



November 2010 Issue
Peace

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A Word from the Editor

Beloved Alisa!

We search through relationships, material possessions and pleasures, desperately seeking the three longings of our souls: Love, Joy and Peace. Little do we know that these three priceless commodities are the first three fruits that the Spirit of God produces for free in every Christian (Galatians 5.25). We desire them because our spirits crave the essence of a holy God.

People waste their time grabbing onto the things of this world, yearning for peace; but they find themselves suffering under emotions of depression, anxiety and worry. Our bodies begin to show the effects of a soul in turmoil. Sadly, Christians are not excluded from this life void of peace. Instead of living a life of victory, we live a life of defeat.

Peace is the absence of negative oppression -- hate, mistrust, worry, fear, insecurity -- that the Enemy tries to suffocate us with. He would like nothing more than to blind us from our destiny, so he will plant unholy seeds of darkness in our lives. But we do not have to grow his seeds of deceit. We can align our lives with God's truth and experience peace that "transcends all understanding"

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(Philippians 4.7).

Peace is more than a feeling or emotion; it is a choice. We can choose to embrace God's peace, or we can choose to accept the Enemy's unrest. A life of peace can be ours, but Christians need to seek it and claim it. God has an abundance of peace for the taking.

The articles in this issue are written by women who desire peace. They sought peace during seasons of stress, worry, heartache, change and even death. They pursued peace, and God filled their spirits abundantly. We pray that you read these women's words and their hearts, and know that there is a God who cares about every life trial you're facing.

"...seek peace and pursue it." -- Psalm 34.14 (NIV)

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A Little Peace of Jesus



"Peace I leave you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives" (John 14:27, NIV).

Rain beat against my windowpane and the wind howled through the cracks and seams of my house. It made me aware of just how quiet the house was when the sky was clear, the air warm, and the only clouds were white and puffy, and not dark and gray. Do you ever feel like peace is as elusive as the sun on a rainy day?

We yearn for it, and desire peace to push away the storms of life -- to return to the calm weather that makes us feel like everything is right in heaven and on my part of the earth. But this isn't to be. Christ went through turbulent storms of His own, and yet He found solace through the pounding rain by clinging to God and by believing they were a part of the bigger picture. That bigger picture was to save us from Hell! If He hadn't endured those storms, I think we know where we would be headed today.

Storms produce perseverance. And just like heating metal to get rid of the impurities, storms weather us and test us, producing marvelous results if we endure. As we stand strong amidst trials of all kinds, remember that Christ went through the same things and still experienced peace. This peace means we trust God and what He's doing is not just to make us suffer, but to utilize what He gave us -- peace through his Holy spirit.

If you are weathering a tough storm right now and peace seems far away, keep searching for it. The Holy Spirit's peace is for the taking if we ask. Expect to receive it, and look for it. His peace may not be exactly what you wanted, but it's what God wants. And because He's omniscient, we have no reason not to accept what He has chosen for us.

Lord, even if I want all of my problems to disappear, I understand it's for my best. I ask the Holy Spirit to grant me peace - despite every storm that comes my way. Amen.

~ Heather Spiva

Heather Spiva is a freelance writer from Sacramento, CA. She loves reading and writing and spending time with her two young sons and fire-fighter husband. Check out more of Heather's writing at her blog [Writer's Manna](#).

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Harvest of Peace



This time of year always brings to mind the seasonal word *harvest*. As nature goes through its seasons, so we do as Christians. As Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 3:1, "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven." (NKJV)

We all have seasons of rain, sunshine, heat, cold, storm, calm, dryness, and flood, plus sowing and reaping. Circumstances come and go in our lives but our aim is to always work toward having a spiritual harvest, no matter what

the circumstantial season.

God once whispered to my heart....

If the ground is not turned, I cannot plant My seeds. A life as a lovely green meadow with its abundance of wild flowers is a fair picture of beauty. But there's more to be had from the rich soil lying beneath the surface blanket of a lovely green pasture. Cultivating this meadow can produce a harvest of fruit, of nourishment, of good things for others.

The Hand of the One tilling the soil is the One Who loves it the most and sees the greatest potential in it for a harvest. The roots of unwanted growth beneath the surface must be ripped out that the ground might be tilled and furrowed. This gives room to accept the seeds of new growth and eventually welcome a beautiful, golden field of harvest, waving its ripened grain in the breeze.

A life in the Hands of the One guiding the plow will display a fruitful meadow. When it is uprooted and turned over, it welcomes the plantings of the Master Husbandman and gladdens the hearts of others with its lovely field of produce.

Hmmm. Roots of unwanted growth. Do you have any? I know I do.

Do you have any of these roots: bitterness, unforgiveness, pride, judging, gossip, complaining, doubt, worry, unbelief, or hypocrisy?

No? None of that? Then, is the field of your heart filled with the roots of too many duties, meetings, appointments, errands, children activities, church obligations, or work, work, work?

Do you have seasons, sometimes long seasons, of trials, heartaches, or grief?

To counter these roots, what seeds are you sowing? No matter what the circumstantial season, no matter how difficult it may be, if it is not accompanied by one thing, we will be miserable. And that one thing is...Peace!

If we are filled with sin or the anxieties of life and make no time for sitting at the feet of our most Beloved for intimate conversations, then our peace is seriously at risk. Paul exhorts us, as he did the Roman believers, that "to be spiritually minded is life and peace." (Rom. 8:6 NKJV)

What kind of harvest do we each want to see in our lives? Success? Health? Stable relationships? Love? Joy?

If those are your desires, what seeds have you sown to produce those things? What harvest is coming up around you? Not what you'd like? Is it time to check those seed bags? Paul wrote to the Galatian believers, "Don't be misled-you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant." (Gal. 6:7 NLT)

What did Jesus say to His disciples? "I am leaving you with a gift-peace of mind and heart! And the peace I give isn't fragile like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid." (John 14:27 TLB)

The greatest seed we sow is our seed of time in fellowship with the Husbandman, and we reap the benefits, the fruit, the harvest of His presence and His peace. I love these two versions of James 3:18, "People who work for peace in a peaceful way plant a good crop of right-living." (NCV) "And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness." (TLB)

What rolls around in your head making an uproar, disturbing your peace? Are you taking time to sit at the Lord's feet or have you put Him on a waiting list?

I pray the same for all of you what Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, "Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all." (2 Thess. 3:16 NKJV)

~ Lynn Mosher

Born and raised in a Christian home in Kentucky, Lynn Mosher has been a believer since the age of 11. Lynn lives with her husband of 44 years in their empty nest in Kentucky. On occasion, the three offspring, who have flown the coop, come to visit, accompanied by a lovable son-in-law, daughter-in-law, and three precious granddaughters. During this time, the Lord placed the desire in her heart to write for Him. She now writes in obedience and, in addition to devotionals and inspirational writings, which can be found on her blog [Heading Home](#), she is putting the final touches on her first book.



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The Problem of Peace



Peace is harmony and quiet confidence experienced in challenging circumstances. What makes it such a problem to experience peace? We gain valuable insights when we look back at the woman who had peace at its fullest.

I have a friend who is a gardener, and her straight rows of dark green leaves and crayon colored vegetables make me long for a garden like hers. It's hard to imagine the Garden of Eden, a place where "the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Genesis 2:9). God's

garden was beyond our imagination, filled with everything for life, including a menagerie of animals to provide company for His caretaker, the man unmarked by disease or stress or need. It was a place of peace.

