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Peace: A Five-Day Devotional

Malinda Fugate

Day One

Jesus, Tamer of Storms

Mark 4:35-41

The howl of the wind drowned out every sound except ominous thunder crashes. Thankfully, the sky flashed frequently with lightning- though too close for comfort, it illuminated the otherwise cave-black darkness. But those bright glimpses revealed the desperately worsening situation- their boat was sinking in the middle of the sea.

At this particular moment, the disciples were a teeny tiny bit stressed out.

Our worlds are miles and centuries apart, yet we find ourselves relating immensely with the pounding fearful hearts of these ancient fishermen. Their trip across the Sea of Galilee was routine. They'd been sailing their whole lives and encountered plenty of challenges, weather or otherwise. Yet, they found themselves suddenly in an emergency. Our own setting might lack the smell of fishy salt water and our feet might be planted on solid ground, but so familiar is the moment when business-as-usual becomes a crisis. We think we have everything under control when the unexpected turns our world upside down.

Let's rewind a little bit and find our disciples with Jesus back on dry land before their stormy journey began. Mark 4 describes the Sea as a lake, and the reason they were there was for Jesus to teach about the kingdom of God. Ah, what a relaxing setting right? Maybe. Maybe not. The crowds were so big that Jesus had to get in a boat and teach from the water while everyone listened from the shore. His teaching was filled with parables, creating a mix of intrigue and confusion. These passages don't mention any conflict, but with a crowd so large, we can assume the reactions to Jesus' message were varied. Conflicts with religious leaders often stirred up trouble, so the disciples must've been on high alert with such a large crowd. What a relief when the sun began to sink below the horizon and the band of brothers could slip away with their dear friend Jesus to safety on the other side of the sea! They could finally let their guard down, relax, and ask personal questions about the sermon of the day.

And then the storm came, a doozy of a squall that filled their souls with panic. This was beyond their capabilities and they sincerely expected that their lives would end that night on the violent waves. All the while, their beloved Jesus slept. He must have been so exhausted after a whole day marathon of teaching, because the chaos did not stir Him from His deep slumber. It wasn't until the disciples interrupted His nap in hysterics that He addressed the dire circumstances.

In that moment, while the wind knocked the breath out of their lungs and the pelting downpour soaked their tunics, Jesus got up and spoke directly to the elements.

“Quiet! Peace! Be Still!”

And then silence.

The wind was calm. The storm immediately ceased. Luke describes the miracle in chapter eight of his gospel, describing the raging waters subsiding and a peace over the sea at Jesus' rebuke. The disciples had done all they could to handle the disaster and landed at a place of helplessness. The storm was overwhelming them. But the Son of God is master of wind and waves and came to their rescue. He eliminated the threat and took into His own hands what was beyond the abilities of His friends.

Our storms come in many varieties, but we can cling to the comfort that Jesus also counts us as friends (check out John 15:15). Psalm 121:4 tells us that God is not sleeping, but watching over us. Christ, our Friend and Brother, is not oblivious to the storms raging around us. Scripture does not say that Jesus was oblivious to the extreme weather and failing boat. However, He had knowledge that the disciples did not. He knew how things would turn out, He was aware of the limitations of the vessel, and He considered the skills of the fishermen with the strength of the storm. Most of all, Jesus knew His own power and care for His friends. This could be why He asked them, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" After all they were learning about the character of the Lord and His care for them, would they remember His mighty faithful hand in the midst of the crisis?

We modern day disciples follow the same pattern as our Biblical brothers. We recognize in clear hindsight where God was working out everything for our good. But our memories are short and trust hindered when the wind blows, rain splatters in our faces, and the thunder and lightning overwhelm our sensibilities. Yes, our emergencies are extremely serious and our stressors are substantial. Their validity remains, but a peaceful trust can still thrive in the midst of a raging squall. Where our capabilities end, the Lord can and will step in to handle the circumstances. His timing will not be a moment too late (despite our limited perspective). After all, His point of view includes past, present, and future. He knows the exact moment to intervene and how long to allow us to stretch and grow. But He is right there in the sinking boat with us, He has not and will not abandon us.

