

blessed are the
peacemakers



Chapter 1: Finding Peace



Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

St. Francis of Assisi



BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

A letter from Mark

Peace. It is a term that conjures so many opposing ideas. From a quiet morning, to the result of a bloody victory, to visions of hippies at Woodstock, or a frivolous farewell—peace can mean so many different things.

This side of Christmas, we are reminded that among the many names Jesus received upon his birth, one was “Prince of Peace.” Jesus’ advent and presence in this world created a reign marked by peace! When peace takes place, Christ’s Kingdom is at work and people are restored.

Yet, we live in such a conflicted time. We see division and strife all around us—breaking up families and friendships, fostering disdain for those who are deemed “other,” fueling the hatred that incites the many culture wars, and of course displayed in the tragically common violence, oppression, and war scattered around our world.

We need the Prince of Peace.

Jesus has a solution to this conflict, hatred, and fracturing. For better or worse, Christ’s solution is **us**. As followers of Jesus, he commissioned us to extend his kingdom of peace in this world. Jesus gave us this blessing and promise:

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

For us to take up our role as children of God, we must learn what it means to make peace in this world.

The Vine has created an extended series called “Blessed are the Peacemakers.” We are breaking up this series into three “chapters,” each with its unique theme. The chapters are: (1) Finding Peace, (2) The Language of Peacemaking, and (3) Peace in Our World. This journal is meant to be a companion to the sermons and VineGroup conversations—pointing us to Scripture, to prayer, and to meaningful practices.

I hope and pray that this series will fill you with the hope that we are not just bystanders to this conflicted world. We are here to be an active presence, like yeast in dough or a candle in darkness, with the calling to foster peace in the name of Jesus. In doing so, not only will we display the reign of the Prince of Peace, but we will discover what it means to be a child of God.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Charbonneau". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Mark Charbonneau
Pastor at The Vine



WEEK 1

Finding peace with God

Before we claim our role as being a peacemaker in this world, we must know the power and deliverance of finding peace with God. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, longs for peace to rule in our hearts so that we would embody the love and liberation that is a by-product of knowing Christ.

This week, we will explore how God provides peace for each of us.

Day 1: Chosen

READ

Notes:

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit - fruit that will last...”

John 15:13-16

“I have always enjoyed the part of the prayer that suggests to us that we are taken by God, that we are chosen. ‘You did not choose me, I chose you,’ we are told Jesus said to His friends once, and I claim it for myself as often as I feel I can get away with it. I remind myself of the hope of it when the darkness comes, and celebrate the astonishment of it when the Light is all around me.”

—Robert Benson, *Living Prayer*

REFLECT

How do you feel about the conditional nature of displaying our friendship with Jesus? How could these verses be misapplied? What do you think Jesus was trying to convey to us?

Compare the difference between being called Jesus' servant and being his friend. What are the differences?

Jesus declares that he initiated the relationship. Yes, they were chosen, but they were chosen to bear fruit. What fruit have we been chosen to bear?

RESPOND

The Christian life is in perpetual response to God. God's grace and love always goes before us. We have found peace with God because God has made a way. Consider for a while all the ways that God has provided for you to know and respond to God's love. It could be people, experiences, truths, or gifts that open our hearts to the chosenness of being God's beloved. As you consider the many gifts from God, what comes to mind:

Look over the list of graces that God has given you. Slowly and mindfully reflect on them, one by one. As you reflect on them, give thanks to God for choosing to grant you peace and love.

Day 2: Faith and peace

READ

Notes:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God....

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:1-2, 6-8

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

John 3:16-17

"I do not at all understand the mystery of grace — only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us. It can be received gladly or grudgingly, in big gulps or in tiny tastes, like a deer at the salt."

—Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies*

REFLECT

Consider the order of the different promises in Romans 5:1-2. What do you see happening in the intersection of these concepts?

How does Romans 5:6-8 display the character of Jesus as a peacemaker?

Perhaps John 3:16 is the most popular verse from the Bible. How does it read differently to continue with verse 17?

RESPOND

Peace is a natural byproduct of grace, but faith is crucial. For Paul, justification (or being brought into peace with God) was achieved not by our perfection, striving, or determination... but through believing in the work of Jesus Christ. If peace is a gift from a loving God, faith is our ability to embrace it. If this is true – what makes it difficult for you to have faith in the power of God's grace?