Know What You Want?

Into this garden God placed our predecessor, Eve, and welcomed her into perfect harmony. With all this from His hand to her fingertips, how could she want more? This woman had no need to work out, get a facial, or take supplements. She was perfect, except she was easily convinced she knew what she wanted and needed better than her Maker. We're so like her, thinking we really know what we want. Why do we find our mailboxes stuffed with glossy advertisements, home pages popping up with ads, and billboards flashing images as we hurry from place to place? We're easily enticed and convinced we're missing out. Thousands of years and lots of clothing later, we still want something "better" than what life has dealt us.

With all Eve had how could she crave more? When God set loving boundaries for the first couple (Genesis 2:16-17), He said man would begin dying, destroying the peace, if he transgressed. As cunning Satan appeared to Eve, he came as a garden creature, not a surprise to the outdoors woman. When he began to pry at her confidence in God's provision and intentions, she began to uproot herself from the peaceful garden paradise, and generations of women to follow were torn from tranquility with her.

We Think We Know

When my son was five years old, we were missionaries in Asia, living in a crowded city filled with noise and pollution and poverty. One quiet afternoon when the air was hot and heavy, we packed towels and toys, sunblock and snacks, water bottles and balls and drove toward the sea. We found sand wrapped around the coastline like an Easter dress ruffle and set up for a day of perfect peace. As we watched bright fish in turquoise water and felt the breeze of palm trees, we enjoyed the tranquility away from our city. Noise gave away the presence of monkeys, lured by hanging fruit nearby. Like any other child, Jacob was enticed, moving closer to the animals. Warning him against advancing closer, we were curious to see the monkeys boldly moving to the treeline, calling from high branches and dancing around tree trunks. Jacob laughed in pure enjoyment.

Moments later, the monkeys shrieked at Jacob, now between the animals and beach. The tranquility was gone. When was the last time you decided to pursue something you thought you really wanted,

despite the warnings from God's Truth urging otherwise?

Our son thought he knew what he wanted and decided to get it. He thought we were withholding fun from him. The troop didn't appreciate his calls, storming him from the jungle, sending Jacob screaming to the safety of the ocean. Since their intimidation worked, the monkeys retreated into the jungle, but our young son was left with deep impressions that **pursuing what you want isn't all it's cracked up to be**. The peace we enjoyed was lost.

~ Julie Sanders

Julie is a pastor's wife, mom, women's ministry director, writer, and Bible teacher who is so thankful for God's divine intervention in her life through 20 years of marriage and over two continents she's called home. She loves to teach God's Word and write about how His peace covers each day. Check out Julie's almost daily blog, [Come Have Peace](#), and her Marriage Mondays for more encouragement and info.

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The Worrying Mother-to-Be



It's hard to believe that this year of waiting is almost over. This past winter, my husband and I found out that a third member would be added to our family. Now, we have only a matter of days before we meet our little son or daughter. This little one is already beginning to change my life. As my tummy gets bigger and my back continues to curve, I can feel the weight bearing down on my hips. Aches and pains change the way I walk, sit and sleep. It's an ever-present reminder of the changes taking place.

Our old craft room now has a crib in it with sheets and a growing pile of clothes that will eventually have to be cleaned. My husband and I are starting to talk about reorganizing our house to make it more child-friendly. The teapots that have always sat so cutely on my little green shelf are being moved much higher, the cleaning solutions will soon be regulated to a locked tub or cupboard, and before long, child-locks will be installed throughout the house. Already, so much of our life revolves around this little one!

I can hardly wait for that day in the fall when our child will enter the world, and we'll finally find out if it's a boy or a girl. It will be such a blessed day.

At the same time, I worry. I worry about the house being ready in time. I worry about the process of laboring this little one into the world. I worry about all the decisions that we'll have to make at the hospital. I worry about those first few weeks home from the hospital -- if I'll be up to the task of being a mom. I worry about raising this child so that he or she, too, will come to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I have such a large task ahead of me.

It seems like every day I find something new to worry about. While I love the idea of being a mother, some days I get weighed down by all the worrying. I get weighed down by all of the unknowns.

And, once again, I have to lay all those worries at the foot at the cross.

"Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall" (Psalm 55:22 NIV).

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7 NIV).

Over the years I've turned to these verses over and over again. It seems as if there's a constant battle warring away inside of me. It's so comforting to be reminded that God is ready and willing to take each of those worries, big and small. The verses above promise that God "will never let the righteous fall." Yes, I'll fail in small ways, but ultimately, God will be there each step of the way, helping me through each battle I face. Why? Because he cares about you and me. I'll never stop being amazed at the thought that the Lord of all Creation cares for little me.

How wonderful. How amazing. And more than that, he truly cares about the little things that I worry about each day. He understands my anxiety over having a child, and daily reminds me that he will be there every step of the way. All that he asks is that I surrender those worries and allow him to replace them with something wonderful, peace.

"The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace" (Psalm 29:11 NIV).

The Lord blesses us with peace. Isn't that an amazing thought? It makes me wonder why I fight so hard against that peace in my own life. Perhaps I think I can handle life's worries better on my own. But that isn't true at all. There's really no better place to be than wrapped in God's arms of peace. But still I fight it, telling friends and family about my worries instead of handing those worries over to the only person who can actually take them away from me -- God. It's as if I daily need a reminder of how wonderful God's perfect peace really is.

"You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you" (Isaiah 26:3 NIV).

Do you ever struggle with finding peace in your own life? How do you replace your worry with peace?

For me, what works best is to pray about each specific worry, every day if I have to, and ask God to replace that worry with his perfect peace. The result is such a wonderful thing.

The worry of having a child will continue for the rest of my life, I'm sure. But at the same time, I'm learning just how wonderful a peaceful life is. When I'm at peace, it starts in my heart and ends up as a smile on my face. This peace gives me joy and influences the way I treat my husband and those around me. When I'm at peace, I get a lot more done throughout my day and find myself sharing that peace with those around me. That peace is something I'm willing to reach for, each and every day.

With that peace, I'm able to face the unknowns of having a child with the assurance that God will be there each step of the way. With peace, the future really isn't quite so scary.

~ Megan K. Chaney

Megan K. Chaney lives in Colorado with her Air Force husband. She loves spending time outside in God's creation, sipping lattes, and blogging. In 2008, she received her Master's in English from the University of Dayton. Since then she's happily taken up the role of housewife, soon-to-be mommy, and freelance writer. Her work has been published in Student to Student, Proverbs 31 Magazine, Granola Bar Devotionals, and The Secret Place. Visit her blogs at www.latteloverdevotions.blogspot.com & www.deployedheart.com.



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Spiritual Decluttering



I'm on an organizing streak....

- I'm decluttering my bookmarks on the computer -- transferring all the sites I want to remember onto index cards which are put in a categorized index card box.

- I'm decluttering my computer desktop -- backing up files onto CDs then deleting things from the desktop that I don't need.

- I'm decluttering my home to some extent, determining what things I really want to keep and what can go and organizing in the process.

There's a freeing feeling I experience when I clean out my email inbox or declutter a space in my home. I don't know that I can really describe it; just that I feel better...lighter somehow. Maybe you know what I'm talking about. By getting rid of clutter, I feel freed up.

