

ADVENT 2016

BEING  
MAKING  
LIVING

*Peace*



*finding*  
**Peace**



# ADVENT 2016

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*If we are peaceful, if we are happy,  
We can blossom like a flower,  
And everyone in our family,  
Our entire society,  
Will benefit from our peace.*

Thich Nhat Hanh

There are over 250 Biblical references to the word *peace*. In the Hebrew Scriptures the word is used meaning the absence of war or aggression. But with the birth of Jesus, *peace* takes on an entirely new meaning. *Peace* refers to a state of being that God gives us.

Advent is when we remember God’s approaching promise, the coming of the *Prince of Peace*. Peace is what we all desire, inner peace, peace of mind, even peace on earth. Our 3 part Advent Small Groups will engage in discussion about what peace is really all about. Each week we will explore ways to access the peace Jesus said he left us, the deep abiding peace of God that Paul wrote, “surpasses all understanding”.

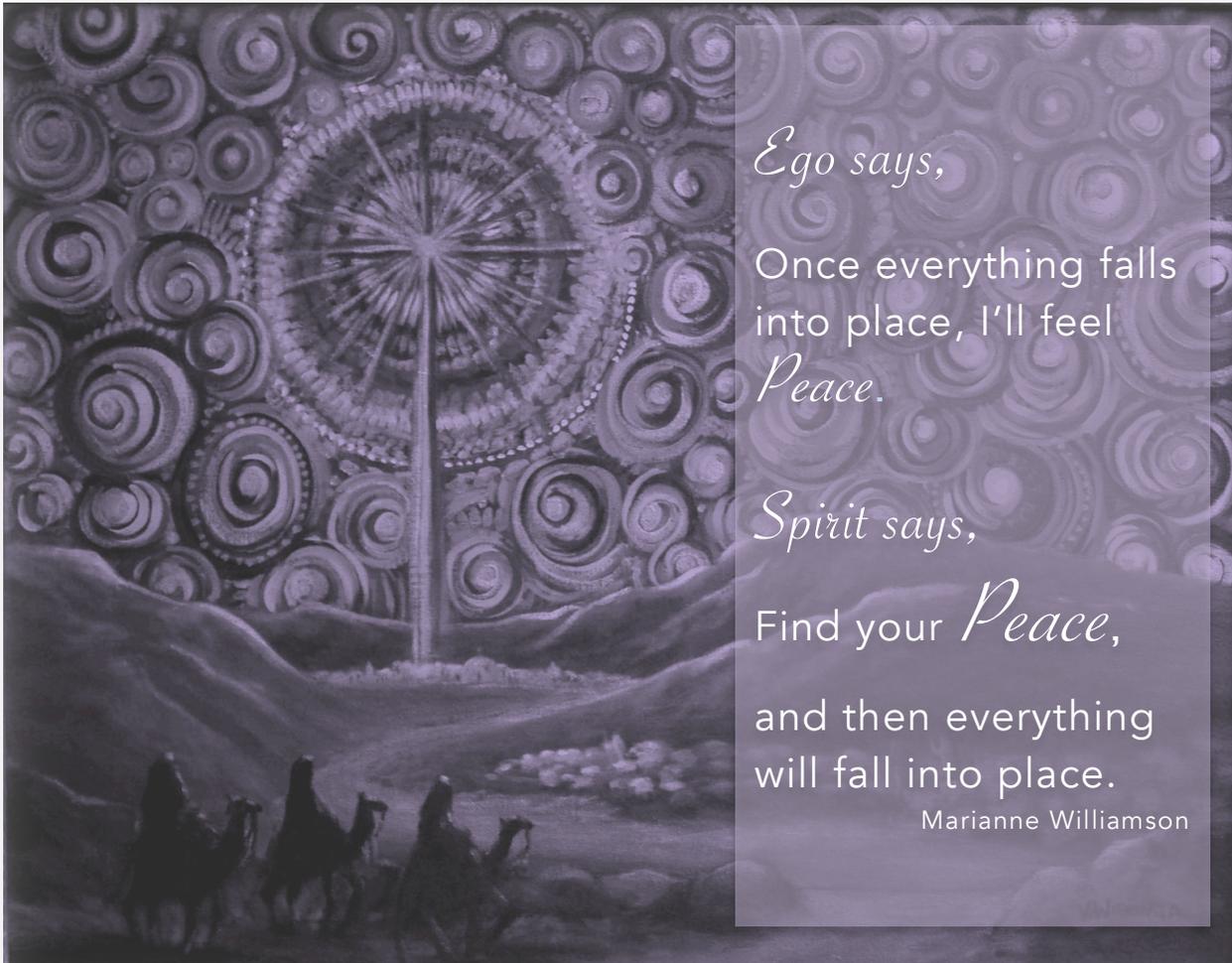
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*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

