

Today

March/April 2023

refresh, refocus, renew

Jesus,
LAMB
of God



ALSO: THE PEACE THAT ENDURES

Friends:

Will lasting peace ever come to our hate-filled and war-torn world?

In the month of March, Pastor Sergei Sosedkin, who has family members in both Russia and Ukraine, explores the Bible's teaching on war and human strife. The Bible promises peace, and this is the ultimate peace of being right with God. This personal peace comes only through knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Yet this peace not only makes us right with God but also puts us on the right path to peace with our neighbors, the people around us. And the peace that comes through Jesus looks forward to worldwide peace one day, when God's kingdom of peace fully comes and nations "will beat their swords into plowshares" (Isaiah 2:4).



In the month of April, Pastor Hernandez Dias Lopes guides us in reflecting on the basics of our salvation taught in Scripture. Throughout these meditations we catch glimpses of the mystery, depth, and wisdom of God's plan to redeem this fallen world. At the very heart of God's plan of salvation is the love of Jesus Christ. His life, death, resurrection, and continuing work nurture our new life as his followers. Jesus' great love also inspires and challenges us to love each other and to share his love with the world.

May you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed in God's Word!

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

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**"The Peace That
Endures"**
Sergei Sosedkin



"Jesus, Lamb of God"
Hernandes Dias Lopes

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march

The Peace That Endures

Sergei Sosedkin

The topic of war and peace is as old as human history, and it has become prominent again lately.

The Bible speaks a lot about the conflicts that we humans are involved in. Our fallen human nature brings us first of all into a state of war with God. This conflict extends to our inner being, and it strikes outward to other people who are near and far away. And in the process, peace gets obliterated—on many levels.

Yet the Bible gives us the promise of shalom, a special kind of peace from God that covers every part of living. This month let's reflect on God's peace and how to receive it through the gift of Christ. Through God's grace we find forgiveness, and that helps us to forgive one another and to search out ways to compromise so that we can live peaceably in this world as well.

Sergei Sosedkin is the Russian-language ministry team leader of ReFrame Ministries, which publishes these Today devotions. He is a native of Russia, and his wife, Olena, is a native of Ukraine. They are the parents of two children. Sergei carries out his ministry work from offices in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and from various locations in Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltic States.

TRUSTING GOD FOR PEACE

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.
—Psalm 4:8

I remember that as a child I was often afraid of the sounds of aircraft flying at night. I was born and raised in Moscow, USSR, at the height of the Cold War. At that time, the sounds of jets flying high in the sky could mean that an enemy attack was near.

Those were common fears back then. Many years later an American friend shared with me that he had a similar experience while growing up.

Sadly, in today's world fears of war are coming back to many of us. And, far worse, those fears have become very real and tragic experiences for people in war zones.

War is terrible, and peace is precious. This month I'd like to invite you to reflect on peace. What does the Bible say about peace? Why do we need it so much? How can we find peace and keep it?

In Psalm 4 we find a distressed psalmist calling out to the Lord at night. In this very personal prayer, as the writer seeks relief and mercy from God, he discovers that trusting God is the key to finding peace and happiness. Trust in God allows the psalmist to lie down and sleep, and to face the next day with hope and assurance.

That's the comfort we need. All kinds of fears can assault our minds and hearts. But if we trust in the Lord, we can dwell in safety, regardless of external circumstances.

Lord, in this world of danger we trust you alone for our salvation and safety. Give us your peace so that we may face tomorrow boldly, protected by your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SHALOM

The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:7

If you follow the daily news, you know that bad news grabs most of the headlines. We hear about wars, disasters, crime, terrorism, economic troubles, and more. Our personal situation may also include bad news—family problems, health issues, more and higher bills to pay, and so on.

What can we do in the midst of so much struggle? The potential negative outcomes can make us anxious, even to the point of becoming physically ill. It's no wonder anxiety is one of the most common issues of our time.

In Philippians, however, we find the promise of God's peace, "which transcends all understanding."

The Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, has a very rich and profound meaning. True biblical shalom conveys an inner sense of completeness, whole-

ness, and tranquillity. It can describe not only an absence of war or conflict but also inward harmony with God, oneself, and one's community. Shalom points to the flourishing of full life as God intends for us.

For Paul, inner peace doesn't come through relaxation techniques, denial, or the power of positive thinking. He fully trusts the Lord to protect him and grant him peace.

Trust in the Lord to save you and fill you with life, and you don't have to be anxious. You can thank God and share with him all of your troubles and anxieties. He hears and gives peace.

Lord God, thank you for the good news of Jesus. Fill us with your amazing peace and deliver us from anxiety, we pray. Amen.

CONFESSING OUR SINS

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. —1 John 1:9

Dmitry, a media listener from Belarus, wrote to tell us, “It’s been very difficult for me to find inner peace. I have tried to be a good man, and I have read a lot of wisdom literature, but that hasn’t helped me. I’m still searching.”