Today, we will respond in stillness and rest. The way of this world is performance and reward. The way of the gospel is belovedness and faithful acceptance. Today, simply rest in the truth that you are loved not for anything you have brought to the table. Instead, you are loved because Christ has said so.

Day 3: The advocate of peace

READ

Notes:

Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

"All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 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.

John 14:23-27

"Just as a weaned child on its mother's breast seeks no physical nourishment but enjoys the riches of unspoken Love given and received (Ps 131), so the soul in quiet adoration lays its head against the heart of Love and absorbs all that Love yearns to bestow. This Love draws out what is truest and best in all it touches, shapes all things towards the wholeness proper to them, is quietly victorious amid the strident self-importance of the world."

—John S. Mogabgab

REFLECT

For Jesus, there is a connection between love and obedience. How would you describe this relationship?

Write out the different purposes of the Holy Spirit according to Jesus. How do they hold different meanings for you?

Yesterday, we reflected on how Jesus was a peacemaker. Through these verses, how do we see the Spirit making peace within us?

RESPOND

One of the purposes of Jesus' life was to prepare the way for the Holy Spirit. In John 14, Jesus calls the Spirit an Advocate. Synonyms of "advocate" are a supporter, a proponent, a protector, or a backer. The Spirit of Jesus is alive in you, and one of the purposes of this Spirit is to ensure you know that you are claimed by the peace of Christ. Jesus left us with the Advocate to ensure that our hearts are never troubled by the belief that we are alone. This Advocate wants to establish peace in you and between you and God.

Where do you need the peace of Christ to fill you? Where do you need the Spirit to be a champion of peace?

Imagine that you take that troubled part of your life or your personhood, and place it in a box. Imagine walking into a room where you find Jesus. Walk up to Jesus and offer him your source of uncertainty and fear. Place this box in his hands, and imagine walking away. Take courage and let the Advocate, the Spirit of Jesus, fill you with peace.

Day 4: Reconciliation made visible

READ

Notes:

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him...For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Colossians 1:15-16, 19-23

“The one who has struggled to purify themselves and has had nothing but repeated failures will experience real relief when they stop tinkering with their soul and look away to the perfect One. While they look at Christ, the very thing they had so long been trying to do will be getting done with them. It will be God working in them to will and to do.”

—A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*

REFLECT

Colossians 1:15-16 and 19-20 display the character and nature of Jesus. Write out the different characteristics. Which seems familiar? Which seems more ignored?

How would you explain the work that was accomplished through Jesus' embodiment and Jesus' cross?

Paul says that we have a potential to "move from the hope held out in the gospel." What does that mean to you? What potentially is moving you from hope?

RESPOND

Paul wanted the church of Colossae to have a greater vision of who Jesus was and the purpose of Jesus' life. The same One who created all things and holds all things together, also had the mission of reconciliation.

Though many of us are afraid of being fully seen by God, we find here that Jesus presents us pure, blameless, and without blemish. We have a part in living out this deliverance, but Jesus is the one who claimed us by his peace.

Spend time in prayer before God. Set your gaze upon Christ in prayer. Spend time doing two things in conversation with Christ:

1. Declare to Christ who Christ has been. In prayers of thanksgiving, slowly consider the gracious works of Christ.
2. Ask for the courage to believe in Christ's reconciling power.

Day 5: Be still and know peace

READ

Notes:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

God is our refuge and strength,
 an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the
earth give way
 and the mountains fall into the heart of
the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
 and the mountains quake with their
surging.

There is a river whose streams make glad
the city of God,
 the holy place where the Most High
dwells.

God is within her, she will not fall;
 God will help her at break of day.
Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
 he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

The Lord Almighty is with us;
 the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Come and see what the Lord has done,
 the desolations he has brought on the
earth.

He makes wars cease
 to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
 he burns the shields with fire.

He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;
 I will be exalted among the nations,
 I will be exalted in the earth."

The Lord Almighty is with us;
 the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Psalms 46

REFLECT

In this passage from Romans, we see God as the God of hope and peace, but there is a calling for us to be people who trust. What does it mean to place our trust in God's hope and peace? Is this trust simply a belief, or is there a practical response that displays trust?

Psalm 46 shares how God is a peacemaker. What do you notice in this psalm? Where do you find questions or comfort?

RESPOND

As we conclude our week of finding peace with God, take some time and reflect on the lessons and experiences you encountered this week. What are some truths that you hope to carry with you?

What are you still processing or asking of God?