The disciples and Jesus continued to sail across the water. The storm no longer harassed them, allowing them to peacefully reach the shore. And then? They immediately encountered a demon-possessed man. After that, they were back in the boat and arrived in a town with persistent crowds seeking healing and the death (and new life!) of a young girl. Much was required of the followers of Christ. The storm had been momentarily calmed, but stressful situations never ceased. Perhaps the difference was an increasing trust in their Savior and a reassurance that they were safe because Jesus was with them.

Jesus said He would never leave or forsake us (Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 13:5-6, and so many more). He is a calmer of storms- part of His character that will never change and remain the same yesterday, today, and forever. There is not a single circumstance in our lives that extends beyond His capabilities and control. We are securely held in the hand of God, close to His heart. From here we can hear Him say, "Peace. Be still."

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Day Two

Be Still and Obey

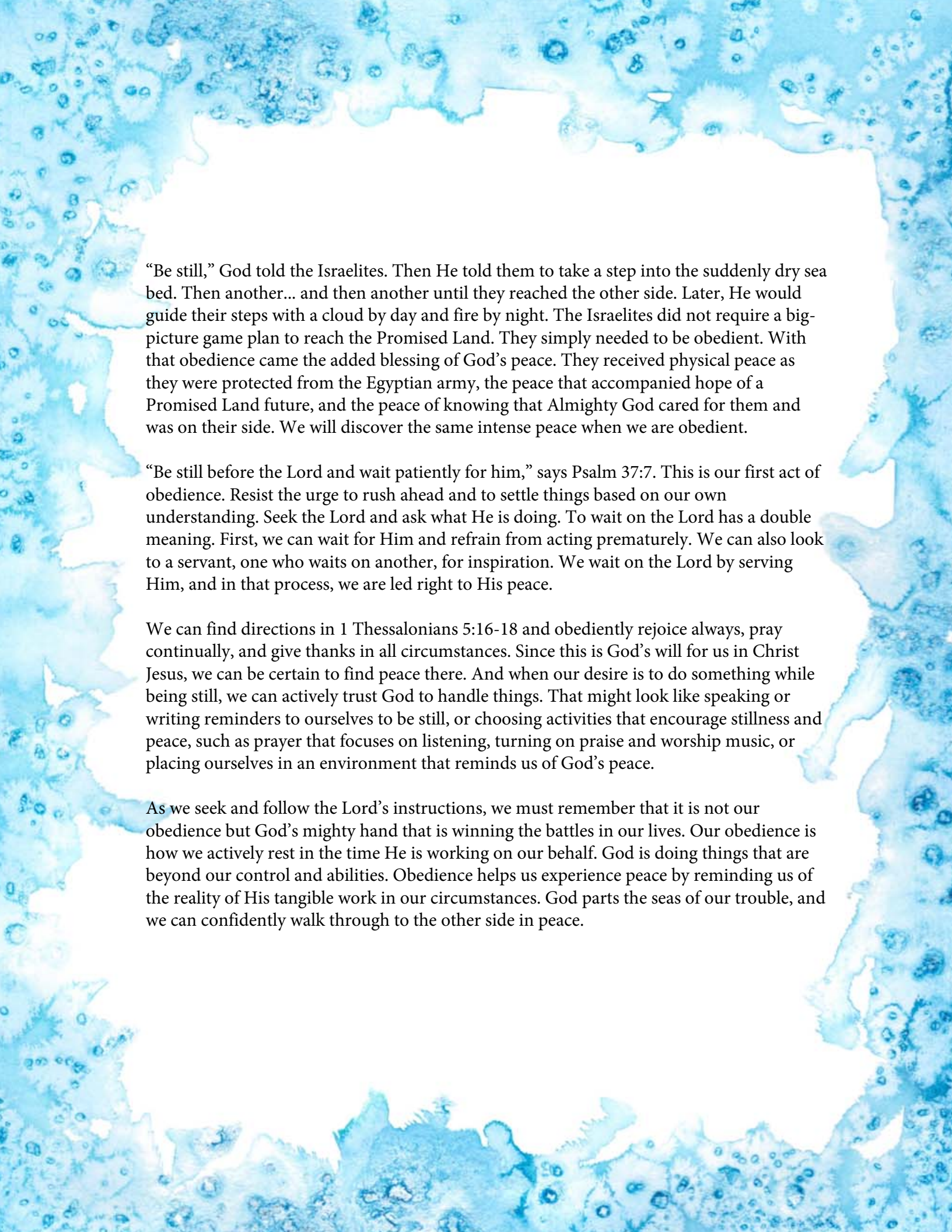
Exodus 14

They were stuck between a wet and a sandy place. Sandwiched between the deep Red Sea and the dry wilderness, the Israelites saw the cloud of dust rising above the pursuing Egyptian army. There was nowhere to hide as their end drew near. They weren't equipped to win a battle, even if the women, children, elderly, and livestock weren't present. Regrets about leaving Egypt were useless at this point; all that was left was desperation.... and the miraculous.

Their loving Lord did not rescue them from Pharaoh's oppression merely to allow them to be destroyed in the desert. Where the Israelites saw the end of the road, God saw a scenic route. He instructed Moses to lift his staff, and once the obedient leader followed instructions, the Lord moved in a mighty way. He sent a powerful wind to blow back the water, creating a dry path to safety on the opposite shore. The salty sea water rose up on either side of the newly-formed road as each man, woman, child, and animal stepped on solid ground. The miracle was astounding.

The Egyptians, however, were steadily approaching. Did the Israelites have time to wonder at their stroll through the sea bed, or were they fleeing in panic? Once all of God's people were accounted for on the shore, God instructed Moses to stretch his hand out over the sea once more. The walls of water came crashing down to fill the sea to its natural depth, drowning the enemy soldiers and chariots. The threat was halted, the pursuit ended, and the Israelites could breathe more easily in relief, their hope at the Promised Land no longer hindered by fear of Pharaoh the slave driver.