God originally designed us to live in close relationship with him, to rule over his creation, and to enjoy his all-embracing peace. However, Adam and Eve disobeyed their Creator when they ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3).

It can be said that the human race lost its peace at that moment, known as the fall into sin. This brought about our separation from God and from ourselves, others, and God’s creation. It also left us with a sense of anguish, fear, and loneliness. And to this day we

are all affected by that original sin.

It’s good to be kind to people around us. It’s good to read books of wisdom. But, as the Bible tells us, we can find peace only if we confess our sins before the Lord. It would be a lie to claim that we are without sin. To regain our peace with God, we have to trust wholeheartedly in the saving power of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Only Jesus can repair our relationship with God. Only he can grant peace and comfort to our wounded souls.

Father, we confess our sins before you. Forgive us, restore us, and make us whole. Give us your precious peace, we pray. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

OUR SEARCHING GOD

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts . . . and lead me in the way everlasting.

—Psalm 139:23-24

Mikhail is a refugee. He lives in a strange land and struggles to learn a new language. He misses his old friends and tries to fit in. In an email Mikhail shared his prayers with us: “I pray that I don’t have to feel lonely anymore. I pray that I can make contributions to the world. I pray to be free from this anxiety and depression. I’m exhausted.”

Most of us are not refugees. We don’t know what it’s like to be uprooted by military conflict or persecution. We don’t have to run for our lives. But many of us still know what anguish, anxiety, and loneliness are all about.

In Psalm 139 we read about the God who searches for us and knows us. God’s love goes far beyond geographic distances, political borders, and human circumstances. God

knows our needs perfectly and cares about us. He sends his Holy Spirit to comfort and guide us in our search for peace, even if we have to cross difficult and unfamiliar terrain.

When we feel hurt, when our situation looks bleak, when we are haunted by dark, anxious thoughts, let us remember that we are not alone. Our loving and caring God is always near. He is able to help.

Turn to him, seek his face, read his Word, and he will lead you in the way everlasting.

Our searching and knowing God, please guide us as we seek to walk with you. Help us to be your faithful followers in good times and bad. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

TAKE IT EASY!

God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all [his] work. . . .
—Genesis 2:3

Nick is a small-business owner. He runs a restaurant. He opened it a few years ago, and he is still spending countless hours improving its operations and managing the staff. “There’s only one problem,” Nick admits. “When Sunday comes, I have no time or energy for the church.”

We all live in a world that pushes us to run faster and work harder. How does your calendar look? Do you have time for God and for your spiritual welfare? Do you have time for your loved ones and for the ministry of your local community of faith?

In the Bible we discover the God-ordained rhythm of life. God the Creator labors for six days and rests on the seventh. We all need regular time off to rest and be spiritually recharged in God’s presence.

The concept of biblical shalom, or peace, is all-encompassing. It includes inner wholeness and tranquillity. Such harmony is unattainable if we routinely ignore our spiritual and physical rest.

Sabbath can be described as God’s “reset button” for us. Resting is central to wholeness because God uses his holy day to restore our shalom. Let us not forget about our spiritual and physical rest as we search for meaning and inner peace!

Father, thank you for teaching us about the healthy patterns of work and spiritual rest. Help us to stop running so that we can take time for you. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

THE PEACE OF GOD

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."
—Matthew 5:9

In A.D. 989 the once powerful Carolingian Empire lay in ruins. The collapse of central authority had led to increased violence. Bloody feuds and local wars broke out in much of the area where France is today. That's when local church ministers proclaimed "*Pax Dei*" ("The Peace of God"), granting shelter from violence for people who could not defend themselves—peasants, clergy, and many women and children. *Pax Dei* prohibited nobles and their guards from invading churches, burning houses, beating people, and so on. If anyone broke those rules, they could be excommunicated from the church.

From a humble beginning, this church-led movement spread through Western Europe, surviving in some form for about 200 years. Today it is con-

sidered one of the first mass peace movements.

Nearly a thousand years before *Pax Dei*, Jesus preached "Blessed are the peacemakers" to the shock and disbelief of his listeners. In those days many of his fellow Jews dreamed of rebelling against the ruthless occupation of the Roman Empire.

The call to make peace was difficult in Jesus' day and in the Middle Ages, and it is still difficult today. Yet Jesus inspires his faithful followers to seek peace, for that is God's way of restoring us to himself and making us his children.

Heavenly Father, thank you for making us your sons and daughters. Inspire us to become your peacemakers. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

PRINCE OF PEACE

To us a child is born. . . . And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

—Isaiah 9:6

During the week of Christmas 1914, as World War I raged in Europe, guns and artillery at several points along the western front fell silent. It has been reported that roughly 100,000 British and German troops participated in informal ceasefires, especially on Christmas Day. As German soldiers lighted candles and sang Christmas hymns, the British responded by singing carols of their own. Mass fraternization in no man's land followed, and some groups exchanged Christmas presents while others played impromptu games of soccer.

