

⊕ LIVING COMPASS

# Living Well Through Advent 2024



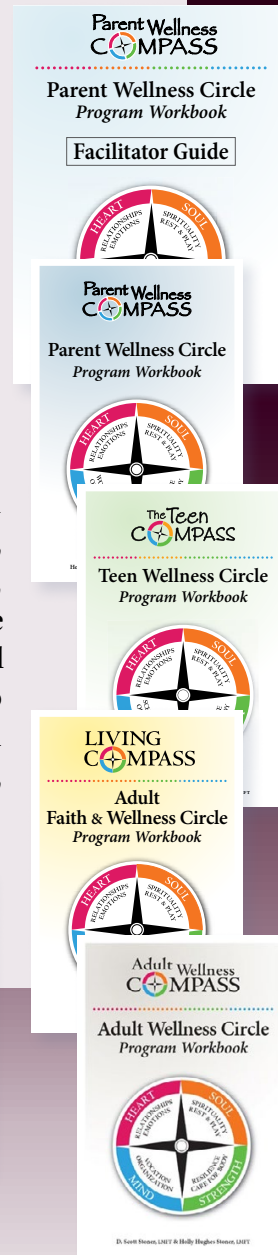
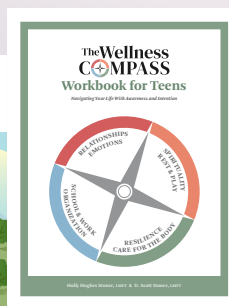
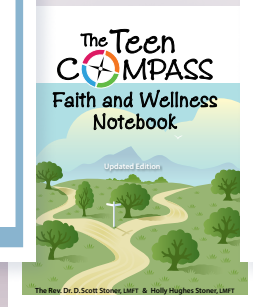
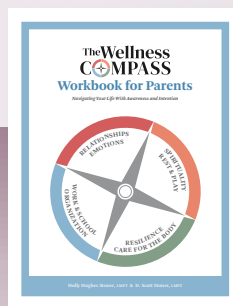
*Practicing Peace with All Your  
Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*

A Living Compass Seasonal Resource

# The Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative

In addition to our Advent and Lent devotionals (in English and Spanish), Living Compass offers a number of resources (faith-based and secular) and trainings designed to outfit individuals, families, congregations, and organizations for the journey toward wellness and wholeness. Recognizing that we have a variety of resources that can be used in many creative ways, we offer several ways to learn about, experience, and to become more familiar with them.

We invite you to visit our website: [livingcompass.org](http://livingcompass.org). There you will find more detailed information about our resources, including books, workbooks, facilitator guides for many of our programs, Wellness Circles, Community Wellness Advocate Certificate Trainings, as well as individual training and consultation options. You can also sign up for the Living Compass newsletter, which is the best way to learn about upcoming trainings, highlighted resources, and other opportunities.



To learn more about our resources and other offerings, please contact our Program Director Carolyn Karl at [Carolyn@LivingCompass.org](mailto:Carolyn@LivingCompass.org)

# Living Well Through Advent 2024



*Practicing Peace with All Your  
Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*

*We wish to express deep gratitude to our friends Ab and Nancy Nicholas and the Nicholas Family Foundation. While Ab passed away in 2016, their generous support continues to make this resource possible.*



*Outfitting individuals, families, congregations, and communities with tools and training for the journey toward wellness and wholeness.*

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- Download this publication as a free PDF file.
- Sign up to receive a daily email of each reflection at no cost.
- Access all past daily reflections.
- Download our Advent Facilitator's Guide as a free PDF file.
- Listen to the Living Compass podcast, which features two six-minute episodes per week during Advent that focus on *Practicing Peace*. Find on our website or by searching for "Living Compass" on any podcast app.
- Find all of these resources and more on our website: [livingcompass.org](http://livingcompass.org)
- Questions? Email us: [info@livingcompass.org](mailto:info@livingcompass.org)

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## *About the Writers*

**Robbin Brent** is the director of publications and resource development for Living Compass, a spiritual director, and founder of Wisdom Way of Knowing. She leads spiritual retreats and programs, facilitates gatherings of contemplative leaders, and is a graduate of Shalem Institute's Transforming Community and Spiritual Guidance programs. She loves spending time with her family, hiking, and early morning coffee with the wildlife that graces her backyard.