As freeing as this process is for me, there's another decluttering that is far more important and yields lasting results. It supersedes emptying email inboxes, organizing a computer desktop, or freeing up space on a bookshelf. I call it spiritual decluttering and it results in a mind at peace. Let's take a look at what spiritual decluttering is and why it is so important.

What Is Spiritual Decluttering?

Psalm 62:8 tells us, "Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge." (NIV) Pouring out our hearts to God -- releasing emotions, concerns, and feelings to Him -- is spiritual decluttering. It's a process of clearing out or unloading those things that are compiling inside of you.

Why Is Spiritual Decluttering Important?

Spiritual decluttering is a crucial process. If we let too much time pass without addressing things, they can slowly compound -- just like that growing stack of papers on the desk that threaten to fall on the floor everywhere. If we don't address the pile of stuff inside of us, it can spill over into other areas of our lives and affect others around us. In addition, peace can seep away as we find ourselves wrapped up in our own internal stuff. Spiritual decluttering is a way to allow God to bring that peace back into our lives, lightening our load and freeing us up.

An Example

Let me illustrate this concept with an example. Imagine you have a gallon-size pitcher of cold, iced tea. When that pitcher is full, it is heavy. If you're not careful, when you pick it up it is extremely easy for the tea to spill all over the floor. Each time some of the tea is poured out into a glass, the pitcher gets lighter and the chance of spill lessens.

When we pour out all our emotions, thoughts, feelings, and concerns to God, like that pitcher being emptied of its contents, we become lighter and lighter as we empty ourselves of those things, truly releasing them to God, and trusting them in His care. As a result, we not only experience more freedom and can avoid a major spill all over the floor of our lives, but we also find ourselves more at peace.

Do You Need to Do Some Spiritual Decluttering?

Are you feeling heavy like that full pitcher of iced tea? Are thoughts, emotions, feelings, or concerns piling up, causing you to feel weighted down? Are you having accidental spills on the floor of your life? Would you like to be freed from the weight and experience more peace? Then it's time to declutter sister! Why not unload it to God right now? Release it into His hands and trust Him to take care of it all. He is YOUR refuge; a safe place you can run to with whatever is on your mind and in your heart. You can absolutely, completely trust Him with all things.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

I am so glad I can come to You with anything. Lately, I've realized that (talk about what is on your mind and heart and unload it to God). Father, I know that I can trust these things to Your care. Help me release it all to You and let You take care of it all. Please just flood me with Your peace Lord. In Jesus' Mighty and Powerful Name I pray and ask these things, Amen.

~ Karen Lowe

Karen Lowe has a passion for writing in-depth Bible studies and teaching women God's Word. She is the founder of [Truth and Grace Ministries](#), a ministry dedicated to assisting and equipping women in the study, understanding, and application of God's Word. She has had articles published in the [Sanctified Together Publication](#) and [Granola Bar Devotional](#). You can find Karen writing on her ministry [blog](#) and for Truth and Grace Ministry's free online Bible study publication [Growth Points](#).

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The Only Real Peace



Have you ever lost something, maybe a key, an earring, your hand bag? You search high and low for it but to no avail? You begin to get frustrated and angry because you really need this item. Finally, after wrecking your house in search of the lost item, you give up.

Afterwards you sit hopelessly looking at the shambles that you made and there in the most obvious place is the item you're looking for. At this time you're unable to even appreciate finding the item because

you're too busy looking at the mess that you made while looking for it. The sad fact is the item was not really lost. It was there all along. You simply didn't look in the right place to begin with.

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." John 4:13-15

Unfortunately, this is the way it is with life sometimes. The woman at the well was the perfect example. She wanted so much to find happiness, to find love and acceptance. She tried to find it in the arms of men, marrying and separating when they didn't live up to her expectations. Finally, she gave up on marriage after five times, but she still felt empty inside. All of her searching had gotten her nowhere. She was ostracized, hated, and looked down upon because she was searching for something to fill the empty spaces in her life.

The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he." John 4:25-26 (NIV)

Sad isn't it? Often times in our search for happiness, we end up being wounded. Sometimes our wounds are so deep that what we are searching for may be right in front of us and we may not recognize it because we are searching in the wrong places. We look to family and friends and they let us down. We try to find happiness by accumulating stuff and they are destroyed. We may try other things, concentrating on our jobs, losing ourselves in different projects...but none of these things will ever be enough. The only real peace and fulfillment we will ever find in this life is in Jesus Christ.

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him. John 4:28-30.

The awesome thing I've found about Jesus is that when we take a moment to truly listen to Him, we are totally changed. Whatever it is that is going on in our lives when we turn it over to Him, our entire outlook and demeanor is changed and in turn others are touched by what He's doing in our lives.

*The only real peace that I have, dear Lord, is in You.
The only real peace that I have, dear Lord, is in You.
With all life's temptations, I need You, and I know I do.
'Cause the only real peace that I have, dear Lord, is in You.
- The Hemphills*

Lord, help us not to be so busy searching that we do not realize that what we are searching for we have already found in you.

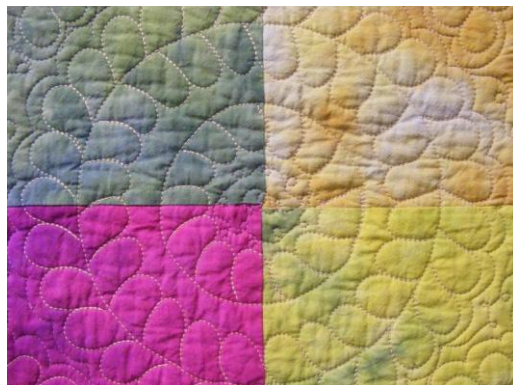
~ Bernadine McIntosh

Bernadine is a thirty something single lady who loves life, loves to laugh and loves her Lord. She has a passion for ministry to young ladies and seeks to point them to Jesus Christ, the one who captured her heart as a teenager. Bernadine can often be found curled up reading a book or writing in one. You can find her at personal blog, [Trusting Him with Today](#), and she's a monthly contributor at [Laced With Grace](#).

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Peace from Scraps



Whirligig

A basket of scraps
 That is what I am
 A piece of me here
 A piece of me there
 Like flying geese scattered
 Everyone pulling pieces from
 This basket of scraps

Beggar's Block

Like vines at the window
 Crayon and Pencil Children want a piece of me
 The laundry Room wants a piece of me
 My man wants a piece of me
 The checkbook, too, reaches and grabs
 My Mother's Dream wants a piece of me
 The Devil at the Window wants a piece of me
 Grabbing pieces,
 From this basket of scraps

Broken Dishes

All pulling pieces
 To fit their design
 Disregarding color schemes
 pattern lines
 quantity
 risking crazy quilt and broken path randomness
 from leftovers in
 this basket of scraps

Star of Hope

God's eyes see me
 Not like mis-matched cups and saucers

Or un-coordinated color swatches
Not as a basket of scraps
Or Party Star Pieces
The Master Designer quilts me whole
into
A Peace Quilt
To wrap around
His children
Quilting me whole
Out of a Basket of Scraps

~ Maryleigh Bucher

A wife of 27 years, a mom of 5 sons, a child of divorce become whole as a daughter of The King. With a BS degree in Journalism and MA in English from Eastern Kentucky University, I taught college composition and home school groups. Author of [Blue Cotton Memory](#), guest contributor to [The Home School Post](#), journalist, poet and creator of Standing at the Cross Roads, a program designed to break/prevent cycles of dysfunction.