Tragically, hostilities resumed shortly after these holiday celebrations. The fighting continued for four more years, killing and maiming millions.

Against the background of humanity's wars, our biblical passage for today comes across

as both striking and hopeful. Looking forward to the coming of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah calls him the Prince of Peace. When Jesus came to live among us, he broke down the walls of hatred that separate us from God and from each other. His death on the cross was the ultimate payment for peace.

And this is not some kind of brief truce. The finished work of Christ guarantees the permanence of God's blessing: "there will be no end" to the peace he brings. Do you know the Lord's eternal peace?

Lord and God, fill our hearts and lives with the assurance of your eternal peace. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

THE PEACE OF CHRIST

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts . . . as members of one body. . . . And be thankful.
—Colossians 3:15

My grandmother Natalia was one of the most peaceful persons I have ever met. I recall that as a young boy I often took her kind personality for granted. Looking back on her life now, I cannot help wondering how she managed to escape bitterness and resentment throughout her life.

Her younger years on a collective farm in Russia were tough. In her teens she endured the war, Nazi occupation, hunger, hard labor, and suffering. Later, after moving to a city, she was injured in a work-related accident and lost the use of her right hand. Even so, she remained cheerful and thankful to the end. How can this be?

There's an answer in today's Bible reading. The apostle Paul talks about the Christian calling to peace and thanksgiving. For him, these attitudes do not depend on happy life

experiences or special training. Peace and thanksgiving come through Christ alone.

When Christ's peace rules in our hearts, it changes us and our view of the world. It gives us strength to meet our challenges with grace and humility. And no matter what—we are called to be thankful.

I'm convinced that my grandmother had the peace of Christ in her heart. Each of us can experience this peace too, if we humble ourselves before God. Do you have this peace?

Heavenly Father, help us to humble ourselves and receive the peace of Christ. Teach us how to reflect your peace in this world with grace and thanksgiving. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

LOVING OUR ENEMIES

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. . . ."

—Matthew 5:44

A dear friend of our ministry shared this story: She grew up in the Netherlands during World War II. During the Nazi occupation of her homeland, her Christian family was ordered to house a young German officer. Understandably he was an unwelcome enemy.

One day the young man received a small package from Germany. He was so excited—his mother had sent him warm woolen socks! Something moved in the hearts of his unwilling hosts. In the midst of the war's hatred, death, and suffering, they could see a human soul in this enemy. They invited him to church, included him in their family devotions, and led him to Christ. On this small front, Christian love dealt a blow to the hatred of war.

Our Scripture reading today highlights a seemingly impossible command: "Be perfect

. . . as your heavenly Father is perfect." Jesus sets before us the ideal of perfect love, God's standard that we must always strive for. God knows that we often tend to demonize our enemies. But he wants us to see humanity in them, to overcome evil with good, and to wear down hatred by showing love.

As we walk in Christ, we are surrounded by all kinds of people. We must remember that we are called to love not only our friends but also our enemies.

Lord, in the bright light of your perfection we see our imperfections. Fill us with your Spirit, that we may learn how to love others, even our enemies. In Jesus, Amen.

GOD'S WORLD AND NUCLEAR WARFARE

The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. . . .
—Psalm 24:1

In 1983 the ABC television network carried one of the highest-rated TV movies in United States history. More than 100 million people watched the initial broadcast. President Ronald Reagan and his military chiefs were given an advance screening.

It was the movie *The Day After*—a fictional story about a military conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union that escalates into a full-scale nuclear war.

In 1987 *The Day After* was shown on Soviet TV. I remember watching it as a teenager. It terrified millions of viewers and had a profound impact on attitudes toward nuclear weapons.

Today the talk about potential nuclear strikes is back. But much of the fear seems to be gone. Curiously, many people

seem more concerned about the dangers of peaceful nuclear energy than about the threat of a nuclear conflict.

The Bible teaches that we should not murder. Human life is priceless. The Bible also calls us to care for God's creation. This world belongs to God, and we are its stewards.

Seeing God's workmanship fills our hearts with praise and thanksgiving. It also partially reveals God to us and encourages us to seek him further. What a terrible sin it would be for humanity to destroy the earth in a nuclear holocaust.

Lord, thank you for this world and the life you give us. Help us to care for and to guard human life and all the rest of your creation. Amen.

NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE

"Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?"
—Luke 18:7

"No justice, no peace." You may have heard this slogan in the context of antiracism protests.

In January 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "There can be no justice without peace, and there can be no peace without justice. . . ." King spoke these words in connection with a protest about the Vietnam War and concerns about civil rights.