**Jesus** (John 14:27)



*Ego says,*

Once everything falls  
into place, I'll feel  
*Peace.*

*Spirit says,*

Find your *Peace,*  
and then everything  
will fall into place.

Marianne Williamson

## BEING Peace

## Discovering Peace Within

**WEEK ONE**

Week of November 27

**MAIN POINT**

The only way we are going to be able to experience peace in the world is if we first find true peace in our hearts.

**IDEA**

Most of us search for peace our whole life. Whether we believe it comes through outward circumstances, relationships, or an inner calm, we long for it. The **ADVENT** promise is the coming of Jesus, the *Prince of Peace*.<sup>1</sup> In relationship with Him, followers of Christ can expect to experience a spiritual peace with God, the emotional peace of God, and relational peace on earth. God desires us to live at peace even in this chaotic world.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 9:6

**SCRIPTURE:****John 14:27**

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

**Philippians 4:4-9**

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.*

**Luke 1:78-79**

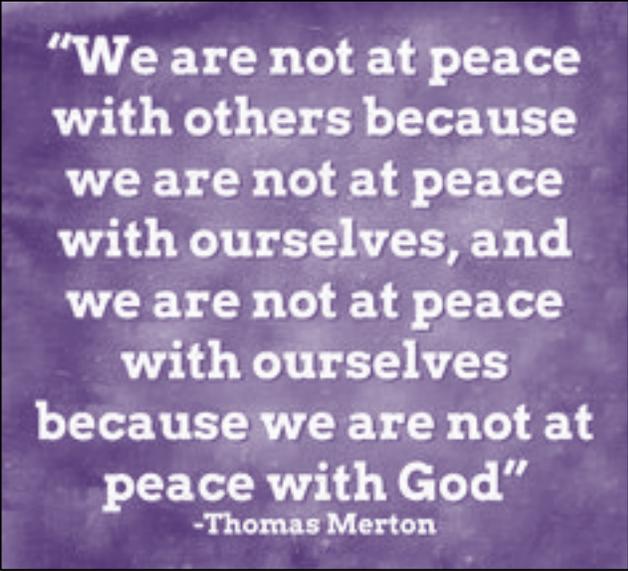
*Because of our God's tender mercy, the dawn will break upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

## SCRIPTURE: EXCHANGE

- Slowly read the Bible passages out loud.
- What one thought or idea from the scripture intrigued, provoked, challenged or surprised you?
- Is it possible to “not worry about anything?”
- Have you ever experienced the light of Jesus in the dark places of your life? Tell the story.