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Of Worry, Warts and Bunnies



I don't know about you, but I can be a stress bunny - so much so that my husband bought me bunny ears to wear. I worry about everything. I worry about work, the family, the house, my health. When I make a decision, I wonder if it's the right one. I even worry about the increasing speed of each passing year.

Then God reassured me I don't have to live this way. "*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life...*" He says in Matthew 6:25. God promises many wonderful gifts. He promises us

salvation, eternal life, joy, fulfillment and even peace. The thing about God is that we can trust everything He tells us. So, it's true: I don't have to worry, I can experience joy, I can be content and I can find peace.

So why don't I feel this peace?

The key of course lies in the definition. When God promises us peace, He doesn't mean a sixties movement. He doesn't mean that everyone should agree with everyone about everything. Neither does He mean we should stand back and watch our sister or brother fall because we would rather avoid confrontation or awkward situations. Jesus reassured his disciples in John 14:27 (NIV) - *"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."* It's a peace not of this world, but a peace of the inner spirit that can only come from God and has nothing to do with our worldly situations.

To receive joy, contentment and peace there is only one condition: we must accept these promised gifts by responding to God. It's much like getting a voucher for a free gift in the mail. All we have to do is go to the store to pick it up. Sounds simple enough. But the problem is 90% of those vouchers are never redeemed. It might be because it's inconvenient, we're too busy, we forget about the voucher or time runs out. Likewise, we must redeem God's promises. God's gift of peace is ours for the taking if we turn to God and claim this free gift.

I need to remind myself that there's no need to be a stress bunny or a worry wart. Paul said it best in his letter to the Philippians 4:12-13 (NIV): *"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength."*

~ Lynda Young

Lynda Young is a Sydney-based writer of Christian devotionals and articles. She has been married to her husband for almost 12 years. Lynda gave her life to Christ in her early teens but it's only been in the last five or six years that she started writing about her faith. You can find her at her personal blog, [Fearfully and Wonderfully](#).

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Peaceful Swords



Our world is a colony, established by God to emulate His divine Kingdom (heaven) here on earth. The Holy Spirit is our colonial ambassador, living amongst us, guiding and teaching us in the ways of our perfect King. The Holy Spirit's job is to saturate our world with Kingdom-influence so that God's children will become like their Father. The Holy Spirit is able to lead each person whose sins have been atoned by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Jesus is our Prince of Peace because He is our only link to the King's abundant peace (Isaiah

9.6). God is Holy and faithfully undivided; He is the source of all peace. We cannot fully understand His divine peace until we're on the other side of eternity (Philippians 4.7). Christians have this Source of Peace inside each of us - a gift promised by the resurrected Jesus (John 41.26).

Sin penetrated our special colony, so our environment has become corrupt, our bodies decay and people hurt each other. We live in a world of unrest and conflict. We capture moments of peace only to have them swept away by the tide of disorder. We grope onto pitiful worldly understandings, desperately seeking illusions of peace. But peace - pure and endless - can be found generously within the spirits God breathed into each of us.

Be assured, though, Christians go against the grain of world culture, and we will cause turmoil because of the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus says, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10.24 NIV). Christians will not agree with much of the world-view, and this will create division. We will be spotlighted as Bible-thumping trouble-makers. The colony has declared independence from our holy and perfect King and the heaven we were meant to represent. Indeed, Christian influence will disrupt the world's agenda if we are to stay sanctified (1 Thessalonians 5.23).

However, Jesus also tells us to pursue harmony. He says, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other" (Mark 9.50b NIV). As a church, we need to swallow our pride to keep the peace and put the unity of the Body of Christ above our own desires (Colossians 3.15 NLT). As Christians, we should serve others and eliminate our self-entitlement and our perceived rights. Our goal should be to strengthen the Church, so we can be used by the Holy Spirit to spread His Kingdom-influence.

But how do we know when we should pursue peace or division? When should our sanctified lives sever or unite? When should we be swords or peacemakers?

Swords: We cut away unholy influences with truth to keep the Church sanctified.

Peacemakers: We deny our self-will to promote peace in the Church.

The Holy Spirit lets us know when to separate the Body of Christ from the world's influence and when to lay down our rights for the sake of church harmony. This is every Christians balancing act, and we must be completely submitted to the Holy Spirit if we want to be the peaceful sword that God has called us to

be. God's Truth will build the church and offend the world, and Christians are called to do both. But even as we slice off sin for church sanctification or cut off our personal rights for church harmony, we still have the peace of God in our spirits -- and that's how we become Peaceful Swords!

~ Alisa Hope Wagner

Alisa has a God-given passion to write, and she loves to write about what the Holy Spirit is currently teaching her. She is the founder of [Granola Bar Devotional Writing Ministry](#), which helps publish and share women's faith-story. She writes Christian meditations on her personal website, [Faith Imagined](#). She is also a contributor for [Internet Cafe](#). She and her husband lead a church homegroup and enjoy homeschooling their three children.



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Peace Kept



Peace. What is the first word that comes to mind when you see or hear this word?

Tranquility? Quietness? Calmness? A relaxed state?

What do we try to do to attain those things?

We attempt to de-clutter our outward atmosphere, we have someone watch the kids, we spend money to go to a spa, we try to create that eagle soaring moment; yet, the peace that is of God is not based upon outward

circumstances. The God of Peace is seen as we cling to Him in the midst of the raging storms of life. Much like the eye of a tornado, there is an eerie calm, yet all around the eye is a whirlwind of unimaginable destruction.

I am led to the reminder of all the times in my life when I have seen the peace of God bubble up from within as the peace manifested with great overflowing power. The peace was revealed in the midst of great crisis, which attempted to break me with paralyzing fear. Philippians 4:6-7 and Isaiah 26:3 reveal that there is a keeping power that the peace of God possesses.

Keeping power? When something is "kept," I see it as an object or person being held onto with great gripping power against evident opposition. For instance, when anxiousness attempts to creep in, Paul reminds the Church of Philippi to "Be anxious for **NOTHING**; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, **which surpasses all**

understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7, NASB) [emphasis added]. Although crisis and mayhem are all around, the powerful tool of God's peace guards both our hearts and minds. The revealing power of God's gift is that His peace is powerfully active and our minds cannot grasp an understanding of His keeping power.

When placing the perception of the world's definition of peace and the peace that God provides side by side, we see how opposite they truly are. The peace of the world attempts to create a calm from the outside in; yet, the Peace of God comes from within by the Holy Spirit's power, and overflows onto the outward, revealing the awesome glory of God. The peace is always there on the inside of us if we have the Holy Spirit within us; however, will we allow the gifts of the Spirit to be stirred up within ourselves as we seek His face? When we seek peace, this is where we have gone wrong, for we are not called to seek out the things of God; but we are called to seek out GOD HIMSELF! As we find this out, we realize that the peace is an automatic as we seek the God of Peace.

God's peace leads me to the awe and wonder of Who He is: Majestic, Holy and Excellent in ALL HIS WAYS! The storms of life cannot destroy or annihilate the peace of God, for the peace of God obliterates the fear and anxiety as we cling to, trust in and fix our eyes on God Himself! For He will keep us in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Him, because we trust in Him (Isaiah 26:3)! When we yield to the peace of God, there is a revealing power of trusting in Him for Who He Is!