In our Bible reading for today Jesus tells a parable about a widow who keeps pleading to a judge because he will not give her justice. The widow doesn't give up. She resists the judge's unfair treatment by way of peaceful persistence. She keeps coming to him with the simple plea: "Grant me justice against my adversary." And eventually the judge caves in. Reluctantly he says, "I will see that she gets justice. . . ."

Jesus uses this story to reveal something important about God. God is the complete opposite of an unjust, dishonest judge. God hears and responds to our prayers, promises to bring about justice (though it may not be right away), and gives us his peace.

Father, thank you for hearing our prayers and giving us your peace. As we seek peace and justice in this world, guide us to rely on you, acting with grace and peaceful persistence to help bring right where there is wrong. In Jesus, Amen.

SEEK HIM!

If . . . you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul.

—Deuteronomy 4:29

"I can't stand Sundays!" Maria wrote to us angrily. She shared that on Sundays she often felt lonely and empty because many of her friends were busy with their families and churches.

Maria is a single woman with no church affiliation. She is unhappy about her situation. She says she tried dating in the past but didn't find the right man. She also went to a few churches but felt that they weren't good enough either.

In our response to Maria we suggested that perhaps she shouldn't focus mainly on searching for the right man or even the right congregation. The Bible teaches that everyone's main concern should be about seeking the Lord first. That's the initial step on our journey to peace and happiness.

In our passage for today we hear a call to seek the Lord. This prophetic word was originally spoken to God's people who would be scattered in exile many years later. The call is followed by a promise that those who are earnest in their search will find the Lord.

Please note that the act of seeking God is more than just a first step or a phase in our spiritual growth. Rather, it is a lifelong quest. The continued search for God, leading to the deepening experience of his love, is the foundation of our inner peace.

Father, lead us to you in faith, obedience, and love. Guide us each day and teach us to be fully committed to you. In Jesus, Amen.

BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS

He himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier. . . .
—Ephesians 2:14

Anton reached out to our media team with some challenging questions: “Where is God when different races and ethnic groups are fighting? Why is he doing nothing to stop the hatred?”

Anton’s inquiry touches on a hot topic. Humanity seems to be getting more fractured day by day. Barriers are popping up here and there and everywhere. Culture, race, language, religion, politics, the economy—so many things separate us and often pit us against each other.

Political scientists are talking about the rapid balkanization of our world. This term refers to the Balkan States in eastern Europe that divided into several small nations in the late 20th century. It points to the breakup of a large region or state into smaller entities that are hostile to one another.

In our Bible reading today, we are reminded that Jesus miraculously broke down the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles. Jesus, “our peace,” creates one humanity out of distinct groups. This unification happens because of our reconciliation with God through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.

If we want to promote peace in our communities, we need to remember that reconciliation starts with Jesus. He has restored our relationship with God the Father, and he calls us to be reconciled with one another.

Lord Jesus, guide us in bringing our diverse communities closer. Help us to discover that reconciliation happens through believing in and following you. Amen.

FINDING PEACE IN CALAMITY

Though . . . the fields produce no food . . . yet I will rejoice in the LORD . . . in God my Savior.
—Habakkuk 3:17-18

After watching the daily news, our media listener Natasha shot us a note: “How can I find peace and joy in the midst of what’s going on today?”

Perhaps you find yourself asking the same question as you follow the news or receive a worrisome personal update. How do you respond to bad news and reports of trouble and struggle in so many places? What happens to your walk with the Lord?

Today we turn to one of the most powerful affirmations of faith in all of Scripture. Faced with news of an upcoming war, the prophet Habakkuk anticipates food shortages and hunger throughout the land. But in the face of such calamity, he declares that he will still rejoice in God his Savior. External circumstances are not going to stop him from finding personal peace and joy in the Lord.

As Christians, we can rejoice in the midst of the most challenging circumstances because of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Even in the toughest of times—such as having to look death in the face—we know that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

In the midst of bad news and hard times, never forget that God loves us, no matter what. By his Spirit he comforts us. He is always in full control of our lives. That joyful reality gives us peace even in the most difficult of times.

Lord, thank you for being with us always! Give us strength to rejoice in you, no matter what troubles we face. Amen.

FULL DISCLOSURE

*"Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division."
—Luke 12:51*

Abdullah is a young man who lives in a predominantly Muslim country in central Asia. Several years ago he lost his parents and two of his siblings, so at times he feels very lonely. His family members did not die, however. They and other Muslim relatives turned away when Abdullah became a follower of Jesus.

Sadly, Abdullah's story is not uncommon. Many Christians throughout the world suffer from strained family relations because of their faith. Even if we live in a religiously tolerant society, we can experience rejection or misunderstanding by family members, friends, and neighbors because we follow Jesus.

Our reading for today may sound shocking, but it rings true for many Christians. Jesus is being fully transparent here. Having faith in Christ will bring

divisions and disrupt our relationships with relatives and friends who are not believers. Faith gives us many blessings, but it can also strain our relations with loved ones.

