

PEACE BEGINS WITH YOU!

Fifteen Days of Scripture, Thoughts and Prayers for a More Peaceful Life.



Hello!

I am so glad you have decided to begin this journey!

I believe that one of the biggest problems in our world today is that people have stopped working for peace. We would much rather win the fight than work it out. This has caused big, big problems in our world and everything seems to be getting worse.

I also believe that people truly want to see a more peaceful world and I believe that you can play a very important role in helping to make this a reality. As you read through the scripture, thoughts and quotes contained in this booklet, I pray that you will begin to ask the question: How can I be more peaceful in my life? And I pray that as you seek to be more peaceful, others will see the difference and join you on your journey.

Please know that I care about your journey and I want you to succeed. If you have any questions or just want to talk about the things you're reading or thinking, please feel free to contact me!

God bless you on this journey!

In Christian Love,

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ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

Day 1

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." -John 13:34-35

Jesus makes it clear that love is the way that the world will know we are children of God. Notice that Christ did not say: "by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you know many verses and have your theology solid..." or "by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you attend church, give me all your money, and avoid all sin..." He simplified it for us- love one another.

So how do we show this love? I believe it is expressed through our unconditional acceptance of people regardless of race, creed or color. Whether that person is kind to you, or treats you like dirt. Whether you agree with their lifestyle, or stand against it. All of these things are quite irrelevant when it comes to obeying God and loving others. If you set up any pre-requisites for loving others, then you are disobedient to Christ and ineffective in your witness.

THINK

What if Christians responded with love to those we don't agree with? How would our world be different?

CHALLENGE

Think of one person that just really bugs you and ask God to soften your heart for that person. Think of something you like about that person and focus on it more that you focus on what bugs you.

PRAY

Loving God, Thank you for loving me... Help me to love others, especially the ones that are hard to love. Amen

WORK FOR PEACE

Day 2

It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it. -Eleanor Roosevelt

THINK

What do you think about this quote? How can you "work at" peace in your life today? What would life look like if you started truly working for peace among the people in your life?

CHALLENGE

Make a list of ways you can work for peace. Put it up where you will see it every day. Keep track of how you're doing.

PRAY

Lord, you want us to be peacemakers but sometimes I really don't know how to do that. Please show me how. Today. And help me to truly WORK toward it. Amen!

*Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.
Matthew 5:9*

THE GRUDGE

Day 3

Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them; they don't know what they're doing. Dividing up his clothes, they threw dice for them. The people stood there staring at Jesus, and the ringleaders made faces, taunting, "He saved others. Let's see him save himself! The Messiah of God ha! The Chosen ha!"
- Luke 23:34 <The Message>

Jesus does not hold grudges, nor does he require obedience before demonstrating love. He cares for people regardless of their personality, position, or possessions. In Luke 23:34, Jesus asked for forgiveness for a group of people who tortured him and mocked him. For us, it's really hard to not want to fight back, let alone forgive them – or ask God to forgive them. But remember, Jesus said we must respond to evil with love... Ask him to help you do that today!

THINK

Have you ever been picked on? What is your typical reaction? How does it compare to Christ's reaction?

CHALLENGE

Think of one person in your life that you're holding a grudge against. Ask God to help you forgive that person and to help you see the good in that person. Maybe there's something to love? ;)

PRAY

Jesus, You forgave your enemies and you instruct us to do the same... but it's really hard to do that sometimes.. Help me to become more like you today. Amen

Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it. 1 Peter 3:9

I DON'T UNDERSTAND

Day 4

Peace cannot be achieved through violence, it can only be attained through understanding. - Ralph Waldo Emerson

THINK

What do you think this means? How can we be understanding of views that are different than ours? How can you create peace by understanding?

CHALLENGE

Write down some things you don't understand about people... maybe it's their religious views, or their lifestyle choices, or maybe it's their hatred for others... Now, try your best to put yourself in this person's shoes to understand where they're coming from. Maybe you'll have to have a discussion with them about their life to develop an understanding. Once you have a better understanding of that person, see if you can work harder at peace with that person.

PRAY

Dear God, Sometimes people do things that I just don't understand... and it leads me to dislike them... or think they're views or actions are stupid. Help me to be more understanding of others... and help me to be more peaceful toward those I don't understand. Amen!

DON'T THROW STONES

Day 5

Jesus went across to Mount Olives, but he was soon back in the Temple again. Swarms of people came to him. He sat down and taught them. The religion scholars and Pharisees led in a woman who had been caught in an act of adultery. They stood her in plain sight of everyone and said, "Teacher, this woman was caught red-handed in the act of adultery. Moses, in the Law, gives orders to stone such persons. What do you say?" They were trying to trap him into saying something incriminating so they could bring charges against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger in the dirt. They kept at him, badgering him. He straightened up and said, "The sinless one among you, go first: Throw the stone." Bending down again, he wrote some more in the dirt. Hearing that, they walked away, one after another, beginning with the oldest. The woman was left alone. Jesus stood up and spoke to her. "Woman, where are they? Does no one condemn you?" "No one, Master." "Neither do I," said Jesus. "Go on your way. From now on, don't sin."