~ Teresa Stevens Criswell

Encouraging. Passionate. Dramatic. Crazy. Funny -- these words describe Teresa Criswell. She is a wife, mom, writer and has a love of speaking forth God's Word with great encouragement. In her love for the Lord, Teresa shares encouragement through the Word of God and with personal experiences. She inspires others and offers hope in the midst of hopeless situations, utilizing the greatest weapons from God: His Powerful Word and our praises to God. Her love for people reveals a glimpse of the heart of God as she longs to see Truth and Freedom of God transform lives. Teresa enjoys living in Texas along with her amazing husband and two beautiful children. You can visit her at [Triumphant Victorious Reminders](#).



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Peace and Pumpkin Pie



"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Phil. 4:6 (NIV)

We've all heard the cliché, "Stop and smell the roses," but at this time of year maybe we should change that to "Stop and smell the pumpkin pie." Either way, it can be hard to heed that advice. **We are busy people. Busy with planning. Busy with doing. And, as a result, busy with stressing out!**

This is especially true during the holidays. We hurry and scurry, planning and shopping and dragging our harried hearts from one party to another. Retailers have now started offering Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas items in September - all at once - playing on our fears that we might not get everything done in time. We might fall short. We might fail at being the perfect hostess or gift-giver or fantasy home decorator.

It's obvious we need to have more balance in our lives. But deep in our spirit, restlessness often outweighs contentment. We are uncomfortable with stillness. Is it a case of insecurity? **Are we attempting to prove our worth through how many tasks we can accomplish on any given day?**

Consider the story of Mary and her sister Martha. Jesus comes to dinner and Martha is stressing over the details while Mary sits at Jesus feet eager to hear what he has to say. Martha complains and this is what Jesus tells her:

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:41-42 (NIV)

I don't know about you but I empathize with Martha, maybe because I tend to lean toward a Martha mentality. **And, if we're honest, there are days when we all seem to revel in our Marthanness.** Like spinning tops, we dizzy ourselves with "to do" lists until we run out of energy and collapse from the weight of the reality that we cannot possibly do it all. Nor should we try.

Many things are necessary and good and we need to pay attention to details. But we should know when to stop spinning in place so we can move forward. There is a time for everything. A time for picking weeds and a time for smelling roses.

We do have a choice. **We can choose to make peace a priority -- inviting it into our homes and hearts by focusing on the Prince of Peace.**

My prayer is that we would give ourselves permission to rest. To sit at the feet of Jesus. To take a deep breath and ask God to help us enjoy a more balanced and peaceful life. And isn't that what we all desire?

Not the temporary satisfaction of deeds done but the abiding peace that comes from taking time for the eternal -- that better thing that will "not be taken away" from us.

And, now, I think it's time to stop writing and indulge in a piece of that pumpkin pie. Care to join me?

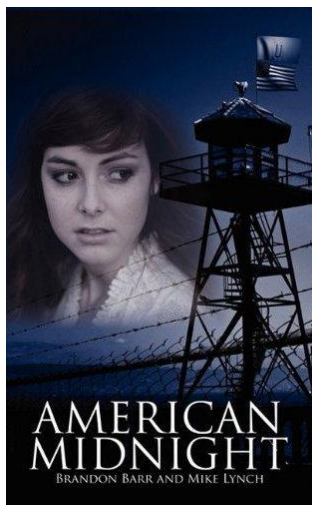
~ Angel Bowles

Angel Bowles is a freelance writer, blogger and dreamer and, in her words, "a deep lover of God, my awesome husband and all things chocolate". She hopes to inspire others by sharing the inspiration she finds in everyday life. Visit her at her blog, [Finding the Inspiring](#).



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Author Interview: American Midnight by Brandon Barr



Author Interview:

1) Your characters were each dynamic and well developed, especially the young female lead. I was able to relate with her so well. Being a man, how were you able to write her so well?

You aren't the first person to ask me this question, and honestly, I'm rather flummoxed myself at how I'm able to do it. However, before writing American Midnight, I did a novella with a teenage girl main character, and it was while writing this first story that I realized I could actually write a convincing female character. In fact, I found it abnormally exciting diving into a young female's mind with all the dilemmas and emotions that rage in a girls heart during that stage of life.

As I observe teenage males and females, I find myself more mystified by males than by females. In once sense girls are more complex than boys, but in another sense they are simpler. A girl is more complex in her range of emotions, more specifically, the way she arrives at those emotions is complex, but the core of those emotions (the root) seems more simpler in my mind. In contrast, a male's range of emotions, and how they arrive at them seems to me more simple, but the core of their emotions is harder for me to grasp, and seem more complex. This in reality might be totally bogus, but that's how I view males and females. For me, writing a complex male character seems much more difficult, because guys tend to be

less complex in the areas that I find easier to write into characters. But, I'm working on remedying that!

2) There was never a dull moment in this book. I was always on the edge of my seat because of the the constant plot twists. Do you enjoy causing physical distress to your readers?

Yes, because distress (or drama) heightens our emotional attachments to the characters in the story, and more importantly, it is in those situations are characters grow and over come. In our own real life distress (pain, suffering, doubting) we ultimately are forced to struggle and overcome, or shrink back and despair. Just like in fiction, trials can show our true character. Will we persevere, or will we give up.

3) When did you know you were called to be a Christian Fiction Writer? How has the journey been so far?

I loved writing short stories as a kid, but I didn't even thing about writing seriously until my senior year of college (2004). I published a few short stories and began giving and receiving critiques at the online writing workshop site. Writing became a very serious hobby, until at last I started to see it as a possible vocation. Now, six years since I started the journey, I see writing fiction as a high calling. Art (music, movies, books, etc.) are major influences on culture. So as a Christian, I want to strive for excellence and create stories that reflect the truth of Christianity. That said, writing is an arduous journey for me. Short stories are fun to write, novels are very very hard. My problem with novels is that I keep changing things around, and I end up re-writing. Since I write with a co-author on most of my novels, that helps me stay focused, but on my solo novels, I'm writing three pages of scrap for every one page I keep.

4) You have another book coming out soon. Can you tell us a little about it?

Yes! My novel After the Cross is coming out next year from Ellechor Publishing House. Here's a [LINK](#) to the site. This new book falls into the adventure/suspense category. Here's the back cover:

At a newly excavated archeological site in Istanbul, Turkey, a discovery is made that is poised to rock Christendom to its very foundation: an 800-year old letter which purports to reveal the final resting place of Jesus' cross. This explosive news is kept quiet at the behest of Vladimir Zarco, a Ukrainian billionaire whose illegal business empire is threatened by the document's discovery. He hastily convenes a team of experts in an effort to discredit the manuscript's authenticity, but when their analysis points to it as being genuine, a bomb destroys the research facility. Zarco orders the surviving researchers to ignore their initial findings, but two of the linguists, Drs. Mallory Windom and Colton Foster, have other ideas. They decide to hunt for the cross on their own, even though mysterious forces seem bent on stopping them at all costs.

Foster and Windom follow a trail of clues described in the letter, only to find themselves battling against time, hired mercenaries, and each other. Despite every obstacle thrown at them, Foster and Windom press on to Sepphoris, an ancient Jewish town where the cross has allegedly been hidden. They soon discover, however, that the most important struggle of their lives is not around them, but from within, testing their beliefs, their ethics, and their growing love for one another.