Jesus knows what we are going through. He personally experienced misunderstandings by family members and friends. He sends his Spirit to give us inner peace, and he encourages us to reflect God's love to all who do not understand our devotion to him. The Spirit guides us daily. And once he breaks down people's resistance to God, our relationships are easier to repair.

Father, thank you for your Spirit, who comforts us when we are rejected because of your name. Help us to witness to all who don't know you. Amen.

GOD'S UNFAILING LOVE

Neither death nor life . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. —Romans 8:38-39

My grandfather Ivan fought in World War II as a machine-gun operator. He was badly wounded in a battle. He survived, but for a long time it seemed as if his Christian faith did not.

He grew up as a Christian but claimed to have lost his faith after seeing the horrors of war. Yet toward the end of his life he began reading the Bible to his wife, my grandmother, who had become very sick. And he rediscovered God's grace and found peace with Jesus.

Our passage today reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God that comes to us through his Son, Jesus Christ. Neither death nor life, nor supernatural powers, nothing in the present nor the future, not a single created thing—nothing can separate us from God's love!

Many Christians who formally accept the teaching of God's love may still have fears about losing God's salvation and favor. But even in the midst of the most terrible struggles of life, we can be reassured that the Lord is with us. Gently he is holding us in his hand. When God loves us in Christ, he loves us forever.

Have you put your trust in God? Have you found his peace?

Father, we praise you for your unfailing love for us in Jesus Christ. With your Spirit make us lean on you fully as the Creator and Sustainer of our faith. Amen.

HOPE FOR THE WOUNDED HEART

Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise. —Jeremiah 17:14

Yesterday I shared about my grandfather who had fought in World War II and was badly wounded. A shell exploded close to his position, and he was hit with many pieces of shrapnel.

Later, in a makeshift hospital, a surgeon took out the bigger shell fragments. But smaller ones were left in my grandfather's body for the rest of his life. As a result, he had difficulty passing through security scanners because pieces of metal under his skin would set off alarms.

Most of us do not experience such dramatic events in our lives. But we may carry bits and pieces of our traumas from the past. In our media ministry we often hear from people who cannot enjoy their life fully because of severe hurts they experienced years ago. Their

wounds can still set off alarms in their daily living.

The Bible teaches us to turn to the Lord in every situation—particularly in our hurts and struggles. Though we may be in pain or feel haunted by old memories, God is closer than we realize. Like the prophet Jeremiah, we can lean on the Lord in faith.

Intellectually we may know that the Lord heals and saves. But when we trust him fully, his salvation and peace become our personal reality.

Father, set us free from the burdens of old traumas and bitter memories. Give us a heart of praise by assuring us of your love and salvation in Jesus. Amen.

NO JESUS, NO PEACE

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."

—John 14:27

To me, one of the fascinating things about the English language is homonyms—words that sound the same but have a different spelling and meaning. A good example of a homonym phrase is in the saying "No Jesus, no peace—know Jesus, know peace."

Besides being a catchphrase for a t-shirt or bumper sticker, this statement reflects a profound biblical truth. In tumultuous times we long for peace, but without Jesus such inner harmony is impossible.

In today's passage Jesus calls on all who love him to obey his teaching. This obedience comes as a direct result of knowing Jesus and fellowship with him. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives in order to keep us securely grounded in the teaching of Jesus.

The peace that Jesus promises is much more than a wish for an end to war, or even for emotional calm and quiet. Rather, it brings an inner tranquillity and harmony rooted in the very essence of our caring Savior.

The power of the peace that Jesus gives us is such that we don't have to be troubled or scared. Regardless of what may be happening in our lives, we can be at peace because we know that the love of Jesus is always stronger.

Father, we praise you for peace that we can enjoy in your Son, Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.

PEACE WITH GOD

Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. . .
—Romans 5:1

As a Jehovah's Witness for almost 40 years, Ilya tried his best to earn salvation and find peace with God. But one day he heard a Christian radio program about salvation by grace through faith in Christ. For Ilya this was an eye-opener. He started studying the Christian Bible and visited a local Christian church.

Today he is a committed believer, professing Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. He says that studying the Bible has helped him finally find peace with God.

In our verses for today the apostle Paul explains that through faith in Jesus, we have a sinless record, as if we've always obeyed God's righteous standards. This ushers us into a place of friendship, unity, and peace with God.

Our sin separates us from God. No matter how hard we work,

we cannot bridge the gap that separates us from God the Father. All our good deeds aren't enough to bring us to the point of being at peace with God. Things such as our religious background, our ethnicity, or our cultural heritage cannot make us right with God either. We are too weak, too sinful, to free ourselves.

But the Son of God can set us free. We find real peace when we wholeheartedly believe in and follow the teaching of Jesus Christ. Have you found God's peace and hope in Christ?