## How do you define peace?

The absence of war, tranquility, safety, free of all anxiety, blissful silence? What did Jesus mean when he said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you, I do not give to you as the world gives.” The Apostle Paul seemed to indicate that the peace of God was something beyond calming the turmoil of our immediate circumstances. The Divine Peace, he writes, “surpasses all



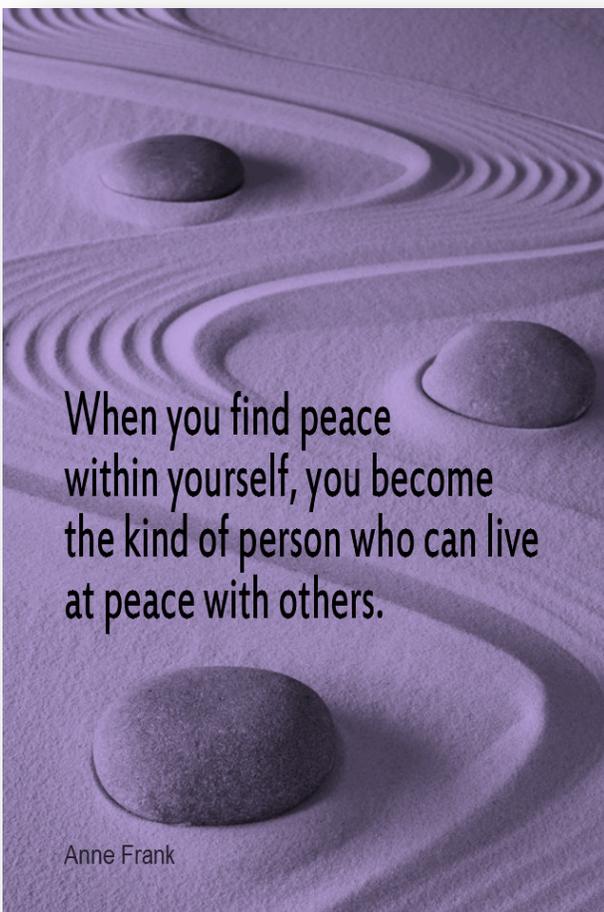
**“We are not at peace  
with others because  
we are not at peace  
with ourselves, and  
we are not at peace  
with ourselves  
because we are not at  
peace with God”  
-Thomas Merton**

understanding”. Certainly this mystical peace would include any of the attributes we might think of but also something deeper that eludes our ability to comprehend it in our minds. The peace of God transcends thought and confounds analysis. The mystical peace that Jesus invites us to receive can only be accessed in an experiential relationship with a living God who is not

ambivalent to our needs. Our prayer cultivates the relationship and gives consent to an absolute trust in God’s presence, boldly releasing any particular outcome we may think is right. This may seem to many like naive denial in the face of crisis and suffering; but actually, from a peaceful heart comes a distinctive clarity that informs effective, and sometimes counter-intuitive action.

Paul gives us a roadmap toward opening ourselves to this abiding peace. Surprisingly enough, it begins with rejoicing! It’s important to know that Paul is writing these words from a Roman prison. When

he writes, “I am in chains for Christ”<sup>2</sup> he is not being metaphorical. Even here, incarcerated in chains, he urges the follower of Christ to rejoice, not worry about anything and find gratitude. Paul can confidently write this because his experience has taught him to completely trust in a God that is always *for* him no matter what circumstances threaten his well being. He knows that personal comfort is only a cheap imposter of real peace. He doesn’t blame anyone for his situation but humbly accepts that somehow, “all things work together for good.”<sup>3</sup>



This kind of ruthless trust, that can rejoice always, never worry, and find gratitude is fed and nurtured in an active, mindful prayer life. Paul is continually present to the Holy Presence that permeates and sustains all living things. The practice of mindful presence leads to a state of actually being peace. Being peace within ourselves is the only path to true peace with others, even those we disagree with. God’s invitation is to co-create peace on earth beginning with nurturing the peace within.

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<sup>2</sup> Philippians 1:13

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:28

“Peace  
begins  
with a  
smile.”

