



Week  
1

*Receive His  
Peace*



Sometimes we mix up the words *peace* and *order*. They are not interchangeable. They are not equal. But sometimes we fall into believing that they are one and the same.

Often we mistakenly believe that to have peace in our hearts, everything has to be going well. Everyone has to be getting along, all of our desires must be fulfilled, and all the ducks must be in a row. As the world sees it, peace is a result of everyone being happy and everything going smoothly. But Jesus gives a peace that makes no sense to the world: “Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7).

Several years ago, I ran across a video online of a few dozen people singing songs of praise to the Lord. The scene was very moving and the singing was beautiful, but the situation in which the singers were giving God glory was unexpected. These people were gathered around cots in a stadium that was being used as a shelter during a hurricane. These people had been evacuated from their houses and were in danger of losing loved ones and their homes, yet their song was filled with peace. They were praising God in the middle of disaster, even though nothing about the situation was ideal. Evidence of your reliance on the Lord is feeling his peace even in the midst of terrible storms, both literally and figuratively.

How does this happen? How can we find peace even when nothing is going right? By turning our gaze and our hearts to him who is Peace, and uttering the simplest of prayers: *Jesus, be my peace.*

This prayer was my only recourse as I approached the birth of my son, Zion. I was blessed that my C-section was not an emergency—neither Zion nor I was in immediate danger, but my body had progressed as far as it would go, and we had run out of options for a safe delivery. It was interesting to experience because the moment the doctor decided to do a C-section, everyone went into action. They quickly started moving the bed and preparing medical



equipment; things became quite chaotic. It was organized chaos, but chaos nonetheless. Our birthing class did not cover C-sections in detail, so every moment of the process was totally unanticipated. Several nurses were readying me and my body to get the baby out, while the doctor was suited up and my husband, Daniël, prepared. There was no peace in this process as the world defines it.

And yet, in the midst of it all, I have never felt more peace. I have never felt less anxious. I have never felt such a lack of worry or trouble in my life than in that room, in that moment, on that day.

Why? Because I had unshakable confidence and peace in Christ himself.

God was showing me that even in the middle of mayhem, when you cling to Christ, you can find a wellspring of peace that does not make any “sense.” I was speechless at the peace I felt. The Lord told us that we would not understand how we could have such peace (Phil 4:7); it is the result of anchoring our hearts in him in all things, as we turn our gaze and heart to him each day.

Your life may be chaos. Maybe you have had weeks, or months, or even years of chaos. If that is the case, I share this prayer with you to hold on to for the rest of your life: *Jesus, be my peace.*

This week I invite you to find peace right here, right now, even if things are all out of order. Peace doesn't depend on the messiness of your current moment; it's about finding yourself in the heart of God to say, no matter what is happening in my life today, God is my refuge. He is my rock. He makes all things work together for the good of those who love him (Rom 8:28). He is my fortress and my shield, and I find peace in him—not the peace that comes and goes with my circumstances, but a peace that lasts forever.



*SOUL EXERCISES*

1. Where do you need Christ to bring his peace into your life right now?
2. Philippians 4:7 speaks of the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding—the kind of peace that does not make sense to our human minds. Has there been a time in your life when you felt unexplainable peace, even in the midst of a great struggle? Reflect on this time and let it teach you about the peace Christ always wants to give you.

*YOUR HEART'S PRAYER  
THIS WEEK*

Jesus, you are the Prince of Peace. Thank you for providing the peace that only you can give in every circumstance of my life. Thank you for being my refuge in the chaos of life, in the uncertainties of my journey, and on my brightest days. Help me to rest, always, in the serenity of your heart and your presence. Jesus, be my peace for the rest of my days. Amen.





*Seek Him*



We can glean many spiritual lessons from the well-known parable of the prodigal son. As a cradle Catholic, I have heard numerous reflections on this parable throughout my life of faith. Most explanations highlight our propensity to run from God in our sin and his willingness to accept us with love when we come to our senses, repent, and come back home to his loving and merciful arms.

I recently heard a new perspective on this parable that helped me better understand the depth of commitment that God is asking of me. First, I want to share a portion of the scripture with you to take and reflect on throughout this week. The prodigal son has returned home, and his older brother gets upset:

He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, “Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.” He said to him, “My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours.” (Lk 15:28–31)

Both sons wanted what the father could give more than they wanted the father. The first son wanted his inheritance *right then* (Lk 15:12), placing material goods over his current relationship with his father. The older brother wanted a substantial gift, such as a goat, that he could share with his friends, again caring more about his father’s possessions than his father. Neither son focused on spending time with his father—to love him, to be in his company as his son. They prioritized earthly possessions over the father-son relationship.

We can fall into the same trap with God: we seek what God can give us rather than God himself. This is what the older son



expressed that he desired—a reward, a goat to share with his friends, for his faithfulness to his father.

Have you ever desired a reward for your faithfulness? I have.

I have sought rewards from the Lord for my fidelity to him and have expected his good favor for loving him. I have been frustrated on the hard road of faith when I have seen women who I know have not been following Christ appear to receive more blessings in life than me (perhaps you know how this feels). Additionally, there have been times and seasons when I have constantly presented to the Lord a list of the things I'd like him to do rather than simply sat in his presence to say over and over, *Lord, I love you*.