As He would do many more times over the course of history, God fought for His beloved people. In Exodus 14:14, He tells them, "The Lord will fight for you; you must be still." He continues to fight for His dear children still today, telling us only to be still as He works all things for our good (Romans 8:28). Such a simple directive appears easy to follow, but our humanity longs to step in and take action. Impatience and insecurity drive our attempts to fix things ourselves while a lack of trust and an abundance of doubt urge us to quickly address problems on our terms. But this approach steals our peace, the peace with which God longs to surround us.



“Be still,” God told the Israelites. Then He told them to take a step into the suddenly dry sea bed. Then another... and then another until they reached the other side. Later, He would guide their steps with a cloud by day and fire by night. The Israelites did not require a big-picture game plan to reach the Promised Land. They simply needed to be obedient. With that obedience came the added blessing of God’s peace. They received physical peace as they were protected from the Egyptian army, the peace that accompanied hope of a Promised Land future, and the peace of knowing that Almighty God cared for them and was on their side. We will discover the same intense peace when we are obedient.

“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him,” says Psalm 37:7. This is our first act of obedience. Resist the urge to rush ahead and to settle things based on our own understanding. Seek the Lord and ask what He is doing. To wait on the Lord has a double meaning. First, we can wait for Him and refrain from acting prematurely. We can also look to a servant, one who waits on another, for inspiration. We wait on the Lord by serving Him, and in that process, we are led right to His peace.

We can find directions in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and obediently rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances. Since this is God’s will for us in Christ Jesus, we can be certain to find peace there. And when our desire is to do something while being still, we can actively trust God to handle things. That might look like speaking or writing reminders to ourselves to be still, or choosing activities that encourage stillness and peace, such as prayer that focuses on listening, turning on praise and worship music, or placing ourselves in an environment that reminds us of God’s peace.

As we seek and follow the Lord’s instructions, we must remember that it is not our obedience but God’s mighty hand that is winning the battles in our lives. Our obedience is how we actively rest in the time He is working on our behalf. God is doing things that are beyond our control and abilities. Obedience helps us experience peace by reminding us of the reality of His tangible work in our circumstances. God parts the seas of our trouble, and we can confidently walk through to the other side in peace.