~ Brandon Barr

Brandon Barr lives in Southern California with his wife and son. He graduated from California Baptist University in 2004 with a degree in English. Since then he's published two novels, with a third coming out in 2011. Besides novels, Brandon enjoys writing short stories, many of which have been published in print magazines and online zines. For more on his stories, check out his website, www.brandonbarr.com and [blog](#). Outside of fiction writing, Brandon's interests include apologetics, softball, and an occasional day at the lake to fish.



American Midnight

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Devotional: Peace



"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7, NIV)

I will be the first to admit that the daily struggles of life often get in the way of having a peaceful, non-anxious existence.

When you get to the point that is when it is time to take a few minutes (or hours!) to sit back and mediate on Philippians 4:6-7.

God wants to be the center of your world - you know this!

When you enter a time and place in your life that has the enemy written all over it, you truly need to spend time with our sweet Jesus! That is what He wants! You will make Him so happy when you do this. You will ALSO make yourself very happy.

Have you ever had a day where it takes a lot of energy to even just smile at someone? Unfortunately, I know we have all had one of those days. Days like that, it is so important that you give thanks and pray...I promise you, your heart will start feeling warm and cozy. You will start to be peaceful.

All of your anxiety and worries will go away...your heart will be guarded and protected by Jesus

Christ...you will feel at peace.

Yesterday, when I was in the midst of having "one of those days," I stopped in the middle of the grocery story (I might have looked like a silly person, but I don't care!), closed my eyes, gave praise to Jesus and asked for Him to grant me some peace and serenity. Within five minutes of doing this, I ran across a person who reminded me how beautiful and wonderful life truly is. This person, thanks to Jesus, pushed my stinky mood aside and granted me peace!

How wonderful and glorious!

God grants us so many opportunities for us to lean on Him for support and peace! (I'm not saying He will put you in a bad mood just so He can pick you up!) What I am saying is to not waste an opportunity you might have to lean on our sweet Jesus, praise Him, and ask Him for peace...peace of mind, peace of heart...anything!

If you are faithful, obedient, and you ask, He will grant it.

After all, that is what He told us.

Do you trust Him with your life...with your sense of peace?

I do. Certainly, I praise Him for that every single day!

Thank You, Jesus, for always being there when I need you, for being faithful to me! Thank You for granting me a sense of peace in my mind and in my heart on a daily basis. Thank You for taking away all of my worries and concerns. Thank You, Jesus, for granting me peace!

~ Camille Billy

Camille has a very strong passion for helping those in need, particularly single mothers/families that are in need. That is what [Baby Pickel](#) does - helps those in need who are in dire need of support - whether it be an open ear or a lent hand (clothes, food, etc.) for their family. With every person I encounter, I strive to show how much God loves each and every person - I pray that I warm every person's heart in some way - her [blog](#), [facebook](#), etc. show this!



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What is Your Valley of Trouble?



It's really amazing what a little unscripted time in God's Word can do!

I was reading up on the various valleys in the Bible the other day, and was specifically reading all of the passages I found to contain the **Valley of Achor**. It's not mentioned very many times in the Bible, at least not from the results of the brief research I did. However, an overwhelmingly refreshing truth was revealed to me in those few little passages I read.

1) Valley of Trouble - Joshua 7

You need to go read this for yourself to get the full picture, because God so beautifully weaved the tapestry of His Word in this chapter. Beginning with the first verse; if you pay close attention to "little" things you may normally skip right over (i.e. genealogy), you will see that He cleverly, specifically, and deliberately ties up near the end of the chapter with some of the same "little" things He used to begin it. Of course, the main point from this chapter that I want to bring out to you here is that in Joshua 7, the Valley of Achor is named because of what occurs in this chapter. The very interesting thing about its name, which I discovered by a tiny footnote in this chapter, is that **Achor** means "**Trouble**." Very fitting for what went on here as well as the fact that it is a valley.

2) Valley of Rest - Isaiah 65

Again, do read this chapter and let it soak in. I love Isaiah. Here in Isaiah, the place that was once known as the Valley of Trouble for God's people is promised BY GOD to become "...**a resting place**...for my people who seek Me" (Isaiah 65:10 NIV). WOW! I'll just let His Spirit do the talkin' to you.

3) Valley of Hope - Hosea 2

Once again, read it! Let Him speak to you! The beautiful thing I found here to tie up this Valley of Trouble is that once again BY GOD this valley was promised to be not only a resting place, but finally a "**door of hope**" (Hosea 2:15 NIV). So precious and refreshing and hopeful!!!

Know this, Child of God...What was once our place of trouble will become a place of Rest and Hope!!!

Trust Him and Believe it!

~ Haelie Heard

Haelie is a follower of Christ, wife, mother of a five-year-old son, and a full-time Nurse Informaticist by profession. Her personal blog is [To Not Decide...Is To Decide](#) and you can also find her on [Twitter](#). She also



writes for and co-administers two other blogs: [Faithful Feet](#) and [What If...](#). Her life mission is to be a voice, both written and audible, that unapologetically points to Christ and His sovereignly redemptive love and forgiveness.

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Peace, Perfect Peace



In this world, perfect peace is just not attainable although moments of peace may glide in and out of our days and evenings. For me, I may experience one of those rare moments when I can sit, listening and watching the migrating birds resting in our trees, or when I can read a wonderful book and become so involved that I am unaware of the world around me. Just this very morning as I drove across the causeway, stretching out over Nueces Bay, a flock of hundreds of white pelicans silently glided through the air to find their winter home in Oso

Bay or other nearby bays here in South Texas. Their beauty, their movement, and their silence gave me an inkling of sweet peace while I watched and even later recalled the sight. Yet, this peace lasts for just a little while before an interruption occurs--traffic, a noise, the bridge.

Perfect peace, while not touchable today, is attainable through our LORD, Jesus Christ. He is the Prince of Peace, the Giver of the true and beautiful peace. He is that perfect peace.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."
John 20:19-22 ESV

Through the Blood of the Cross, our LORD has given us peace. He showed His hands and His side to the disciples, to us, to say that He has gone through this for you, for us. You are forgiven. Jesus says you may have peace as you believe Him, His death, and His resurrection. How can the death of Jesus Christ bring peace? It does through forgiveness and is the only event where true and perfect peace lies.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:19-20 ESV

As I ponder "peace," I quiet my mind, sit still before my God, and ask, "What does 'peace' mean?" The dictionary has words to describe "peace" :

- freedom from disturbance
- quiet and tranquility
- mental calm; serenity
- freedom from or the cessation of war or violence

Yes, these describe "peace" as I know it intellectually. Yet, I want to know "peace" spiritually. LORD, please show me Your Peace. Jesus Christ stands before me without words. He is Peace. He is Perfect Peace.

How can I have it, my LORD?

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD God is an everlasting rock. Isaiah 26:3-4 ESV

His Word tells me to trust and keep my mind upon Him. So when I want to do something my way, or in the world's way, when I am disobedient, when I dwell upon myself, my struggles, everyone else's struggles, I am not trusting; I am not keeping my mind set upon the LORD. I am doing things Linda's way.