And that's it. Not . . . Lord, I love you, and *can you give me this?* Not . . . Lord, I love you, and *can you do this for me?*

These are not *bad* prayers, but we have to be careful of running toward God while looking over his shoulder to see what he is going to give us—a husband, a baby, a house, a better job, a cure, a financial blessing.

Do you follow God and try to remain faithful to his (sometimes difficult) commandments because of *who he is* or because of *what he can do*? This week, I invite you to ponder this question as you take a hard look at your motives in following Jesus, and at your prayer life. How have you been praying lately? Are you crying out to God over what he has not given you, or are you stopping to give him glory and gratitude simply for who he is?

When we look at the parable of the prodigal son, we must pause to ask ourselves, *Am I seeking a Person or a prize?*

Let us seek the Lord because we love him—not because of what he does or what he gives, but because of who he is.



*SOUL EXERCISES*

1. Have you ever tried to draw close to God in hopes that he would give you a desire of your heart? What was that desire? Did it become an idol in your life, or is it currently an idol in your life? Pray with the Lord about this desire, asking him to help you surrender it to him.
2. Have you ever been frustrated because those around you who do not follow God seem to be rewarded more in life than you? Have an honest conversation with God about that, and be open to listening to what he has to say.

*YOUR HEART'S PRAYER  
THIS WEEK*

Jesus, I want to seek you above all else. Help me to relinquish my desire for reward, recognition, or a prize for my faithfulness. Grant me a desire to know you more, to love you more, to run toward you with open arms—not looking over your shoulder, but looking only at you, my greatest love. Thank you for all that you are. You are more than enough for me. Awaken my heart to a greater desire for *you*. Amen.







# Let Him Soften Your Heart



But to you who hear I say,  
love your enemies, do good to  
those who hate you, bless those  
who curse you, pray for those who  
mistreat you.

—Luke 6:27–28

What does it mean to have an enemy? You and I are not going to war. There is no enemy attack about to take place—but in my life, I consider enemies to be the people who have hurt me badly, the people who make fun of my faith, the people who try purposefully to make my life miserable. Enemies like these can be anywhere—at school, in the workplace, even in our family.

None of Jesus' teachings are easy, but this is one of the hardest ones: Do good to those who hate you. We were told countless times as children that *hate* is a very strong word that we should never use. Extending forgiveness to people who are our enemies, who hate us, who mistreat us, seems like enough, doesn't it? But in Luke 6:27–28, Jesus asks us to go a step further. He *commands* us to take action beyond forgiveness; he doesn't say, "You probably should. Maybe it would be a good idea." He gives imperative commands . . .

Love. Do good. Bless. Pray.

I struggle greatly with adhering to this command. The last thing I want to do is do good to those who hate me and pray for the people who have mistreated me. Forgiveness can be difficult enough for our human hearts. It often takes much reflection, surrender, and prayer to come to forgive people who have mistreated us.

But that step beyond forgiveness into love, into prayer, into blessing those people, is an act of mercy. Loving your enemies is an act of mercy. And Matthew 5:7 is clear about those who show mercy to others: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Mercy is something that is undeserved. It is something we receive from Christ every day of our lives out of the love in his heart, and he asks us to love in the exact same way.

Have you ever taken intentional time to pray for the people in your life who you dislike so much that you feel repulsed by the thought of praying for them? A few years ago, I went through an extremely hard situation with a friend who betrayed me. It was very ugly for many reasons, and a few months after our big fallout I decided I had to begin praying for this person. I didn't want to,



but I decided to try. Praying intentionally for this person felt like having soap in my mouth at the start. The words came bitterly out of my mouth as I tried to take the first step in following this command of Christ. But I kept at it. I did it again and again. And I don't know how my prayers affected that person, but I know how they affected me. They gave me new eyes to see. Christ gave me the eyes to see this person as he sees them—hurting badly from deep wounds and desperately needing peace. As I prayed more, it got easier, and my heart softened, thanks be to God. Our God is in the business of softening hearts.

This week I invite you to pray deeply through this verse: “But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Lk 6:27–28). What does loving your enemies look like for you? Consider trying one or both of these suggestions this week:

- ♥ Write down all your feelings about a situation in which someone hurt you, and conclude with a prayer for that person.
- ♥ Ask God to give you the strength and grace to pray for the person who hurt you, or to teach you how to live out Luke 6:27–28 in your life.

You can focus on a different person each day of this week, or maybe you need to concentrate your efforts of prayer on one situation, one person, one deep hurt. Whichever the case is for you, Christ is present as you follow his command. He knows that it is not easy. He knows that it doesn't come naturally. Take one small step and let him guide you into the next one and the one after that with love, peace, and mercy.



*SOUL EXERCISES*

1. Which situations and people come to mind when Jesus talks about praying for our enemies? Who is he asking you to pray for this week and beyond?
2. Have you ever prayed for someone who hurt you deeply? If yes, what kind of freedom or consolation did you find in doing so?

*YOUR HEART'S PRAYER  
THIS WEEK*

Jesus, it is not easy to follow your command to love my enemies, to do good to those who have hurt me deeply. I cannot do it on my own! Grant me the grace to take that first small step of calling to mind those you want me to pray for, and to lift them up to you. Help me to let go of any resentment and grudges I am consciously or unconsciously holding on to, so that, ultimately, I can find the peace you long for me to live in. This week, I choose to love my enemies with courage—help me to do just that. Amen.