Day Three

When Chaos Persists

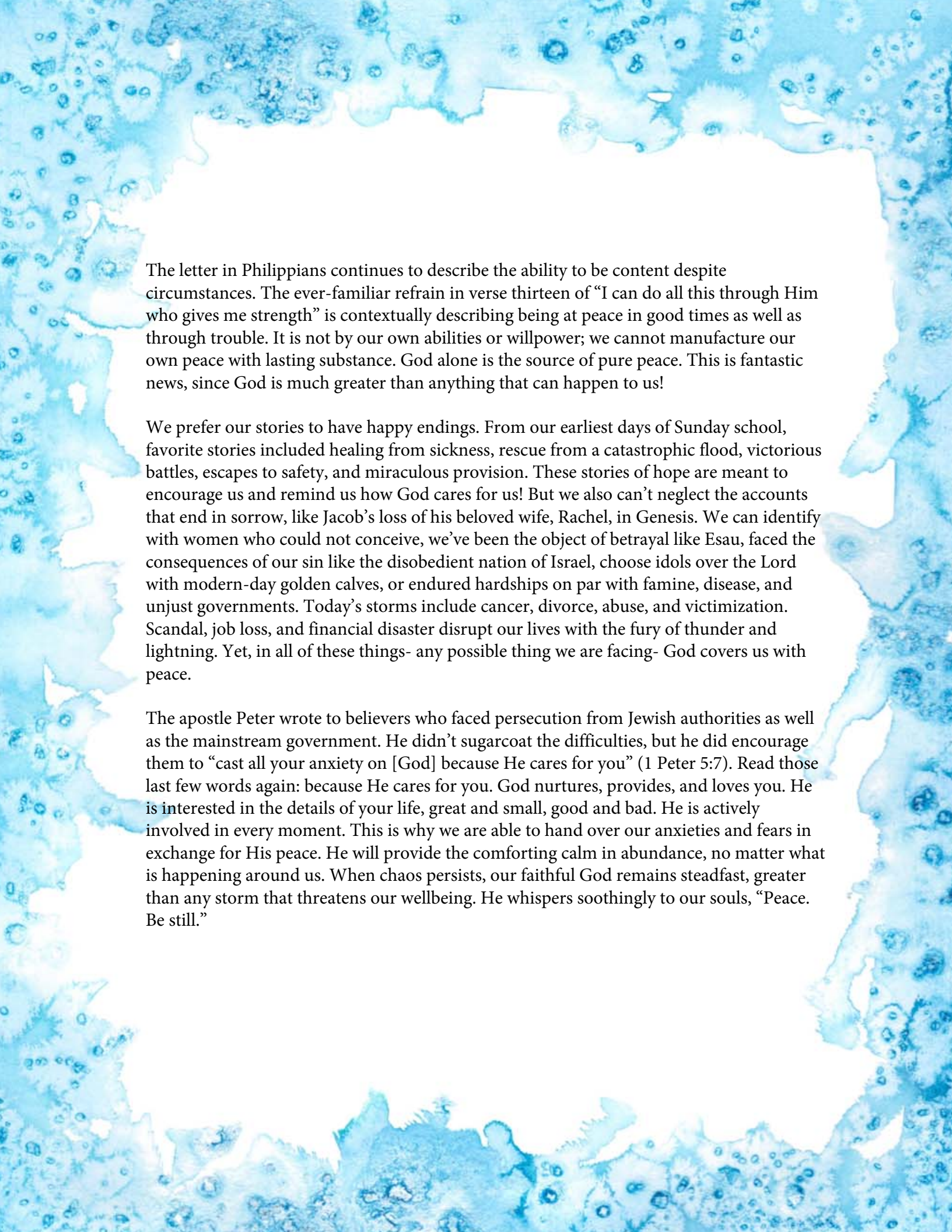
Philippians 4:4-13

The constant reminders whisper at us from mugs and bumper stickers. They are gently delivered by well-meaning friends. All the scriptures that reassure us that things will be ok and God is at work are at the front of our mind as the storms rage and waves don't part. Where is our peace when the answer to our prayers is "no" and situations grow worse instead of better?