Heavenly Father, we praise you for your grace in Jesus Christ. Open our hearts and minds to your truth. Give us your peace and hope. Amen.

PEACE WITH OURSELVES

“Those who find me find life and receive favor from the LORD.”
—Proverbs 8:35

Oksana, a young tennis player, dreamed of winning a particular competition. She trained diligently for many months, and her hard work finally paid off. She became a champion.

But her joy was short-lived. “I’m always hard on myself. I don’t know how to be happy with who I am,” Oksana shared with our ministry in an email after her victory.

Do you have a nagging feeling that keeps telling you that you don’t measure up? Too many people go around thinking negatively about themselves. They keep noticing shortcomings and weaknesses in their personality. They have a constant battle going on inside them.

In the book of Proverbs, wisdom is sometimes personified as a guiding attribute of God. Our Scripture for today encourages us to seek God’s

wisdom, because those who find wisdom will receive life and favor from the Lord.

If we don’t have the assurance of salvation in Christ, we need to seek his face, calling on the Lord to lift us out of our sin and misery so that we can have life. The Holy Spirit uses our restless hearts to direct us to God. By faith and in repentance we can lean on Christ to discover his peace.

And throughout our lives as believers, we need to be reminded that we are not finished yet. God is still working on us. As we lean on Jesus for guidance each day, he won’t disappoint us.

Heavenly Father, grant us your wisdom so that we may know your peace and enjoy life to the full. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

PEACE WITH OTHERS

Encourage one another . . . live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.
—2 Corinthians 13:11

An orchestra conductor was taking a leisurely walk when he suddenly felt assaulted by the sounds of poorly played musical instruments. The off-key noises came from a building that housed a church.

Ready for a fight, the conductor went inside to complain. The source of the racket turned out to be a rehearsing church orchestra. But the people he met were friendly, humble, and apologetic. Instead of fighting back, they invited him to stay for the service.

For the first time in his life, the man heard the gospel preached. The beautiful harmony of God's grace moved his heart to repentance. He became a Christian and joined the church a few months later.

Today we are reading the closing words of the apostle Paul's second letter to the

Corinthians. In this very personal letter, we see the depth of Paul's relationship with the church in Corinth. We also get a glimpse of some challenges to his spiritual leadership there. Yet at the end of this letter Paul speaks of mutual encouragement and of living in peace with one another. The peaceful relations in the community of Christ are part of the fuller experience of God's love.

When we reflect God's love to others, we experience more than just peace in interpersonal relations; we grow in our understanding of God's grace and receive his amazing peace.

Father, help us to reflect your peace in this world with grace. And may we keep growing in our experience of your love and peace. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

THE ARMOR OF GOD

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God. . . .
—Ephesians 6:10-11

When my wife's colleague Petro was conscripted into the Ukrainian military service, his family and friends began collecting money for a special project. They decided to buy him the best body armor system they could afford. In addition to prayers, that was their way of showing that they cared and wanted Petro to return home alive from deadly combat.

The Bible contains many military-related words and descriptions. It explains that the Christian life involves spiritual warfare and that we must take our stand "against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

In Ephesians 6 the apostle Paul uses battle armor as a metaphor to show that we can be equipped by God to be victorious and protected against evil. But our armor and weapons

are very different from what the world would expect. The armor of God includes truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and the salvation found in God's Word.

The apostle calls us to be brave and to rely fully on God in battle—and our victory is assured. All we have to do is hold to the love of God in Jesus Christ, who invites us to be part of a victory that he has already won.

Lord and Father, you know our struggles and the battles we fight. Strengthen our faith in the gospel of peace, and give us courage to fight the good fight. In your Son's name we pray. Amen.

HOW TO BE CONTENT

Be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." —Hebrews 13:5

Our ministry friend Yulia lives in Ukraine. She shared with us how the recent war in her country changed her perspectives on life and faith. One change was an acute sense of God's closeness. "When you wake up in the morning, you are so thankful to be alive. You know that the Lord is near, and you can't stop praising him," Yulia wrote.

The Bible calls us to be content with everything we have. Our family, health, meals we can share with loved ones—and, of course, life itself—all are precious gifts from the Lord. But discontent distracts us from appreciating and treasuring the precious gifts God has given us so generously. Greed robs us of our inner peace and harmony with God. Fears make our faith feeble and our hearts small.

Let's be honest—we don't know what the future holds.

We might have to go through some painful experiences and difficult times in life. Or perhaps right now you are in a difficult situation that brings you pain, sorrow, and tears.

No matter what happens, we are assured as God's children that the Lord will never leave us. We can count on his continuous love and care. God is always near. He is our helper and our peace in this perilous and unpredictable life.

Father in heaven, thank you for being our reliable helper and protector. Fill our hearts with peace and contentment through Jesus, your Son. Amen.

