

Week 3: Cultivate Peace

I'm curious about how you've done on the first two weeks of this community journey. I'm following the Cultivate blog and look forward to becoming acquainted with many of you at Grace through it.

Love, joy and now peace, three fruit of the Spirit that fit together like a glove. They're a trio which interact with each other, weaving themselves together like the grape vines in my garden do. Maybe you've noticed that practicing gratitude has increased your love for God and for others, and hopefully it will flow over into this week to deepen your experience of peace.

To aid you in cultivating peace in your heart, I introduce you this week to Breath Prayers. This is a simple way of carrying a truth, a promise or longing with you throughout your day. I hope you'll be willing to give this a try. Maybe you'll even adopt your own breath prayers from Biblical texts as you go throughout this week. But, as always, you're free to engage with the things which connect with you.

My bonus article for you this week is [today's gift](#) which is a companion to Week One's [formational reading](#). I hope you are enjoying reading the biblical text in a reflective way. Is this new for you? How is it connecting with you (or not)? This could provide some interesting content for the Cultivate blog, your small group discussions, or a conversation with a friend.

Elizabeth

CULTIVATE
rooted and built up in Him

1. Perfect Peace - Isaiah 26:3

Let the peace of Christ reign in your heart (Col 3:15). The Apostle Paul's imperative implies that we have a choice in whether peace fills our hearts or not. As I begin to write today, I'm aware of some low level anxiety hindering my work. Paul's words ring in my ears and I pause and pray. "Lord, let your peace come and reign within me."

A quick prayer is easy to say but does the peace follow, winning out over the emotions which compete with it? I wonder what your experience is with letting Christ's peace replace anxiety or fear, strife or shame, or any of the other things which rob you of the peace which Christ desires to give. Does peace reign in your heart today?

There is a promise tucked in one of Isaiah's songs which gives us a clue as to how this can work.

You will keep in perfect peace
all who trust in you,
whose thoughts are fixed on you!

I like this rendering of Isaiah 26:3 (New Living Translation), for the wording makes 'perfect peace' seem somewhat tangible. I see in this verse that I can actually do something to contribute to the peace in my heart. I can trust. I can fix my thoughts on the Lord.

I encourage you to meditate upon this text today. Read the verse several times, then close your eyes and try to say it from memory. (You may peak if you need to). Repeat it until you can say it by heart. Then allow yourself some space to simply sit with the truth of the verse. How does it speak into your need or your reality today? Don't rush away from silence, but listen for what God would like to speak to you. Express the desire within you which the text touches—your longing for peace, your willingness to place your trust in God, a commitment to fix your eyes upon Jesus, or whatever stirs within in response to this promise.

Breath prayer

Perhaps you would like to form this promise into a breath prayer to take with you into your day or through your week. (When I teach my course on [classic spiritual practices](#), this is always received as one of the favourite practices.) A breath prayer is a short prayer which fits within a cycle of normal breathing. It can help us to follow Paul's admonition to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). To form a breath prayer, you form a verse from scripture or a biblical truth into a prayer, and carry it with you through your day, saying it silently and often, whenever you think of it.

Now Isaiah 26:3 is a little long to include within a single breath, though it would work as a prayer taking up the span of two breaths. You could shorten it so that it fits into one breath. Something like this would work: "Lord, I trust in you (in breath), my thoughts are fixed on you (out breath)." Form it into a prayer which captures the heart of the text and also speaks to the desire within your own heart. Pray your prayer before you close this time of prayer, saying it quietly to fit within the rhythm of one full breath – one phrase as you breathe in, and one phrase as you breathe out. Then ask the Lord to help you to remember to return to it during this day.

As you go about your day, whisper your breath prayer in the quiet of your soul whenever you become aware of your need for God's perfect peace. As you practise this, you will find that a breath prayer helps you to stay conscious of God's presence with you, while you remain open and receptive to God's gift for you.

2. The Gift of Peace - John 14:27,

16:33

Twice during the conversation in the upper room, Jesus promises to give peace to his disciples. The New Living Translation once again opens up Jesus' words beautifully:

I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. John 14:27

Jesus spoke these words as he headed toward Gethsemane and into the most trouble-filled hours of his life. Did his words help him as he wrestled with his will in the garden, and as he suffered through his arraignment and crucifixion? As for the disciples, they hardly knew what had hit them until after Friday's horror was past. Peace? How does peace fit in this picture?

Open your Bible and read from John 14:27 to the end of the chapter. Then skip over to chapter 16: 31-33 where Jesus affirms that, though the troubles and sorrows in this world will abound, his peace runs deeper still. Take heart, he tells us, for I have overcome the world.

Last week we pondered Habakkuk's tenacious commitment to joy. Today Jesus encourages us toward the same kind of tenacity in taking hold of his gift of peace. My thoughts move to a twentieth century martyr, Betsy ten Boom, the sister who so inspired Corrie during their internment at the concentration camp in Ravensbruck. I marvel over her words which are preserved on a scrap of paper in the Ten Boom Museum in Haarlem, The Netherlands "There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still." These words propelled Corrie ten Boom to survive the camp and to speak tirelessly a message of perseverance in love and forgiveness until she was silenced by a stroke at age 86.

Christ's overcoming peace was available in Jerusalem on that first Easter morning. It flowed even in the pit of a Nazi concentration camp. The gift is still given to Jesus' disciples in whatever unrest, turmoil or anxieties we face. Though trouble abounds, his peace runs deeper still. How will you take heart today?

3. *Shalom*

The Hebrew word *shalom* is rich with meaning. It speaks of deep peace, of being whole and at ease, both externally and internally. Kenneson tells us that shalom is an inherently social word. Though it can refer to inner peace experienced as an individual, it is much more than personal serenity or peace of mind. Shalom encompasses the well-being, wholeness and harmony that should ideally infuse relationships within a biblical community (p.83).

Kenneson also speaks about the essential connection between shalom and righteousness. Shalom is God's gift. It begins with God and is made possible because of Christ's reconciling work. Christ's death has made it possible for us to live righteously before God and at peace with one another (p. 86). Living in righteousness is an essential component to the experience of shalom.

Read Psalm 85:8-13 today and pay attention to the connection between righteousness and peace. Then reflect upon your experience of shalom in community, especially among your family and church community. Where do you experience shalom? Where is it absent? Though you might be inclined to look at a lack of righteousness in another, realize that change always begins with ourselves. With a prayerful spirit, reflect upon how you could contribute to the increased well-being, wholeness and harmony of your community. Shalom!

Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. (Rom 12:17-18)

4. *The Primacy of Peace*

Have you ever noticed how many times peace (often coupled with grace) is mentioned in the New Testament? It's used as a greeting and a blessing, as an admonition and a quality to cultivate. Reflect today on Paul's desire for the churches under his influence. Read these as if he were writing to Grace. Reflect upon how these verses speak into your own life and into your fellowship together. Which one of these qualities -- if you (yourself) put it into action -- could increase the quality of shalom which you experience together? I encourage you to pray about that and to share it with someone, or to blog about it.

2 Corinthians 13:11

[Paul's Final Greetings] Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.

Ephesians 4:1-3

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.