Paul knew about persistent hardship. He personally summarized his journey in 2 Corinthians 11:16-33. Despite his hard, obedient work for the Lord, he found himself persecuted, beaten, and imprisoned. He survived three shipwrecks, endured hard labor, lost sleep, faced starvation, and was exposed to the harsh elements of nature- completely naked. In later letters, he describes a "thorn in the side," a chronic ailment that God allowed to remain a hindrance in Paul's life. The apostle was not boasting of his own survival skills here. He wanted believers to know that he understood life's difficulties and could relate to their various struggles. Paul was not preaching from a place of comfort and ease; these were messages from the trenches. So when Paul discusses peace in his letter to the people of Philippi, it is not conditional. The peace of God is not reserved for after the miracles. It is not our reward for reaching the other side of the raging sea. God also gives us peace in the midst of the chaos.

The last chapter of Philippians closes a letter written from yet another imprisonment. Verse four rings out with an unexpected sentiment in his circumstances- Rejoice! And have this joy always! It was so important that he echoed it with enthusiasm- Rejoice! How is this possible? Verse 5b tells us that the Lord is near. No matter what is happening in our lives, God is with us, right by our side, surrounding us with His love and peace. This doesn't mean we are always happy and in a good mood- chaos, stress, and hardship are difficult and bring complex emotions with them. But, with the help of the Holy Spirit, joy can also exist in the mix when we choose to acknowledge God's wonderful truths that withstand anything life throws at us. Like Paul, we can rejoice always.

Paul continues to encourage us not to give in to anxiety. Instead, we must direct our energy to three things that are now familiar to us. In addition to rejoicing, we are to pray continually and give thanks. "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). This peace doesn't make any sense from our human logic. It is a supernatural gift that is independent of our circumstances. When we direct our thoughts to godly things and obediently follow the Lord, "the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9). The promise of peace is etched into His eternal Word. These are everlasting truths we can tightly grasp in the darkest times.



The letter in Philippians continues to describe the ability to be content despite circumstances. The ever-familiar refrain in verse thirteen of “I can do all this through Him who gives me strength” is contextually describing being at peace in good times as well as through trouble. It is not by our own abilities or willpower; we cannot manufacture our own peace with lasting substance. God alone is the source of pure peace. This is fantastic news, since God is much greater than anything that can happen to us!

We prefer our stories to have happy endings. From our earliest days of Sunday school, favorite stories included healing from sickness, rescue from a catastrophic flood, victorious battles, escapes to safety, and miraculous provision. These stories of hope are meant to encourage us and remind us how God cares for us! But we also can't neglect the accounts that end in sorrow, like Jacob's loss of his beloved wife, Rachel, in Genesis. We can identify with women who could not conceive, we've been the object of betrayal like Esau, faced the consequences of our sin like the disobedient nation of Israel, choose idols over the Lord with modern-day golden calves, or endured hardships on par with famine, disease, and unjust governments. Today's storms include cancer, divorce, abuse, and victimization. Scandal, job loss, and financial disaster disrupt our lives with the fury of thunder and lightning. Yet, in all of these things- any possible thing we are facing- God covers us with peace.

The apostle Peter wrote to believers who faced persecution from Jewish authorities as well as the mainstream government. He didn't sugarcoat the difficulties, but he did encourage them to “cast all your anxiety on [God] because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Read those last few words again: because He cares for you. God nurtures, provides, and loves you. He is interested in the details of your life, great and small, good and bad. He is actively involved in every moment. This is why we are able to hand over our anxieties and fears in exchange for His peace. He will provide the comforting calm in abundance, no matter what is happening around us. When chaos persists, our faithful God remains steadfast, greater than any storm that threatens our wellbeing. He whispers soothingly to our souls, “Peace. Be still.”