Mother Teresa

## discuss

- When people say, “I need peace,” what kind of peace are they typically referring?
- How is your own sense of peace dependent on other people or circumstances in your life? How much is it up to you? How much is it up to God?
- What do you make of the phrase, “a peace that passes all understanding”? (Phil. 4:7)
- Is a peaceful life possible apart from faith in God?
- If we are followers of Christ, why might we still lack peace?
- How do you know if you have peace with God?
- Is there an area in your life where you feel you lack peace? What can you do to find the peace of Christ?
- When have you been recently reminded of the peace of God in your life?
- How can you be more aware of and sensitive to God’s peace on a daily basis?



## MAKING Peace

*Conflict as a Pathway to Peace***WEEK TWO**

Week of December 4

**MAIN POINT**

Is it possible that conflict and trial can give us the opportunity to practice finding and brokering the peace of God through the brokenness and tensions of life?

**IDEA**

God desires us to live at peace with one another, yet, the reality is, that to be human is to quarrel and fight with one another. We continually find ourselves in situational conflict and relational conflict on a daily basis. Relationships are never static, our circumstances are in continual flux and peace has no finish line. Conflict also continuously evolves. When we carry the peace of God with us, we don't ignore or run from conflict, but rather we can see it as an opportunity to further cultivate the development of healthy relationships. Let's explore how the peace of God helps us to transform conflict.

*The only way to get rid of an enemy is to make him your friend.*

Abraham Lincoln

**SCRIPTURE:****Proverbs 16:7**

*When a person's ways are pleasing to the Lord,  
Even enemies will find reconciliation.*

**Colossians 3:11-15**

*In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.*

*Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.*

**2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:22-25**

*Pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts. Again I say, don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights. A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people. Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will learn the truth.*

## SCRIPTURE: EXCHANGE

- Slowly read the Bible passages out loud.
- What one thought or idea from the scripture intrigued, provoked, challenged or surprised you?
- How difficult is it for you to forgive those who offend you?"
- Have you ever been forgiven by someone? How did it feel?

**You might think** that the absence of conflict is an indicator of the indwelling presence of Divine peace. A heart at war cannot also be a heart at peace. Yet, conflict is always inherent in any relationship. Even though our symbiotic connections and mutuality is a core characteristic of relationship, sometimes that bond is identified exclusively by who or what we oppose. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. Even the closest and most enduring relationships clash in disagreement. Is it possible that we can engage conflict not with a heart of warring competition and polarized opposition but rather in humility, firmly planted in gentleness and find that conflict can actually deepen our sense of peace and heighten our confidence in genuine relationships?

Avoidance of conflict always produces repression, denial, and false relationships. Unresolved conflict will undercut our sense of peace and provoke anxiety. Fear then triggers our natural response toward urgent defensiveness and the need to be justified in our position. Insecurity, panic, anger or despair drive aggressive attacks or a speedy retreat. This primal “fight or flight” instinct undermines our



capacity for empathy and negotiation. These strong impulses have the power to paralyze character and destroy relationship. However, if we can learn to engage conflict with love, mercy and kindness

perhaps we will find that our disagreements become the very catalyst for positive change, enhanced connection and progressive renewal.

Scripture teaches us that we are to “make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”<sup>4</sup> This may seem impossible to actually live into because we want to *correct* the other’s faults not make room for them. And, many feel that forgiveness will only enable the offender to continue.

Even so, what if we approached conflict secure in the peace and presence of God, knowing that, while uncomfortable at first, we are safe to engage dissent with true compassion for the other? The result of a successful encounter will always produce a deeper bond from the experience! Learning to access the peace of God can free us from the tyranny of default reactions when confronted with conflict.

If we are to pursue authentic peace, we must risk transforming conflict following in the Way of Jesus who taught us to apologize quickly, refuse revenge, and humbly serve and love even our enemies. To follow in the way of Jesus is to always courageously work toward reconciliation in the self-assurance that our identity is secure the grace that allows risking mistakes and the Divine peace that accompanies humility.