-John 8:1-11 <The Message>

I know that as Christians we are called to hold each other accountable. Yet we should not use accountability as an excuse to harbor hatred or indifference. We should also not expect those who do not know Christ to live as we do. Unbelievers need to be shown that they will be completely accepted by the family of God. This acceptance should not come because of any qualifications or actions on their part, but because God loves them. God loves people unconditionally. So should we.

There are people in your schools who are lonely and don't fit in. Many feel ashamed and outcast for whatever reason. If we make anyone feel like an outcast because he/she is different, we bring shame to Christianity. If we check people out to make sure they're cool before we share the gospel, we are allowing our prejudices to interfere with God's work. This is a tragic mistake.

Non-acceptance turns people away from God and Christianity — possibly forever. They run as fast and as far away as they can in the other direction, seeking out other religions and organizations that will embrace them. At that point Satan and those he has deceived will stretch out their welcoming arms. If the enemy has the ability to "love" and accept people, then how much more should we!

Remember, people will go where they are accepted and stay where they are loved. Don't you?

THINK

Do you know any "loners" that could use some love expressed through acceptance? Do the people in your circle of friends know you as a disciple because of your outward expressions of unconditional love? Why or why not?

CHALLENGE

Think of one person that could use some extra love and acceptance right now. Then, be sure to show them kindness this week.

PRAY

Lord, help me to not judge others, or to leave them out just because they are different than I am. Help me treat everyone I know with kindness. Help me to pay special attention to the ones who may never receive kind words or encouragement. Amen

A STORY WITH A POINT

Day 6

True story... A young woman was relating an experience that she had in a seminary class with her teacher; we'll call him Brother Smith. She said that Brother Smith was known for his elaborate object lessons. This particular day when Sally walked into seminary she could tell they were in for another fun day. There was a big target on the wall and a table full of darts. Brother Smith told the students to draw a picture of someone that they disliked or someone who had made them angry and he would let them throw some darts at the picture.

Sally's friend on the right drew a picture of the girl who had stolen her boyfriend. Her friend, on her left side, drew a picture of his little brother. Sally decided to draw a picture of Brother Smith. She really put a lot of detail into her drawing, even to the extent to drawing pimples on his face. She was really pleased at the overall effect she had achieved. The class lined up and was really getting into the dart throwing, with much laughter and a lot of hilarity involved. Some of the darts were thrown with such force that the pictures were ripped. Sally was toward the end of the line, and filled with disappointment when Brother Smith, because of time limits, asked the students to return to their seats.

Sally was thinking how mad she was that she hadn't been able to throw darts at her picture of Brother Smith. The classroom had been quite chaotic during the dart throwing. Then Brother Smith removed the target from the wall and revealed the picture of Jesus that had been directly underneath the target.

A complete hush fell over the room as the students viewed the torn picture, the eyes pierced out, and marks and holes all over the Savior. Brother Smith said only these words, "**Just as you have done it to the least of these my brothers, you have also done it to me.**" (Matthew 25:40) Nothing else was necessary as the tear-filled eyes of the students were riveted on the picture of Christ. The students remained in their seats even after the bell had rung, then slowly trickled out of the classroom.

THINK

Is there someone in your life right now that you would like to throw a "dart" at... harm physically or with your words? Have you ever thought about how your words and actions are viewed by Jesus?

CHALLENGE

Think about the person you would like to harm and ask God to replace those bad feelings with feelings of peace.

PRAY

God, help me to not wish harm on the people who make me mad. Replace those feelings of hate with feelings of peace. Amen

PAYBACKS A

Day 7

Don't talk about your neighbors behind their backs--no slander or gossip, please. Don't say to anyone, "I'll get back at you for what you did to me. I'll make you pay for what you did!" - Proverbs 24:28-30- The Message

I believe that many fights and wars are a result of our desire for "payback" We can get so consumed with winning the fight that we will do anything in our power to destroy the other person. Most of the time, this consumes us. We can't think of anything else. Their mere presence can ruin our good mood. And our desire to ruin that person gets stronger and stronger. Before we know it, we don't even recognize ourselves because we have become so full of anger.

God says "Don't even go there! Payback's a SIN!"

I believe that if we stop focusing less on payback and more on forgiving, little by little, our world will become a better place.

THINK

Have you ever tried to ruin someone's reputation or harm someone in an effort to pay them back for hurting you? How did it turn out? What would happen if you didn't act that way?