Day Four

Come, Holy Spirit, Come

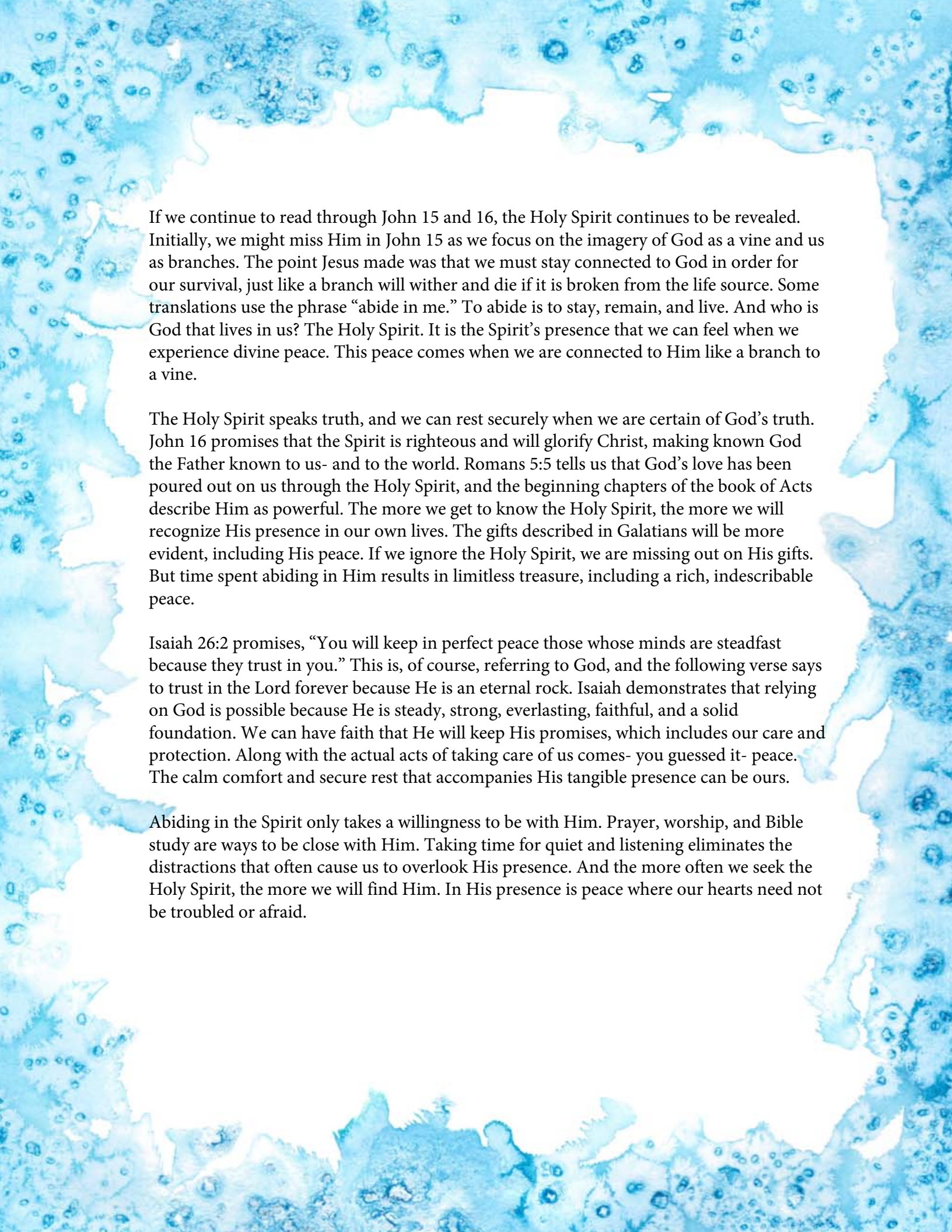
John 14:26-27

When we live in chaos, peace feels unfamiliar. How do we recognize it? God's peace is a calm, comforting clarity like nothing else we encounter on earth. It is reassuring, secure, and a special sort of quiet in the depths of our heart. When we experience God's peace, we feel His love in our very soul. This is the treasure that we seek, and it's only in Him that it will be found.