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<sup>4</sup> Colossians 3:13



PixelProtest

## discuss

- Who is a person in your life you have recently come into conflict with? Have you been able to resolve the conflict? Explain.
- How do our outward relationships reflect our inner attitudes and our heart?
- When you were a child, how did your parents handle conflict in the home?
- How might our childhood home life inform how we respond to conflict as adults?
- How could your trust in God help you pursue peace with others?
- Name a time when you persevered through a conflict that transformed into peace.
- What did you learn from that experience?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- Are there any conflicts in your life right now?
- What might you have to give up to bring reconciliation and peace in conflict situations?
- What keeps you from engaging in this difficult situation?



## LIVING Peace

Bring about the Peaceable Kingdom

**WEEK THREE**

Week of December 11

**MAIN POINT**

To follow Jesus is to love others and actively pursue peace in every corner of life - no matter what has happened. When we consider God's desire is always for reconciliation and peacemaking, we will begin to find that the only starting point for world peace is located squarely in our own life.

**IDEA**

Mother Teresa said that world peace begins with a smile. When we access the peace of God every day we begin to bring peace to all the chaos that surrounds our world. This peace that passes all understanding allows us to work hard for justice, absorb life as it is, yet still find a calm and centered place, knowing that in the end, love always wins, resurrection happens and God alone suffices.

**SCRIPTURE:****Matthew 5:9**

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

**1 Peter 3:8-13**

*Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.*

*For*

*“Whoever desires to love life*

*and see good days,*

*let him keep his tongue from evil*

*and his lips from speaking deceit;*

*let him turn away from evil and do good;*

*let him seek peace and pursue it.*

*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,*

*and his ears are open to their prayer.*

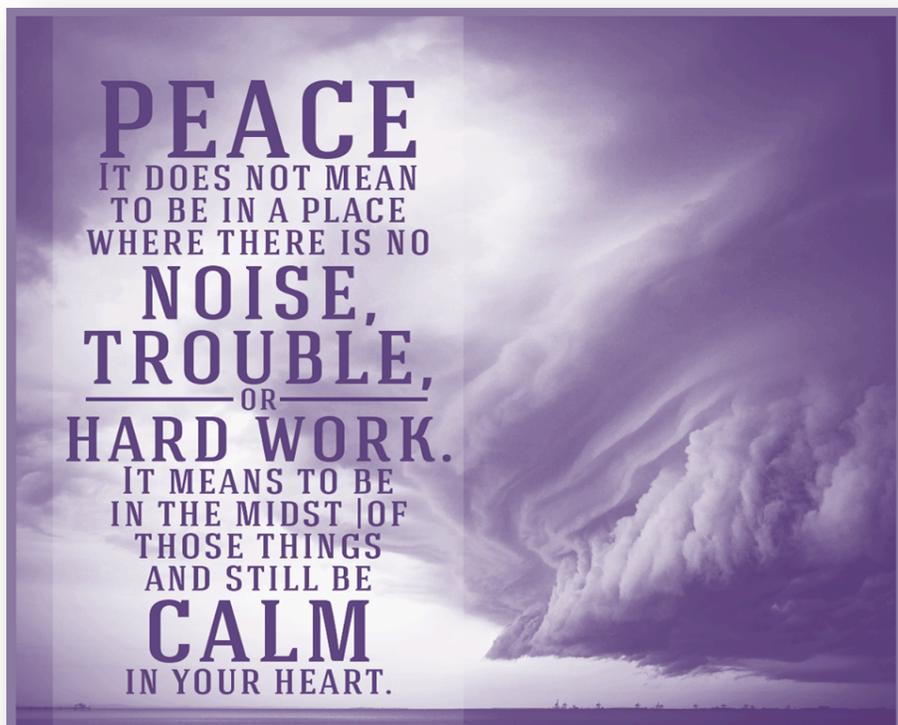
*But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

*Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?*

## SCRIPTURE: EXCHANGE

- Slowly read the Bible passages out loud.
- What one thought or idea from the scripture intrigued, provoked, challenged or surprised you?
- How is unity of mind different from uniformity?
- Is it difficult for you to NOT gossip?