CHALLENGE

Pick one person you've gossiped about and apologize to that person. This will be hard to do, but it might just lead to some peace between you both. It's worth it!

PRAY

God, Forgive me for the times when I've sought revenge, gossiped about or attacked another person. Help me to be more forgiving and less vengeful. Amen.

BAD WORDS ARE... BAD =(

Day 8

"A good person produces good words from a good heart, and an evil person produces evil words from an evil heart. And I tell you this, that you must give an account on judgment day of every idle word you speak. The words you say now reflect your fate then; either you will be justified by them or you will be condemned." <Matthew 12:35-37>

Wow! Pretty serious don't you think?!

You are either helpful or hurtful with your words- period. Don't try to justify meanness by saying "I was only kidding!" Speak the truth in love, but keep in mind that you have a Judge who listens to every word you say.

Commit today to be used by God to help heal people and set them on the path that God has chosen for them with the power of your words.

THINK

Do your words generally help or hurt people?

Have you forgiven those who have injured you in the past? Why or why not?

What situation/person in life brings out your worst speech? What can you do to change that?

CHALLENGE

Think of how you can remove harmful words from your daily interactions with others. Tell someone you're trying to be more positive with your words and ask them to hold you accountable. Tough stuff, but it's good stuff! Good luck! =)

PRAY

God, Forgive me for the times when I've sought revenge, gossiped about or attacked another person. Help me to be more forgiving and less vengeful. Amen.

THUMBS UP FOR HELL? Day 9

As surely as I live, says the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of wicked people. I only want them to turn from their wicked ways so they can live. <Ezekiel 33:11>

I read the other day about a pastor who claims to praise God every time he reads about a terrorist who has lost his/her life.

Did you get that? Pastor. Leader of a congregation. Shepherd to a flock of believers!!!! He teaches people to do that stuff! Wow!

The really ironic thing is that Satan would really love us to be just a little happy about hell. When we are, compassion for the lost goes right out the window. We also forget that we deserve punishment just as much as anyone who has ever lived. Most of all we then stop thinking about the fact that God's heart breaks for those who die apart from a saving knowledge of Christ.

God has called all believers to be compassionate, patient, and loving to unbelievers-period. **They really don't care what you know until they know that you care.**

THINK

What three words describe how you feel about hell?

How can you develop a deeper compassion for the lost?

What if all Christians cared deeply for the non-believers in this world? How would it be different?

CHALLENGE

Think of one person you know that does not know God. Make it a point to have a conversation with them... It doesn't have to be about God, but it could be. =)

PRAY

God, there are so many people in this world who need to know you... I know some people.... Help me to teach them about you. Amen

He felt great pity for the crowds that came, because their problems were so great and they didn't know where to go for help. They were like sheep without a shepherd. <Matthew 9:36>

LOVE WINS

Day 10

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- Romans 12:21

Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

THINK

What do you think about this quote from Martin Luther King, Jr.? How does it compare to the words in Romans 12:21? Do you tend to try to overcome evil with good or more evil?

CHALLENGE

Think of one way you can add "light" to the world of hatred and sin. Write it down in a place where you will see it often as a reminder... and DO IT! =)

PRAY

Father, thank you for the peacemakers in this world. Help me to do my best to overcome evil with goodness. Amen.

LIVE AT PEACE

Day 11

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.
-Romans 12:18

If we're being honest, it's hard for us to do do this. For some reason, we won't take that extra step to ensure there is no drama around us. Sometimes, we try a little... or we're proud that we didn't add to some drama, but Paul is saying no it is not enough for us to just do the norm. We must stretch ourselves to the limit and once we've done that then we can say I've done my best.

Jesus knows that there are some people who will not allow you and I to live at peace with them but just because they don't, we should not let it stop us from being Christ like, and loving them anyway! We can't be responsible for their actions, but we are responsible for ours!

THINK

How can you try to live at peace with everyone? What do you have to do differently? Who is going to be a challenge for you to be peaceful with?

CHALLENGE

Think of the area of your life that creates the most drama... How can you apply today's scripture to that area of your life?

PRAY

God, this is a big challenge... living at peace with EVERYONE seems impossible to me... but I trust that you will help me to do this. Help me to take some steps today that will help me to live at peace with those around me. Amen!

LIGHT YOUR WORLD

Day 12

When you beg the LORD for help, he will answer, "Here I am!" Don't mistreat others or falsely accuse them or say something cruel. Give your food to the hungry and care for the homeless. Then your light will shine in the dark; your darkest hour will be like the noonday sun. - Isaiah 58:9-10

Stating the obvious... If you play in the snow with your shoes on, then your feet will get wet; if you scream at your friends, then they won't want to hang with you; if you put your shoes away where they belong, then you will know where to find them next time; if you give your friend a hug, then it will help to make them happy.