GOD'S GLORY

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. —Romans 8:18

An old friend of mine, a committed Christian, was recovering from an excruciating chemotherapy treatment. When I visited with him, he smiled and joked a lot. But at one point his face became serious. "I'd like to live for as long as God wants me to. But I'm not afraid to die, because I know Jesus," he said.

Our reading for today is a powerful passage in which the apostle Paul discusses living, as a Christian, through the suffering that often comes as part of our fallen humanity. The apostle knows what pain and suffering are all about. So he is addressing this topic both personally and theologically.

Paul maintains that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." This does not minimize the pain we are going through. Rather,

it elevates the much more outstanding glory to come.

How can Christ be glorified in us through our suffering? By our declaration of our love for him, by our trusting in his faithfulness, by our holding to the peace of God despite our pain and struggle. The Spirit always helps us—even if we don't know what to do and how to pray about our situation.

In your suffering remember that God's grace is real. Nothing can separate you from his love in Christ Jesus.

Our Father, encourage us with your Spirit when we go through difficult times. Even in our suffering remind us of the glory you have prepared for us in Christ. Amen.

OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

—Psalm 46:1

Ann, a dear supporter of our ministry, worked as a nurse in a mental-health hospital in the Netherlands during World War II. She shared that as the war drew to an end, their hospital had to be evacuated to save the patients from extermination by the occupying Nazi forces.

This story would make for a gripping movie. Under bombardment in a freezing rain, a handful of young nurses had to take care of hundreds of patients with mental disabilities. The women worked hard and prayed a lot. Ann told me they had to fully rely on God for their deliverance. The evacuees finally escaped and were transported by train to safety.

Most of us have been spared from experiencing something so dramatic. Our lives seem to be much safer and secure.

But let us not forget how dependent we are on God. Today's passage reminds us that the God we rely on is "our refuge and strength"—our help in every kind of trouble. Our situation may change drastically for the worse, but the Lord will always be near. Psalm 46 declares that even if continents break up and sink beneath the surging sea, we need not be afraid. What a powerful statement of faith!

No matter where we live or what kind of life situation we are going through, our souls are secure in the protection of the Lord.

Father, we thank you for being our refuge! When difficult times and circumstances come, we can trust in your faithful love and protection. In Jesus, Amen.

THE LIVING WATER

"The water I give [you] will become in [you] a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
—John 4:14

A media listener from Russia shared with us how he found himself in a spiritual desert after his wife left him. He became depressed and started drinking heavily. But getting drunk didn't quench his inner thirst at all. Fortunately, he heard the gospel message on the radio. That was his first step toward finding healing and peace with God.

In our passage for today Jesus talks with a woman in Samaria about water. He discusses drinkable and living water. Fresh drinking water is a precious resource. Everyone needs it to survive. But Jesus says that the water he gives brings life. He provides living water that wells up within us to eternal life!

Many Old Testament passages speak of thirsting after God as being famished on a hot day and needing a cool drink.

God is called the fountain of life and the spring of living water. In our reading today, living water refers to eternal life. Once we satisfy our spiritual thirst with living water, we will never thirst that way again. The Lord provides this living water in our souls so that we can draw upon it continuously.

If we feel lost in a spiritual desert, only Jesus can show us the way out. Only he can quench our thirst for God and give us the gift that satisfies the deepest desire of our souls.

Lord, thank you for spiritually refreshing our souls with living water through Jesus and by your Spirit. Help us to share this wonderful gift with all the thirsty people we meet. Amen.

PEACEKEEPERS FOR CHRIST

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

The United Nations peacekeeping effort first began in 1948. Since then, UN peacekeepers have participated in 72 missions worldwide, a dozen of which continue today.

As Christians, we are called to be peacekeepers as well. This calling comes in the context of biblical advice on exercising love in action. In Christ we are called to be both genuine and practical in our love. That is done through devotion, humility, generosity, spiritual enthusiasm, empathy, and hospitality.

As the apostle Paul discusses these things, he urges us to “live at peace with everyone.” And he qualifies this by saying, “If it is possible” and “as far as it depends on you.” We need to be realistic about the effects of sin on our relations with others.

The UN peacekeepers’ first mission operation was to main-

tain the ceasefire during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Forty years later the UN peacekeeping force received the Nobel Peace Prize, and their mission in the Middle East is still operating today.

Realistically, living at peace with everyone at all times may not be possible for us. But we must strive for peace in our relations with others. It’s a life-long calling that at times may be tough and unglamorous. Yet in our peacekeeping we have a prize to look forward to: God’s peace and favor.

Lord, may we love others as you have loved us—with compassion and care. Give us wisdom to be peacekeepers in our daily relations with others. Amen.

