you are fearful of a particular group, then build a relationship with someone in that group and your peace will likely grow.

God tells us to be strong and bold in our help for one another. **Galatians 6:2 "Bear one another's burdens."** **Galatians 6:10 "Work for the good of all."** James puts it as a question. **James 2:15-17 "If someone is naked and lacks daily food, and you say to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?"** Peace comes when we are true helpers, when we do the work of saving and rescuing, boldly bearing one another's burdens, and supplying the needs of others.

In the novel, *City of Peace*, pastor Harley Camden makes a discovery about the power of community after a rock is thrown through the window of a local bakery owned by Muslim immigrants. In his sermon Harley said, "Here is what I challenge us to do. After worship, let us walk as a group to the Riverview Bakery. Let us line up and support this business as a manifestation of the Spirit, as an act that shows the reality of our love." After worship, the majority of the congregation crossed the barriers of religion and culture to help, to build friendships, to expand peace.

George Bernard Shaw said, "This is the true joy of life, the being used up for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. Life is no "brief candle" to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations."

Beechmont Presbyterian Church maintains a peace garden. Pastor Marissa Galvan-Valle said. "This garden is important for a church that has members and friends that came to this country fleeing from civil war, crossing borders to find a place where violence and economic hardship was not a prevalent part of life, and people facing economic challenges. We wanted to make a place where people could sit down and be reminded of God's gift of peace. One of the things we included in our peace garden is peace poles. We asked four families to design the peace poles with words of their choosing. We had a family that painted the phrase "God helps us to be the church you envision." A Mexican family included the words attributed to Benito Juárez, a famous Mexican political leader: 'Respect for the rights of others means peace'. One of our more artistic members included symbols and words that are an invitation and a challenge whenever we are thinking about that all-encompassing peace that can speak to us, even amid anxiety,

fear, conflict and trouble.” Pastor Marissa continues, “I want to share Edna’s words with you, as my desire for your life of seeking peace.

Reflect: Don’t fall into idleness! Ask questions. Learn. What are the lessons that, for example, this pandemic has given us? What does this moment of time say about peace? About justice? About love? About how peace should be available for all? How can we find peace even in moments of great stress?

Change: If after asking questions you notice that your definition of peace is challenged, then change is needed — even if it means that you need to change the way you live, the way you go about relating to others, and the way you talk and act. Open your mind and heart to flexibility and change.

Participate: Don’t give up in walking toward a path of peace. Don’t stay in a bubble, confusing peace with “lack of conflict.” The Apostle Paul certainly did not do that. In all his interactions with the churches, he always sought a way of reconciliation and peace. Listen to other definitions of peace. I know that we are tired, but there is no time to retreat. Don’t shut down! Participate.

Care: Care ... care ... care ... care ... care ... and care some more. Apathy, idleness, and gossip have no business in God’s kingdom.

Respect: Even when someone does not think like you, talk like you, dress like you, live like you or love like you. Respect is all about seeing each other as human beings that are fallible, that are worthy, that are not perfect, that are deserving of humanity and not demonization. Every human being deserves to live in peace — at all times in all ways.

Heal: In this world of COVID-19, we think about physical healing, and that is very important. But having peace is also healing. War is devastating. Oppression hurts the human soul in such a way that it can destroy life. Peace heals! Working for a peace that means wellness for others is important. Working for a peace that gives rights to others is important. Working for peace to eliminate the sin of trying to solve everything with war is healing — in a world that really needs to be healed.

Believe: And this is the last one. Believe that peace is always possible. Have faith in peace. Find hope in peace. Believe that the kingdom of God, that the family of God is a real possibility and choice for this world. Believe, even when it seems bleak, that light and hope are possible. Believe! Believe! Believe! And live with the assurance, with the trust, with the unwavering knowledge that God’s gift of peace that Paul gives as a blessing is our blessing as well.” Words to inspire peace from Beechmont’s peace garden.

We are created to enjoy all-encompassing peace. We are created to be helpers for each other, to love, save and rescue each other. We are created to live in peace with everyone. **2 Thessalonians 3:16 “May the God of peace grant you peace at all times in all ways.”** Amen