This is what God is trying to tell us here, IF you stop making trouble for others, using cruel words, gossiping; IF you take care of the needs of others, those who are troubled, down-and-out, THEN the darkness of the night will become like day—you will glow, there will be joy in your life.. and on the lives of those around you! This is an important lesson for all of us to learn and to remember. It is too easy to fall into the pattern of putting down others to lift ourselves up, but God is telling us that this is not how it works.

Out of the mouth of a third grader at my school came this statement, "If you play with someone the other kids don't like, you make them feel better and that makes you feel better." If she has learned that lesson at the age of 9, we should all know it and follow it at our age, whether it be 11.. or 16... or 50!

THINK

Think of some ways you have been cruel this week through things you have said, gossiping, or not stepping up to help. How does that make you feel when you think on these things? Think of some ways that you have stepped up to help someone else. How does that make you feel? Think of a time when you have needed help or support and someone has been there for you. How does that make you feel?

CHALLENGE

Think of the area of your life that creates joy and spread it!

PRAY

God, today I want you to help me to spread joy and happiness. Thank you for being the giver of the things that make us happy! Amen!

TURN AWAY

Day 13

Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. - Psalm 34:14

THINK

What do you need to turn away from in order to seek peace and pursue it?

CHALLENGE

Turning away from evil sometimes means making choices that hurt, but I promise you, it will lead to a better tomorrow! Think of one thing in your life you need to get rid of in order to live a more peaceful life... and DO IT! =)

PRAY

God, help me to turn away from evil, do good and pursue peace today. Amen!

SEEK

PEACE

REAPING WHAT WE SOW

Day 14

E-Devotion from Bishop Mike Coyner, Indiana Conference, United Methodist Church

When the news came last night that Osama bin Laden had been found, attacked, and killed by US forces in Pakistan, I found myself remembering the proverb quoted by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 6, verses 7 and 8:

Don't be misled: No one makes a fool of God. What a person plants, he will harvest. The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others ignoring God! harvests a crop of weeds. All hell have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life.

What we sow, we reap. We reap what we sow. This end of Osama bin Laden was predictable, even if it took 10 years to arrive. He chose to live by violence, spawning terrorism and hatred, and his life was doomed to end by violence. It was going to happen. The US and its intelligence and military units were not going to quit until he was found, and he vowed that he would not be taken alive. This day was coming. It was just a matter of time. We reap what we sow. The things/attitudes/actions/feelings/intentions that we launch in our own lives, seem to come back to us – often coming back to us in multiple ways.

The death of Osama bin Laden does not give me a great sense of victory or the “closure” for the events of 9/11 which so many writers have claimed. I do not rejoice in the death of any person, no matter how evil. Rather I feel a kind of satisfaction that, once again, the truth of scripture has been confirmed. Those who sow violence ultimately reap the results of that violence. Sometimes it happens in a court of law, sometimes through vengeance brought by others, and sometimes through God’s ultimate judgment. I do not smugly say, “Good, we got him” without also being reminded to be careful about what I sow in my life and ministry.

THINK

How about you? Are you sowing the gifts of the Spirit which will bring fruitful results in your life, your church, and in the world?

CHALLENGE

We reap what we sow. The things/attitudes/actions/feelings/intentions that we launch in our own lives, seem to come back to us – often coming back to us in multiple ways. Think of one area where this is true in your life and how you’re going to fix it.

PRAY

Father, help me to plant seeds of goodness in this world, and help that goodness spread. Help me to remember that if I treat others poorly, that treatment will only repeat itself over and over again... and come right back at me. Help me to be peaceful today. Amen

LET THERE BE PEACE ON EARTH Day 15

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me.
Let there be peace on earth
The peace that was meant to be.
With God as our father
Brothers all are we.
Let me walk with my brother
In perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me
Let this be the moment now.
With every step i take
Let this be my solemn vow.
To take each moment
And live each moment
With peace eternally.
Let there be peace on earth,
And let it begin with me.
-Vince Gill

I first heard these lyrics sung about 10 years ago in a small church in Connecticut. The whole church sang this song together every Sunday. It was powerful to sing those words, realizing that each person singing had made some type of commitment to help make this world a more peaceful place to live. There is power in working together, and I hope we can do just that! Today is the last day of our devotions, but not the last day of your challenge! I pray that you will continue your journey toward living a life committed to spreading peace to EVERYONE you encounter.

Please pray with me...

Father God, Thank you for seeing me through these past 15 days of devotions and changes in my life. I pray that you will continue helping me... Our world is so full of war and hatred and unkindness... Help me to commit to changing that... a little at a time... by showing others love, forgiveness, kindness and peace. Amen.