Let us finish with resting in God's peace. Paul's words to the church in Rome were a promise that God longs to fill us with joy and peace. This is the work of the Spirit, and our role is to trust. We have an invitation to "be still and know I am God." Take a moment to listen to this worship song. You may want to join in worship, or use the words to be prompts for prayer. If you don't feel a deeper longing for the Spirit's work, allow the song to be sung over you as something God longs for you to experience.





WEEK 2

Finding peace with self

The Christian tradition places a high value on humility, service to others, and selflessness. These influences are helpful for us to ensure that our lives are oriented towards others, but oftentimes, this comes at the detriment of our own health. We might appreciate peace with God and seek to make peace in the world, while all the time we have inner brokenness, conflict and pain. This is not God's design. Like ripples that spread out from the dropping of a rock in a still pond, peace should move from the inside out.

As an expression of this love, this week we will consider how to find peace within and for our own self. We will consider five different areas that tend to rob us of finding and protecting an inner peace.

Day 1: Finding peace from inner hatred

READ

Notes:

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Matthew 22:34-40

"In my experience, self-hatred is the dominant malaise crippling Christians and stifling their growth in the Holy Spirit."

—Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child*

REFLECT

Jesus shares distinct ways that we can love God. What does it mean to love God with all your heart?

What does it mean to love God with all your soul?

What does it mean to love God with all your mind?

Jesus was asked what the one greatest commandment was, and he gives them two commandments. Why do you think Jesus combined these two? Why can't you separate them?

What does it mean to love others **as you love yourself**?

RESPOND

Many of us treat ourselves with more cruelty or indifference than we would treat anyone else in our lives. Yet, for Jesus, to love others well means we must also dismantle the narratives and practices that diminish our inner goodness. Spend some time in honest prayer with God. What are the narratives that fuel a disregard for yourself?

What are some changes you would make to improve how you love yourself?

Day 2: Dismantling shame

READ

Notes:

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

Genesis 2:25, 3:6-11

the covering is gone
shed its leaves
all that is left is what is
the true essence
of the thing itself
in all of its twistedness
in all of its beauty
like a tree in winter this heart
this heart
laid bare

—Jim Branch, "bare"

REFLECT

The world forever changed in the space between Genesis 2 and Genesis 3, and in that space was the experience of shame. How would you define shame?

What does it mean to you that in eating the fruit, their eyes were opened? What could they now see?

What does the experience of shame create within Adam and Eve? What did it compel?

RESPOND

The experience of shame is not just a part of Adam and Eve's story. It is within us all. The experience of shame for Adam and Eve not only wreaked relational havoc between their relationship and between them and God, but it also changed their inner world. The same is the case with us. Spend time with God as you consider your own story with shame. How was shame introduced in your life?

What does the experience of shame compel in you? How do you cover or hide?

Consider your current relationship with shame, and allow these verses to wash over you.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:35-39

Day 3: The past

READ

Notes:

I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:10-14

“Our hearts are hungering for the *Sacrament of Letting Go*. Once we discover that we already possess enough grace to let go, trust begins to form in the center of who we are. Then we can take off our shoes and stand empty and vulnerable, eager to receive God’s next gift.”

—Macrina Wiederkehr, *Seasons of Your Heart*

REFLECT

Paul’s deepest longing was to know Christ. This type of knowledge must go beyond intellectual understanding. What are other words that we could use to deepen our understanding of knowing Jesus?

How does our past uniquely undercut our ability to “know” Christ?

Reflect on this line: “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” What is Paul seeking to convey here?

How could we “forget” the past without dismissing healthy reflection? What are the traps of being stuck in the past?

What is “the prize” that Paul might hold?

RESPOND

Today, seek to enact the sacrament of letting go. Consider how your past undercuts your ability to experience the peace of Christ. What are those traps?

What are the narratives that are attached to those traps from the past?

How does the Gospel (the good news of Jesus' peace) dismantle those narratives?

Spend time in prayer releasing these traps to the mercy of Jesus. Press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called you heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Day 4: Addressing fear

READ

Notes:

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.

John 14:27

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

2 Timothy 1:6-7

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Psalms 23

"Courage is fear that has said its prayers."

—Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies*

REFLECT

Between the three verses above, which stands out to you? What about that verse in particular is powerful?

In looking at Jesus' word in John 14, notice Jesus gives **his** peace, unlike the peace found in this world. How does Jesus demonstrate a different kind of peace?