PEACE AND HOLINESS

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy. . . .
—Hebrews 12:14

For many years ReFrame's Russian-language ministry has been producing a talk show called *The Difficult Questions*. In this live radio broadcast we answer listeners' questions about the Bible and Christianity.

But sometimes we hear from people who have a complaint rather than an inquiry. One caller recently shared that her family left the church because the congregation had many bitter divisions and fights. The woman said that these conflicts weakened her faith.

In our Bible reading for today the author of Hebrews urges readers to "make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy." This is not an optional short-term activity but a necessity that requires our lifelong commitment. People who are at peace with God are responsible to pursue peace in their relationships with others.

You see, when we seek peace with others, we somehow mirror the likeness of God. In our love and friendships people see a reflection of God's glory, and we personally grow in Christ.

The same is true about our personal holiness. A lack of holiness leads to sin that separates us from God. It also makes us a poor witness, and we can become a stumbling block to others who are searching for the Lord and seeking to grow in faith.

Do you know the Lord of peace? Does your life reflect that?

Father, guide us to reflect your peace and holiness in a way that is pleasing to you. Help us to be faithful witnesses to others. Amen.

THE GOSPEL IN A NUTSHELL

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. . . .
—John 3:16

The siege of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) was one of the longest and deadliest sieges in recorded history. During World War II, Nazi forces held the city hostage for over two years, severely disrupting supply lines. This resulted in a terrible famine, and over 800,000 civilians died.

People who survived the siege no longer took their daily bread for granted. Even years later, they would feel anxious about food shortages and sometimes resort to hoarding. They would also get really upset when they saw food wasted or played with.

Today we are focusing on what is probably the most famous verse in the Bible—John 3:16. It has been called “the gospel in a nutshell” because it summarizes all that God has done for us. But in some parts of the world this verse has become

so familiar that its profound meaning is sometimes overlooked or taken for granted.

To people who are aware of their need for God, this text is as valuable as a loaf of bread to a victim of famine. Propelled by his love for humanity, God the Father sent his one and only Son to save us. Now those who believe in him are saved from death and destruction—they “shall not perish.”

Let us treasure this truth every moment of our lives!

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son to save us. Knowing Jesus puts our hearts at peace. Help us to live a life of thanksgiving for your salvation! Amen.

MAKING PEACE WITH MORTALITY

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
—2 Timothy 4:7

Are you at peace when you reflect on your own mortality? Though our life with Christ will never end, we know that our journey on this earth is not going to last forever. One day we will stand in our Creator's presence.

In 2 Timothy 4 the apostle Paul reflects on this important meeting. His thoughts about the end of his life on earth are filled with stirring emotion and striking imagery. He is honest with us in his sadness, just as he is strong in his Christian hope.

As Paul reflects on his years as an apostle of Christ, he uses language from the sports world. Paul says he has successfully finished the race and has observed all the rules—the teachings of Christ. He has kept the faith, and now he is ready to accept his award—the crown of righteousness.

Throughout his ministry Paul has trusted in his Savior. He is doing the same now as he nears the end of his life on earth and looks forward to a new adventure in God's presence.

When our life on this earth runs its course, will we be able to say we have fought the good fight and kept the faith? Will we receive the crown of righteousness? Only by God's grace can we be faithful, credited with Jesus' righteousness and crowned to live in his presence forever.

Father, help us always to be prepared to meet you. Lead us in your way always, and make us worthy in Christ to receive the crown of righteousness you have in store for us. Amen.

THE MOST INCREDIBLE PEACE

The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:7

During this month in our reflections on peace, we have dug into the Scriptures and human history, dived into our memories, and revisited some of life's most challenging experiences. We have prayed and contemplated. In this world filled with wars, violence, and pain, we have sought to find God's shalom.

Today let's look again at some verses from Philippians 4. Paul wrote this letter from a jail in Rome, where he was awaiting a verdict from the imperial court. Despite the sad circumstances of Paul's imprisonment for Jesus' sake, this letter is often called his epistle of thanks and joy.

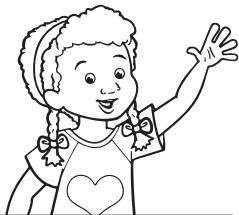
In our verses today Paul calls his readers first of all to "rejoice in the Lord." It's a command that he repeats: "Rejoice!" The reason for this unyielding joy is simple: the Lord is with us. In

the person of Jesus Christ and through his Holy Spirit, the loving God is never far away from his children. Paul also reminds us to be gentle and caring toward others. That's how we reflect Christ to them. And he encourages us not to be anxious about anything but to trust in the Lord completely, presenting our requests with thanks.

When we live with joy, gentleness, thanks, and trust in the Lord, the incredible peace of God fills us. It "guards [our] hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Have you found his incredible peace?

Merciful God, thank you for being near. Teach us to rely on you. Lead us to live with joy, gentleness, and trust in you, and fill us with your incredible peace. Amen.

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