**The Rev. Laurie Brock** serves as the rector of St. Michael the Archangel Episcopal Church in Lexington, Kentucky. She has served churches in Louisiana and Alabama, and is also an attorney. Her books include *Souvenirs of the Holy* (Broadleaf Books), and *Horses Speak of God* (Paraclete Press), and she blogs at [revlauriebrock.com](http://revlauriebrock.com). She is an avid equestrian. On her days off and most afternoons, she is at the barn riding and feeding treats to Nina, her American Saddlebred. In addition to recently adopting a senior dog, Jillie, Laurie also enjoys taking long walks exploring the beauty of nature with Evie, her other rescue pup.

**The Rt. Rev. Audrey Cady Scanlan** serves as the 11th bishop of the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania. She came to ordained ministry with experience as an executive chef, teacher, and guidance department counselor. Audrey's seminary training took place at Yale/Berkeley and she completed a doctorate in the Theology of Disability from Hartford Seminary. She is co-founder of the Special Needs worship program Rhythms of Grace and author of three volumes of curricula. Audrey currently produces a weekly video that includes a short teaching and reflection, which can be found on the diocesan YouTube channel: [youtube.com/@diocesecpa](https://youtube.com/@diocesecpa). She and her husband, Glenn, live in a cabin in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. They love to hike the AT, which runs right near their house.



**The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner**—founder of the Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative—has served his community for more than 40 years as an Episcopal priest, retreat leader, psychotherapist, wellness coach, and author. In addition to his coaching and psychotherapy work, he leads wellness retreats for organizations and leadership teams. He is the host of the Living Compass Spirituality and Wellness podcast. Scott has been married to Holly Hughes Stoner for 46 years and together they are the co-creators of the Wellness Compass Initiative and co-hosts of the Wellness Compass podcast. In his free time, Scott loves cycling, running, and soccer, and spending time with family.

**The Rev. Mary Bea Sullivan** The Rev. Mary Bea Sullivan is the author of *Living the Way of Love*, and the Director of Spirituality and Wholeness at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Birmingham, Alabama. She is married to the Rev. Malcolm Marler. They love hiking in the woods and cycling on the roads. She is passionate about family and savors time with Malcolm, their two adult children, Brendan and Kiki, their beloved dogs, Beau and Grace, and her large extended family.

**The Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Advent 2024**

Advent Year C	First reading	Psalm	Second reading	Gospel
<b>First Sunday of Advent</b> December 1, 2024	Jeremiah 33:14-16	Psalm 25:1-10	1 Thessalonians 3:9-13	Luke 21:25-36
<b>Second Sunday of Advent</b> December 8, 2024	Baruch 5:1-9 OR Malachi 3:1-4	Luke 1:68-79	Philippians 1:3-11	Luke 3:1-6
<b>Third Sunday of Advent</b> December 15, 2024	Zephaniah 3:14-20	Isaiah 12:2-6	Philippians 4:4-7	Luke 3:7-18
<b>Fourth Sunday of Advent</b> December 22, 2024	Micah 5:2-5a	Luke 1:46b-55 OR <i>Psalm 80:1-7</i>	Hebrews 10:5-10	Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)

# Introduction

The season of Advent, along with the thoughtful writings and reflection questions in this devotional, provides us with the opportunity to slow down so we can make counter-cultural choices, choices that will help prepare us for the true meaning of Christmas.

We are delighted that you have chosen to use this devotional as a tool to assist you on your own journey. And we are honored to include the voices and deep reflections on *Practicing Peace* from four featured writers.

In addition to expanding on each writer's reflections throughout the week, each Monday we introduce a weekly theme related to *Practicing Peace*. The theme for week one is *deepening our understanding of peace*; week two is *making peace with ourselves*; week three is *becoming instruments of God's peace*; and week four in Advent is *practicing peace as a "holyyes."*



As important as are the daily readings, the personal reflections and insights that emerge in response to the readings are what matters most. We encourage you to record them, either in the spaces provided, or in a separate journal. When possible, talk with others or join a group where you can discuss your thoughts.