**The peace of God** is a quiet contentment that sustains an underlying and profound joy. This peace is perpetually blossoming from deep within. Also, peace is the assurance of the *Divine Presence* that fills us with serenity and replenishes hope even in the chaos of the raging storm.



Practicing the presence of God liberates us from the prison of worry and relieves the tension of chronic anxiety. However, staying connected and centered in heavenly peace requires daily practice. Being present to the Divine Presence

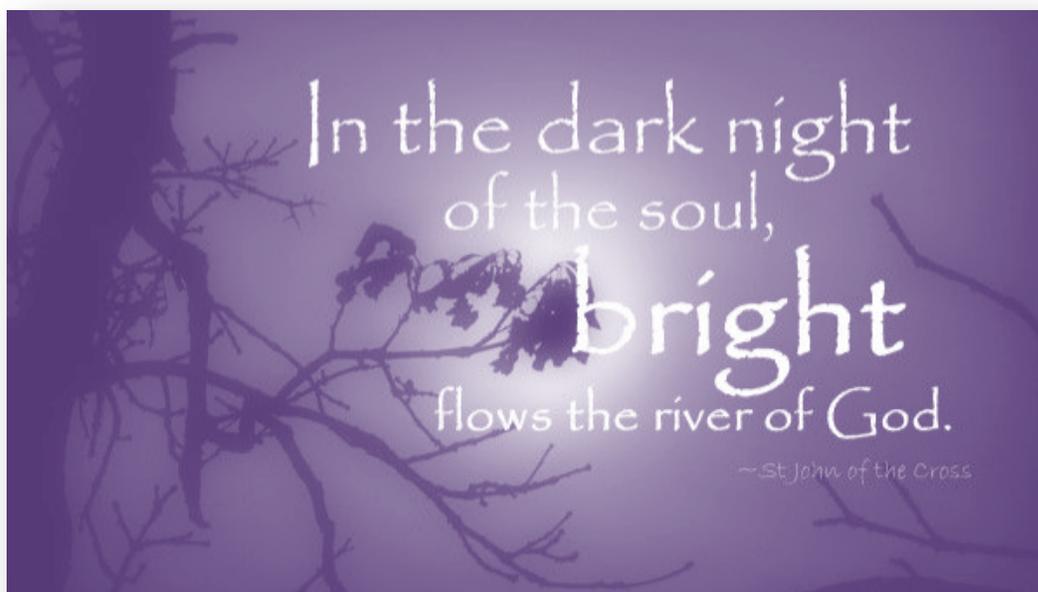
is like baking bread, it must be made fresh every day. We must actively seek out the peace that God offers us. To pursue something is a deliberate and specific action.

Every moment is a personal choice to trust that the peace of God is available to free us from the tyranny of fear. Our outward response to internal anger, resentment and offense is always and only our own individual responsibility. When the opinion of what others think about us hijacks our emotional well-being, our spiritual center is compromised. Likewise, our emotional balance is also threatened by the obsessive fixation to impose our opinion or will on others.

At any time, we can reorient our troubled soul by consciously choosing the peace of God with mindfulness and practice. Accepting this open invitation however comes with a cost. You must recognize and release the seduction of external approval and learn a humility that lightly holds your opinions, solutions and ideas. You don't always have to win! Spiritual peace resides in individual acceptance and is not dependent on another's agreement for validation.

Naturally we will all experience the absence of God's peace, but with practice we learn to read the disturbance as an indicator, warning us that we have chosen to trust fear over faith. But God never

withdraws the invitation to choose peace. Living out of the centered and balanced peace of God can become the normative state of the soul for anyone who practices picking it up.