Paul shares with Timothy a beautiful analogy. God has gifted us all a small flame through the Spirit, but we have agency and responsibility to fan that gift. Instead of living timid and afraid, God has provided a flame we can fan into greater power, love, and self-discipline. How can we fan this flame?

What promises do you notice in Psalm 23?

Where does fear reside in your life today?

RESPOND

There are plenty of reasons to experience fear in this life. Faithful living does not ignore fear or downplay danger. But there is something about living in fear that does great damage to the soul and robs us of our peace. In Scripture, there are over 300 occurrences of the phrases “do not fear” or “be not afraid.” Take a moment and consider why God seems so persistent to give us this instruction?

In all three passages above, fear is diminished by knowing and experiencing the nearness of God—as a shepherd, a flame of power, and a Spirit that has made its home in us. Hold in your mind the source of your fear, and ask Jesus to draw close to you. What might the Spirit of Jesus say to you in this moment?

Day 5: Noise and busyness

READ

Notes:

This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it."

Isaiah 30:15

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

1 King 19:11-13

"Silence requires the discipline to recognize the urge to get up and go again as a temptation to look elsewhere for what is close at hand. It offers the freedom to stroll in your own inner yard, and to rake the way to your heart. Perhaps there will be much fear and uncertainty when you first come upon this 'unfamiliar terrain,' but slowly you will discover an order and a familiarity which deepens your longing to stay home."

—Henri J.M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*

REFLECT

As you reflect on the words found in Isaiah 30, how are repentance and rest connected?

How are quietness and trust connected?

What is it in the human condition that we often reject these postures?

There are passages where God uses wind, earthquakes and fire. Can you name some?

Why do you think in this moment, God met Elijah in a whisper?

RESPOND

Elijah was longing for peace. Prior to 1 Kings 19, there was strife, violence and it concluded with a queen who swore to take his life. So, into the desert Elijah fled. It is in the scarce landscape that Elijah meets with God. This encounter would not be in the dramatic or powerful forces of nature. It would be in a gentle whisper.

Are you in need of peace today? Perhaps, the peace you are waiting for is not in an external solution or hustling a little more. Perhaps, your peace is waiting in rest, repentance, quietness, and trust.

We are going to have a prayer experience considering the experiences of Elijah. Set a timer for 5 or 10 minutes so that you don't have to worry about how long you will be in prayer. Imagine in your mind's eye the experience Elijah had. First the powerful wind, then earthquake, and then fire, but God would be in a gentle whisper. Imagine experiencing these things and then rest with the gentle whisper of God. In silence, sit and rest with God in a posture of trust. Share any notes from this prayer experience here.



WEEK 3

Church: A refuge of peace

One of the main instruments of peace that God has given this world is the church. That may be strange to hear, given how many of us have experienced the church as a place that is capable of such deep wounding. But the people of God are intended to be the presence of Jesus in this world: bringing peace to one another, seeking restoration and repair in the relationships and world around them.

Day 1: Belonging

READ

Notes:

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

1 Corinthians 2:21-26

The church is not a select circle of the immaculate, but a home where the outcast may come in. It is not a palace with gate attendants and challenging sentinels along the entrance-ways holding off at arm's-length the stranger, but rather a hospital where the broken-hearted may be healed, and where all the weary and troubled may find rest and take counsel together.

—James H. Aughey

REFLECT

From the passage above, what do you notice about how God intended the church to operate? How is this different from the way organizations (including some 'church' organizations) operate in our world?

In this passage, what are the things in place that would lead to less division in the body? How is this different from the way organizations (including some 'church' organizations) operate in our world?

Think about your experience with church: who have you seen be told they are irrelevant, unnecessary, or have less worth? What would it look like for these parts to be given more honor?

What would it look like for all parts of the church to have equal concern for one another?

RESPOND

If you've ever felt like an outcast or someone who doesn't belong, the church—the true church—is a place for you to be given honor and belong.

What would it look like to 'reclaim' the church in your life? What needs to happen for you to be able to do that?

Think about your experience at church recently. Who needs to be given more honor? What would that look like?

Think about your life: are there people who have been given less dignity by society or in your workplace or spaces you move in? What is one thing you could do this week to be the church in their lives and give dignity and honor to them?

Day 2: Living as God's people

READ

Notes:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:12-14

"When we claim and constantly reclaim the truth of being the chosen ones, we soon discover within ourselves a deep desire to reveal to others their own chosenness. Instead of making us feel that we are better, more precious or valuable than others, our awareness of being chosen opens our eyes to the chosenness of others. That is the great joy of being chosen: the discovery that others are chosen as well."

—Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*

REFLECT

Make a list of everything you see about how God's people are described in this passage.

Consider the passage again under the leadership of Jesus. How has Jesus modeled these things?

“Unity” can sometimes be weaponized by groups to keep people from pointing out problems or voicing their needs. What is it in this passage that forms unity? How do you think the kind of unity in this passage would look different from a faux-unity that is used to control people?

What is the very first, foundational thing in this passage? How do you think believing your belovedness would connect to the rest of the things in this passage?

RESPOND

One of the reasons people may not associate the church with love and peace might be because the people who participate may not behave like the things we read in this passage. And that may be because we are fighting to earn our love and sense of specialness instead of receiving that from God and resting in it. Read the quote for today again, and spend some time meditating on your own chosenness. What comes up for you when you think about that concept?

Make a list of people you might encounter today. What are some things about them that help you see them as unique and precious? What would it look like to call out their chosenness today?

Day 3: Reconciliation and peacemaking

READ

Notes:

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

"A spirituality of reconciliation involves not directing one's thinking along the traditional channels of power, but making possible the springing up of alternatives to dominative power. To counter power with the same kind of power may restrain it, but it does not lead to peace. This is something practitioners of non-violence have known for a long time. But it is a lesson hard to learn. The power that broke the hold of sin on the world was the powerlessness, the agony, and the humiliation of the cross. The blood that was shed in violence becomes life-giving, redeeming blood. Reconciliation requires finding a different kind of power from dominative power to transform situations."

—Robert J. Schreiter

REFLECT

What does the paragraph above tell you about the ministry of reconciliation that God has given the church? What is it? Why has God given it to us?

What comes to mind when you think of “reconciliation”? Can you think of some times in your life when you have seen reconciliation take place?

Are there moments throughout history that you can think of when the church truly has been a place that is participating in a ministry of reconciliation?

RESPOND

Reconciliation is about fostering unity and peace among diverse groups and individuals. The church is designed to be the facilitator of forgiveness, reconciliation, and building bridges across divides, reflecting God's love and grace.

When you look around your home, neighborhood, workplace, city—in what areas do you see reconciliation needed?

Consider the Schreiter quote from today. What is one action step you could take today to help foster reconciliation in the world around you?

Day 4: Caring for others

READ

Notes:

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Matthew 25:34-40

"Hungry for love, He looks at you. Thirsty for kindness, He begs of you. Naked for loyalty, He hopes in you. Homeless for shelter in your heart, He asks of you. Will you be that one to Him?"

—Mother Teresa,

REFLECT

“For” can mean “because” or “exhibited by.” Rewrite the main point of verses 34–36. What is the mission or image of the Church in this passage?

The Bible says we are saved by faith—by loving and trusting Jesus—not by working to earn security. How do you make sense of this passage in light of that?

What is Jesus sharing in this passage? If you were standing nearby when he said this, and a friend asked what Jesus meant by it, how would you answer?

RESPOND

If we love and trust Jesus, it will play out in caring for those around us in need. This is one of the main functions of the Church.

One thing that is interesting about this passage is that those being called blessed did not seem to have a sense of being given a “mission” to go out and care for those in need, they just seemed to be living a life of care and responding to needs in front of them.

What are the obstacles in your life to being responsive to needs around you?
Are they logistical obstacles? Emotional? Physical? Spiritual?

What is one thing you could do this week to help you be more in tune and responsive to the needs around you?

Day 5: The body of Christ

READ

Notes:

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Ephesians 2:18-23

"I'm a little pencil in the hand of a writing God, who is sending a love letter to the world."

—Mother Teresa,

REFLECT

How does Paul describe the church in this passage?

We often talk about the church as the “body.” What does a body do? What does it mean to be the body of Christ?

Think of your experience with the church: what experiences have you had where it felt like the body of Christ (Jesus caring for you through people)? What experiences have you had where it felt nothing like what you think the body of Christ would be like?

RESPOND

The church is the expression of Jesus in the world today. The Spirit of Jesus is inside of us, moving us and prompting us and enabling us to truly carry Jesus to the world around us.

Read Mother Theresa’s quote again. Now spend some time thinking about the people in your life. Who is Jesus wanting to draw near today? Who is Jesus wanting to provide for or encourage? How might you be a part of that?