So how does it work? How does God deliver this supernatural gift to human beings here on earth? We often overlook an important part of the Trinity when our focus is on God the Father and Jesus the Son, but the Holy Spirit is with us daily. His presence is noticeable in qualities that we are unable to produce without Him: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22). Did you catch that third gift? Peace comes from the Holy Spirit. Peace is one way we know the Holy Spirit is present.

The Spirit often feels mysterious. Father and Son frequently receive more attention in our study. We can't physically see the Spirit and we don't completely understand the mechanics of the Trinity with our finite earthly minds. Jesus gave us some insight in John 14. He calls the Holy Spirit an advocate, or helper, who will be with us forever. He calls Him the Spirit of truth that is in us. The Spirit teaches us and reminds us of Jesus' words. In John 14:26-27, Jesus promised a big gift from the Holy Spirit. "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."

In this passage, he is preparing the disciples for the hard times to come. Soon, he would be beaten and killed on the cross, then rise again and return to heaven. These close brothers would be feeling a sense of loss, but the Holy Spirit- God Himself- would remain with them always. Nothing could separate them (Romans 8:31-39). Here is another example of reassurance and God's care during difficulty. Jesus was taking care of His disciples, and the gift of the Holy Spirit extends to us as His disciples today.

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If we continue to read through John 15 and 16, the Holy Spirit continues to be revealed. Initially, we might miss Him in John 15 as we focus on the imagery of God as a vine and us as branches. The point Jesus made was that we must stay connected to God in order for our survival, just like a branch will wither and die if it is broken from the life source. Some translations use the phrase “abide in me.” To abide is to stay, remain, and live. And who is God that lives in us? The Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit’s presence that we can feel when we experience divine peace. This peace comes when we are connected to Him like a branch to a vine.

The Holy Spirit speaks truth, and we can rest securely when we are certain of God’s truth. John 16 promises that the Spirit is righteous and will glorify Christ, making known God the Father known to us- and to the world. Romans 5:5 tells us that God’s love has been poured out on us through the Holy Spirit, and the beginning chapters of the book of Acts describe Him as powerful. The more we get to know the Holy Spirit, the more we will recognize His presence in our own lives. The gifts described in Galatians will be more evident, including His peace. If we ignore the Holy Spirit, we are missing out on His gifts. But time spent abiding in Him results in limitless treasure, including a rich, indescribable peace.

Isaiah 26:2 promises, “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast because they trust in you.” This is, of course, referring to God, and the following verse says to trust in the Lord forever because He is an eternal rock. Isaiah demonstrates that relying on God is possible because He is steady, strong, everlasting, faithful, and a solid foundation. We can have faith that He will keep His promises, which includes our care and protection. Along with the actual acts of taking care of us comes- you guessed it- peace. The calm comfort and secure rest that accompanies His tangible presence can be ours.

Abiding in the Spirit only takes a willingness to be with Him. Prayer, worship, and Bible study are ways to be close with Him. Taking time for quiet and listening eliminates the distractions that often cause us to overlook His presence. And the more often we seek the Holy Spirit, the more we will find Him. In His presence is peace where our hearts need not be troubled or afraid.

Day Five

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Matthew 5:9, Colossians 3:15, Romans 12:18, Hebrews 12:14

We can watch with wonder-filled eyes as Jesus calms the storms in our lives. As we practice still obedience, we witness personal battles being won by our mighty God. And in times of ongoing trials, we continue to be filled with supernatural peace as we cling to the Holy Spirit. We've identified God's peace and described it, but what do we do when we experience it?

First, we can find rest and strength. Psalm 29:11 says that the Lord gives His people strength when He blesses them with peace. The prophet Isaiah paints a cheerful picture of peace from a compassionate Lord that includes even nature praising the Creator (Isaiah 54:10 and 55:12). In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus invites all who are weary to come to Him, and He will provide sweet rest. And Paul writes to the Romans that when God fills us with joy and peace, we then overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13). Yes, when we experience peace from God, we can enjoy it! Bask in it, delight in it, and savor every peaceful moment.