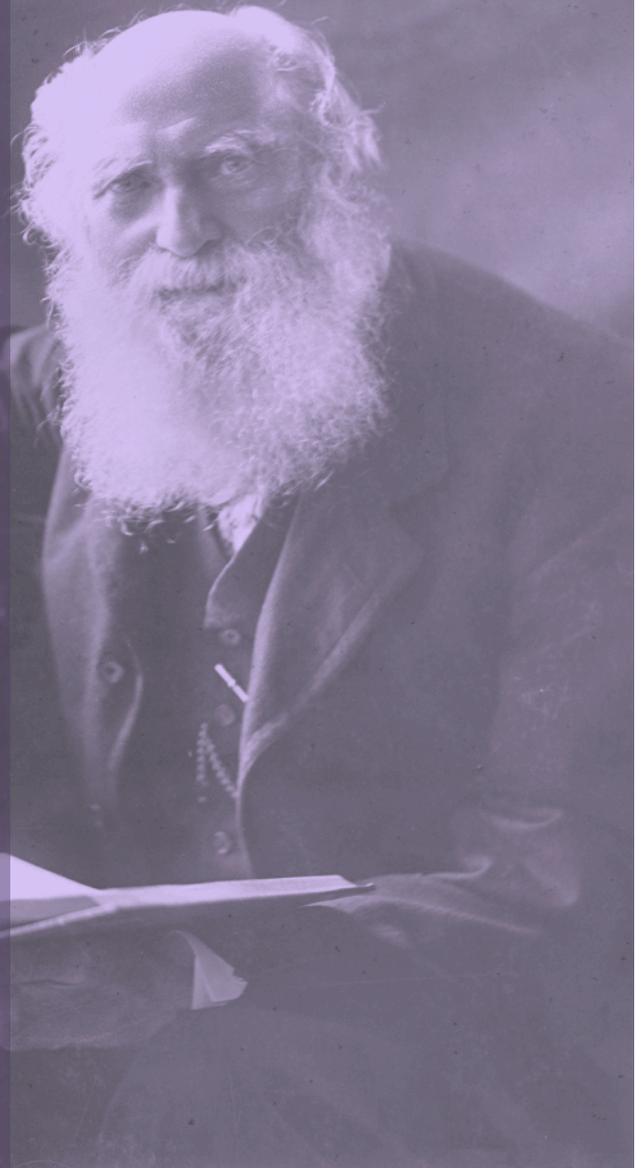


The idea and hope of real world peace begins with a personal orientation toward accessing individual inner peace and allowing that fullness, confidence and joy radiate out to the world regardless if it's received, understood or accepted.

When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world. But I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my country. When I found I couldn't change my country, I began to focus on my town. However, I discovered that I couldn't change the town, and so as I grew older, I tried to change my family.

Now, as an old man, I realize the only thing I can change is myself, but I've come to recognize that if long ago I had started with myself, then I could have made an impact on my family. And, my family and I could have made an impact on our town. And that, in turn, could have changed the country and we could all indeed have changed the world.

*Rabbi Israel Salanter*



## discuss

- What do you make of the Rabbi's story? Is it true?
- How do you seek out peace? How do you pursue peace?
- In what ways was Jesus a peacemaker?
- In what ways did He stir things up?
- Can you be a peacemaker and be in conflict?
- Being a peacemaker does not mean that we do not confront injustice. What might it mean to be a peacemaker in your own life?
- When might pursuing peacemaking cause trouble in your world? Why?
- Do you think living in the peace of God can become the normative state of our soul?
- What do you think most people mean by the phrase "world peace"?
- Do you believe world peace is achievable? Why or why not?
- Are there some relationships where making peace is a genuine struggle for you? Why?



Let nothing disturb you,  
Let nothing frighten you,  
Though all things pass,

*God* does not change.

**Patience** wins all things.

But he lacks nothing who  
possesses *God*;

For *God* alone suffices.

*May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way<sup>1</sup>*

2 Thessalonians 3:16