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." John 16:33 ESV

How often do we live in the way of this world? How often do we linger on troubles and trials, rolling them over and over again in our minds? Then they find their way to our hearts and settle there for a period. Ridding ourselves of these dwelt upon concerns is a call for prayer and for dependence upon God. But He tells us in the phrase, "I have overcome the world," that His Blood shed for us at Calvary is enough. His Love for us is enough. He has overcome the world. Through His grace we can dwell with Him--He with us. He overcame the world that the world cannot dwell in us. He is here in our hearts. He occupies the whole space. And the Word tells me that "in Me you may have peace." IN HIM ... I MAY HAVE PEACE.

I need to have a right relationship with Him. I need to trust Him. I need to believe. I believe IN Him and what He did at the Cross. And I need to BELIEVE HIM. He tells me the Truth. He speaks to me and answers me. He dwells in my heart. And I need to dwell ever-so-closely with my King. Through this beautiful relationship, I can live in quiet contentment. I can know that His Presence in me creates a quiet confidence no matter what my circumstances, what people are doing in my life, or around me, or even far off in another corner of this world. There is a sense of wholeness, a spring of well-being that permeates through me.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. John 14:27 ESV

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through

Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7 KJV

LORD, we pray for heart-understanding of Your peace, the filling of the Holy Spirit Who gives us rest in You. You are Peace. You are Rest. May Your Blood flow through our veins and reign in our hearts as we learn to trust, depend, and love You wholly and solidly. LORD, may we know You as the Prince of Peace here on earth, that we would be able to experience Your rest now, and be ready for Your perfect peace on that beautiful day. Amen.

For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Isaiah 55:12 ESV

I join in singing and praising! Hallelujah!

~ Linda Gill

Linda Gill can be found these days caring for her 96 year old Mom in the nursing home, loving her husband of 17 years, spending time with the Lord, blogging at [Being Woven](#), or writing for several Christian digital/online publications. She is a retired school teacher and children's librarian, loving to serve, whether it be the nursing home, church, one-on-one spiritual mentoring, tutoring children.



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A Stranger Knocked



On a sunny day in February 1992, a stranger knocked at our door. Although uninvited and unwanted, the stranger moved in and became a part of our lives for eighteen months. Along with the stranger came additional expenses coupled with a temporary reduction in income. Numerous out of town trips were required in an attempt to rid ourselves of this unwelcomed visitor. The stranger's name? Cancer.

When the surgeon told me he suspected cancer in my husband, I felt shock, fear, and disbelief. This can't be happening to us. Not my husband, Lord. I recalled my teenage years when a close family friend succumbed to this disease. Later, several family members lost their lives to cancer.

Physicians assured us John's type of cancer, testicular carcinoma, had a ninety-five percent cure rate. However, he required a course of

aggressive chemotherapy. Over the next five months, he underwent treatments at a leading cancer research hospital, four hours away from our home. On our eighth wedding anniversary, he left the hospital for what we thought would be his last chemotherapy.

One year later, on a routine check-up with his oncologist, lab work revealed the cancer had returned. A CT scan indicated cancer cells in the lymph nodes as well as questionable microscopic lesions in the lungs and liver. The initial fear I had at the time of his first diagnosis was nothing compared to what I felt the second time. John's survival chances were only about twenty-five percent with standard chemotherapy, but physicians consulted with one another, searching for the best treatment options.

John continued to work while we awaited word from physicians regarding the recommended course of treatment. For the first few days, I went through the motions of life, but I felt numb with pain and fear. One morning, I poured my heart out to God. I confessed my fears about the possibility of becoming a young widow. I told Him of my uncertainty over a future without my husband.

Later that day, I began to feel peace. Somehow, I knew that everything would be okay. In my heart, I believed God would heal John in this life, but I if He chose not to, John would be in his heavenly home with our Savior. Jesus told His disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27, ESV) The world cannot understand or experience the type of peace I felt that day.

John required additional high-dose chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant. During the months of chemotherapy and hospitalizations, the peace God gave me on that July day never left. God was my source of strength, my peace, and my hope. He provided our every need -- financial, physical, and spiritual.

Seventeen years later, John and I still thank God for his goodness and mercy. There has been no reoccurrence of the cancer. I have never forgotten the peace I felt during those times -- the peace that passes all understanding.

~ Joan Hall

Joan became a Christian at age ten, but many years passed before she allowed Jesus to be Lord over her life. Now she is passionate about telling others about the abundant life found in Christ. She is married to her best friend, John, and they serve together in prison ministry. Joan leads women's Bible studies and loves writing from her country home in East Texas. She co-leads a writer's group at her home church and has contributed to [Granola Bar Devotionals](#). You can find her at her personal blog, [Reflections](#).

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Max and the Master: A Parable of Peace after Death

There was a Max who had a very special border collie. This was a special dog that he carefully picked

Max and the Master: A Parable of Peace after Death



There was a Man who had a very special border collie. This was a special dog that he carefully picked out and called His own. He tenderly raised the dog with all His love and called him "Max." The collie was the best of dogs and was very devoted to his wonderful Master. When they were together, Max felt content and complete. His heart was settled and satisfied with the great love of his Master.

The family watched as Max and the Master walked away, side by side. They stood and stared until they were just a speck and then out of sight. They hugged each other and cried happy tears for Max, who had finally found his way home.

The Master loved to work in His garden and Max was always right there by His side. But one day Max took a long walk; and before he knew it, he was on a farm quite a distance from home. The family on the farm found Max, and immediately they knew they had found a very special dog. He was smart and obedient. He was helpful and wise. The Dad told his children that this dog belonged to Someone else who would one day be back to find him. But the children begged to keep him, since they saw no one around.

Max became part of the family and many felt that he held that family together, since he seemed to be in charge of everything. Dad needed his help out in the fields and Max was good at chasing away all those pesky varmints. When Mom was feeling sad, Max was always there with a kiss as he snuggled up to her. And the kids, they always needed Max around. He was always getting them out of trouble and always there to lick their wounds. When little Johnny got his foot caught under some rocks, things looked pretty bad. Max almost wore out the pads on his paws moving those heavy rocks, and Johnny needed lots of licking on those cuts.

Max was an important character in that family and he was involved with everything they did. One day when the Master was out for a long walk, He saw Max in the distance on that family's farm. As He approached the farm, He saw how the family loved Max and really needed him. He watched Max

as he helped the Dad, stayed by the Mom's side, and even cared for the children. He saw how the children loved Max, and the Master was glad they really appreciated such a special dog like Max. He decided that for this time, Max needed to be there with them to fill a very special role in their lives. After much thought, the Master slowly made His way home.

Max really appreciated his adopted family and he loved them in a very special way. But he always dreamed about his Master, somewhere out there, far, far away. When everyone was asleep, Max would walk out on the porch and his heart would start to ache for the One who held his heart, the loving Master. It was as if there was an invisible string connecting them, and his eyes would well up with doggie tears. If only he could be in His arms, by His side, safe, secure, and filled with contentment. Suddenly, a cry came from the house. Johnny fell out of bed again. Perhaps Billy pushed him. Max crawled up between the two boys to sleep and once again there was peace in the house.

One day Max was out with family and he looked hard and long into the distance. From far away he saw a familiar sight that made his heart stop. Could it be? His walk was recognizable. Max sniffed the air for a trace of a familiar smell. He fixed his eyes tightly on the Man in the distance. Everyone was quiet as they watched Max. Nothing distracted Max as he watched the Man approach. Was this the moment Dad had talked about? The day Max would leave them forever? Was this Max's real Master?