Then, we can share it. Paul instructs the people of the church in Colossae to allow the peace of Christ to rule in their hearts, because we were called to peace as members of one body. Certainly this encouragement is not limited to that group of ancient believers. We, too, were called to be united in the Lord and to live in peace with one another. This is no easy task! It takes effort to avoid quarrels, defer to the interests of other people, and make decisions for the greater good instead of selfish gain. None of these things would be possible without the power of the Holy Spirit- our humanity would make a mess of things if not for Jesus softening our hearts. He is the ultimate source of wisdom, and His ways and thoughts are higher than ours. When, through the Holy Spirit, we align our mind with His ways, we can become peacemakers.

Jesus declared that peacemakers were blessed, and they would be called the children of God. What an honor! There is so much joy in being a child of God, and even more peace to be found so close to His heart. What does it mean to be a peacemaker? Paul tells us that, as much as possible, live at peace with everyone. This requires obedience to Christ's command to not only love our neighbors, but our enemies as well. The writer of Hebrews echoes the sentiment and instructs us to be at peace with everyone as well as be holy. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. This isn't just a nice option, these are godly commands. It's tempting in our individualistic society to regard these verses merely as suggested guidelines that we get along and play nice with everyone. However, the hard truth is that we are called-appointed and chosen- to be makers of peace. We are called to make all of our decisions and base every action in God's unconditional love. Once we have been blessed with His gift of peace, we are not to hoard it all to ourselves. In addition to the personal benefits and strength and rest, we are equipped to carry His peace to everyone we encounter. Yes, every single person, from our best friend to the guy holding up the line at the post office.

Being a peacemaker isn't easy, and sometimes comes at a cost. We might be called to sacrifice the parking spot that was rightfully ours or hold our tongue when treated unfairly. We will certainly need to be in constant prayer, because being a peacemaker requires us to see people and circumstances through God's point of view. That is only possible with His equipping.

How thankful we are for the Holy Spirit to get us through each day! Being a peacemaker is difficult when someone touches on our hurts and emotional scars. We can trust the Lord to guard our hearts while we are obediently overflowing with His peace. None of this is by our own power, dear friend. "May the God of peace sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and He will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). God equips us to fulfill the things He calls us to do, and that includes being a peacemaker.

There's a second part to Colossians 3:15 that we would be foolish to overlook. After the instructions to live in peace with one another, we are told to be thankful. This isn't the first time gratitude has been connected to peace, and we would be wise to pay attention to the repeated theme. It appears that our hearts are prepared for peace when we are actively thankful. Recognizing God's goodness in our lives and responding to Him softens the core of our being. It helps prepare a place for peace to reside in us. It also clears out jealousy, bitterness, insecurity, and other hindrances. When we thank God for meeting our needs and giving us more than just what we need to survive, we cultivate peace. Striving for material things or unmet desires creates unrest within us, clouding our ability to be peacemakers. Practicing gratitude is another step in the process of sharing peace.

Your impact as a peacemaker does greater things for God's kingdom than we are often able to see. As the writer of Hebrews declared that our holiness would reveal the Lord, Matthew 25 illustrates how when we serve others, we serve Christ. Letting His peace overflow from our lives into the life of a brother or sister allows them to experience God's love in a tangible way. What may seem small to us could be life-changing to them. Kind words spoken in a tense situation can turn around an entire day. A seemingly simple gift could fill a giant need. The presence of a fellow child of God has the ability to soothe a lonely heart or even avert a crisis. All of these things bring glory to God, turning the most ordinary day into a celebration of heaven and earth. Indeed, peacemakers are blessed, and so are those they encounter! The peace of God cannot be contained and stored for a rainy day. Instead, it grows and seeps out to bless the people God loves dearly.

Child of God, cherished peacemaker, take the promises found in His word and take them to heart. Allow them to transform your storms into a safe harbor in His loving arms. Invite the Holy Spirit to fill you with His calming, powerful presence. Then go let that abundant peace overflow from your heart and change the world.