During Advent, I will be releasing two six-minute episodes each week on the Living Compass Spirituality and Wellness podcast to expand on the theme of *Practicing Peace*. You can listen at “LivingCompass.org/podcast” or in your favorite podcast app. You also will have the opportunity to receive the reflections from this devotional in a daily email. Visit us at LivingCompass.org/Advent to learn more or to sign up.

I want to thank Robbin Brent for the companion Facilitator Guide (available as a free downloadable PDF), and for the inspiring collection of quotes, Bible verses, and spiritual practices that she once again included in the back. Refer to them regularly to enhance your journey through Advent. A deep expression of gratitude, also, to Carolyn Karl for all she does to oversee the wide distribution of this resource.



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It has been a joy to write the daily reflections for this devotional, inspired by our four guest writers. We at Living Compass are grateful and honored to walk with you on the journey through Advent toward Christmas.

The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner



Director, Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative



**The Living Compass podcast**, a year-round offering, provides additional enrichment opportunities during Advent by releasing two weekly episodes that focus on our theme of *Practicing Peace with All Your Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*. Each episode, about six minutes long, can be found

at [LivingCompass.org/podcast](https://LivingCompass.org/podcast) or by searching for “Living Compass” in your favorite podcast app.

Living Compass—working with The Rev. Pedro Lopez and Estela Lopez from the Episcopal Diocese of Texas—has also published: *Vivir un buen Adviento en el 2024: Practicando la paz con todo el corazón, alma, fuerzas y mente*—a Spanish Advent guide with completely original content by featured writers El Revdo. Pedro Lopez, Estela Lopez, and others. To learn more or to order, contact us: [info@livingcompass.org](mailto:info@livingcompass.org).



# The Living Compass: A Brief Overview

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.*

—Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5

The Living Compass Model for Well-Being offers us guidance in four dimensions of our being: heart, soul, strength, and mind. Just like a mobile or kineshetic art, these dimensions are interconnected.



Whatever impacts one area of our lives (positively or negatively) will have an impact on the other areas. Each of the four compass points focuses on two areas of well-being, and each of the eight areas helps to guide and equip us as we commit to being more intentional about the way we live our lives. The purpose of this Compass is to provide a dynamic resource that will assist us in our search for balance and wellness. The invitation is to live an undivided life, where heart, soul, strength, and mind are integrated into both our *being* and our *doing*.

## Areas of Wellness

### Heart

- **Relationships.** The ability to create and maintain healthy connections with others.
- **Emotions.** The capacity to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy manner.



## Soul

- **Spirituality.** The development and practice of a strong personal faith and meaningful purpose.
- **Rest and Play.** The balance between work and renewal through rest and recreation.

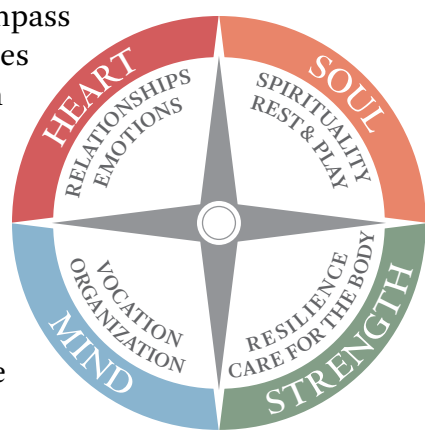
## Strength

- **Care for the Body.** Cultivating healthy habits and practices for our physical well-being.
- **Resilience.** The ability to deal positively with life's adversities.

## Mind

- **Organization.** Effective management of belongings, finances, and time.
- **Vocation.** Making the most of employment, education, and volunteering opportunities.