Max got up and began to move slowly; his eyes still fixed on the man in the distance. Max stepped steadily and surely with his nose sniffing the air, trying to pick up the familiar scent. The children called to Max to stay with them, but Max couldn't hear their voices. Max was fixed on the Man in the distance and nothing else seemed to matter. One of the children ran to grab Max, but Dad held the child back. If this was Max's time, then they had to accept the one thing they always knew -- that Someone else loved Max even more than they did. And that Someone was in Max's heart.

Max's pace began to increase and his steps seemed more sure. His tail was pensive and his muscles tight. He searched for recognition, wondering if this was the moment he'd dreamed of. All at once, Max bolted toward the Man. The Man began to run toward Max with all His might. The children cried and covered their eyes. But Max was exuberant with speed, full of new life and overflowing with hope. Max finally reached the Master and jumped into His arms. The Master fell to His knees and wept over Max, holding his head in His hands, receiving his wet kisses with joy. The Master had held him in His arms and leaned His head on Max's neck. Finally, Max would be His forever.

Max was panting with delight, pressing into the Master's chest, listening to

His heart beat once again. Max was filled with the wonderful scent of his Master, wrapped tightly in His arms, safe and secure, overflowing with love and contentment. At last, Max felt the peace in his heart he had dreamed of and longed for.

The family gazed in wonder, watching Max with his Master, marveling at the joy before their eyes. They remembered Dad's warning that Max was not theirs, but only a temporary blessing, perhaps sent from above. All of them knew the truth -- that Max really belonged to Someone else, Someone very special.

The Master looked at the family and smiled. He reached His hand high in the air acknowledging their love and care for Max. Dad raised his hand high in response, nodding and showing his thankfulness for the special time they shared their lives with an amazing dog named Max. The Master looked at Max with loving eyes and said, "You faithfully served that family with all you had within you, Max. Well done...well done!"

~ Susan Wood

Susan Wood is a founding member of Catskill Mountain Christian Center and has served in compassionate ministry to the homeless of New York City and the victims of the Chernobyl disaster in Belarus. She



worked for Citihope International where she also served as outreach programming director for Christian radio, coordinating a variety of New York City ministries. Susan and her husband, Jonathan, founded the Raptor Project Inc., a rehabilitation and educational effort with birds of prey. Susan, Jonathan and daughter Rachel travel the U.S. on tour each year producing bird shows and exhibits in 28 states. She has been featured on Cornerstone television and CBN. In between road tours, her family divides their time between their New York home and a home on North Padre Island, Texas, where they are members of Bay Area Fellowship.

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I'm Dreaming of PEACEful Holidays



As I turned the page in my daily calendar, it revealed December 1st. Immediately, I could feel the panic, hustle and bustle weighing in on me. How was I going to fit anything else into my already busy schedule?

Don't get me wrong

-- I love this time of year; there is something magical and precious about it. The season beckons family, friends, baking, parties and extracurricular activities, all of which sound dreamy and inviting -- **until** you and your family can no longer function due to holiday stress. And girl let's face it: when you are stressed out, chances are your husband and children are stressed too.

Does this sound familiar? If so, there is good news. Seriously, you don't have to dread the holidays -- you can actually come to love and enjoy them.

Think about what makes the holidays exciting for you? For some families, it is that there are many different activities on the agenda. For others, simple traditions provide the specialness that will be remembered. However, what brings excitement can also bring added stress. To alleviate stress and bring PEACE you will need to plan, evaluate, accommodate, control and enjoy your holidays.

P-Plan. Get out a large calendar and write down every single activity you plan to do or attend now through the New Year. Getting all your holiday school parties, work commitments, family gatherings and traditions down in black and white will give you an opportunity to view your schedule objectively.

E-Evaluate. After everything is written on the calendar, spend some time thinking through the schedules to see what is doable for your family. Evaluate each activity carefully asking yourself: Can we afford this? Are there any scheduling conflicts? Does this activity add stress

to our already busy schedule? Does this activity add value to our holidays?

A-Accommodate. Once you have taken an in-depth look at your family's calendar for the season, it's time to create some give and take. Maybe instead of your child attending three different Christmas parties with his friends, he'll need to pick the one he wants to attend the most. This will give the family more time together, as well as help out with finances. Instead of the extended family having four get-togethers, maybe it's time to scale back to one. Do you need to put a financial limit on the gifts? Or is it time to scale back your Christmas list? Finances are a major cause of stress during the holidays. One thing I've learned is that children are very accommodating, especially when they know the limits.

C-Control. Now that you've decided what will benefit your family and bring peace, it's time to take control. Don't relax your normal boundaries, because that creates tension. Set holiday bed times, making sure the little ones still get enough sleep to avoid crankiness. Monitor their diet. Living off holiday sweets and gingerbread houses creates sugar highs and lows which can cause sibling squabbles -- not to mention Mommy Meltdowns. Maintaining structure within the home will help children handle holiday schedules more effectively.

E- Enjoy. With a little preplanning, enjoying the holidays will not seem like just a dream. It is possible. The holidays are precious times -- perfect for building upon family relationships. Don't let the Grinch steal perfect holiday moments and memories from your family. Plan for them, and expect to enjoy each moment.

PEACE is attainable. So girl, grab a cup of coffee, sneak away with your calendar and think *peaceful* holidays. You'll be amazed at the peace that will come when you plan, evaluate, accommodate, control and enjoy your holidays.

Oh yes, I'm dreaming of peaceful holidays. I hope you are too!

~ Alene Snodgrass

Alene Snodgrass speaks all over the country and is the author of two Bible studies, *Dirty Laundry Secrets ~ a Journey to Meet the Launderer* and *I'm a Fixer-Upper ~ A Day-by-Day Remodeling Guide*. Each study has created drastic changes in many women's lives. Alene, her husband, and three children reside in Corpus Christi, Texas and attend Bay Area Fellowship where Alene coordinates the women's Bible studies. For more information, visit www.alenesnodgrass.com. For a peak into her personal life, check out [Positively Alene](#) or find her on facebook and twitter.



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He is Our Peace



"Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. Peace was conceived of the Holy Spirit." (Luke 19:38 KJV).

Leapt in the womb of Mary.
Was birthed of a

virgin.

And brought forth quietly in a stable.

Peace was ever so gently wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

That Holy night in Bethlehem, Peace made its appearance in the form of a

newborn baby. Not just any baby, but God's Son. The Word became flesh.

The perfect Lamb of God came to earth to be our Peace. Our Prince of Peace.

"...and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6 KJV).

Christ came to offer Peace to a lost and dying world. In Him, we get a peace that is unexplainable, inexpressible, unspeakable. With Him there is rest, comfort and security.

Jesus is our Peace.

God sent this Peace -- His Son -- to reign on earth and in so doing, offers us the ability to find complete tranquility in our stillness before Him. As we sit in His presence and focus on Him, we experience quietness in our souls and we find amazing Peace.

The serenity of His Presence washes over us in a mighty wave.

Be still.
Be quiet.
Listen.

Allow His Spirit of Peace to flood our souls with unimaginable rest.

He is our peace.

~ Beth Herring

Beth Herring has been married to an amazing man for 25 years. She is a pastor's wife, mother to 3 grown daughters and blessed Nana to 6 amazing grandchildren. This season of life finds her seeking and finding the "much more" of her precious Lord and Savior. She blogs for Him at [An Instrument for His Glory](#).



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