Creating resources grounded in the integration of faith and wellness is what makes Living Compass different from other wellness programs. Living Compass believes we all have many compasses that compete to guide our lives, often outside of our awareness. When we choose to make faith the compass that guides decisions in all areas of our lives, we are better able to experience wellness and wholeness. It is worth noting that *health*, *healing*, *wholeness*, and *holy* all come from the same root word *hal* or *haelen*.

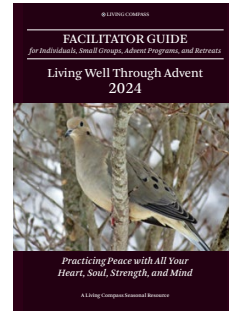


The Living Compass

# Ways to Use Practicing Peace

This guide is designed for daily personal reflection as you journey through the sacred season of Advent. Each Sunday begins with a reflection written by one of our featured writers. Every Monday in Advent we introduce a theme for the week related to *Practicing Peace*. The other days of the week begin with a scripture or quote, followed by a reflection, and then space for you to record any thoughts, feelings, or insights. If you'd like to write more than space allows, we encourage you to purchase a journal to use with this guide.

*Practicing Peace* can also be used by groups. Each week, people could gather—in a home, at a local coffee shop, or at church—to discuss their responses to the daily reflections. We all benefit from a community of support, and this guide can be used to form or deepen that community. If you would like to use it for a church Advent program (online or in person), our Facilitator Guide (offered as a free downloadable PDF) provides guidance on how to use this devotional in a small group. (Available on our website: [LivingCompass.org](http://LivingCompass.org))



A couple of other suggested uses:

- As a resource for congregations to make available to their members, helping keep the focus on Christ during the season of Advent.
- As the resource for a half- or full-day Advent retreat. The retreat leader could offer the daily reading as the reflection, or as a starting point for their own reflections. Following each reflection, participants could record their responses, either in the guide, or in a separate journal. Giving each person a copy of this guide would ensure that the experience of the retreat would stay with them throughout the remainder of Advent.

The seasons of Advent and Christmas are filled with the presence of peace, if only we remember to pause and open ourselves to receiving this gift. As you embark on this journey, we invite you to approach the devotional with an open heart and mind. This Advent season, however you use this guide, our hope and prayer is that you feel supported in your desire to more fully practice your faith in a way that is deeply renewing.

# *The First Sunday of Advent*

December 1, 2024

## **Peace Like a River**

Reflection by The Rev. Laurie Brock

*They shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.*

—Isaiah 2:4

I've lived near rivers most of my life—the Mississippi, the Alabama, the Kentucky—and they continue to create remarkable places for me to explore on my days off. Waterfalls, wildlife preserves, and wetlands all hold a bounty of God's beauty.

They also hold within them power for destruction. Too much rain, too many people building in floodplains, and too confident a belief we can control nature with levees and locks, and these same beautiful rivers become unhelpful and even destructive forces.

Which is why, on a Sunday I was on vacation, as I gathered to worship in a small church overlooking a meandering river, I questioned the hymn writer's words as we sang, "I've got peace like a river in my soul."

I've seen peaceful rivers. I've sat on riverbanks and watched the sun drop slowly into the waters of life and been awed into silent prayer. I've listened to water tap softly against a limestone palisade bank. I've marveled at the rampant, almost aggressive life that lives under its surface waters.

And I've seen rivers that churn and whip across boulders to carve out grand canyons. I've touched the gooey water in swamps and watched bugs scamper across their surface while gators guarded it all.

Rivers move and twist at their rate, carving out paths for millions of years in their changes and shifts. Their waters are red, muddy, and clear, sometimes all in the same river. They trickle and rage, meander and dominate, create, destroy, and recreate.

## THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

“Peace like a river” challenges my thinking about peace. I want peace to be an easy state, free of any discomfort and anxiety. And it is, at times.

But the peace of God is not the peace of humans. Too often human peace comes at the expense of silencing or ignoring disparate voices. We want calm and quietude without the work of shifting and changing our own souls. We want plowshares and pruning hooks without the labor that comes with beating our swords and spears, these tools of war, into instruments of nurture and peace. And we want someone else to do the work.

The peace of God is transformative. It changes us from those who would use oppressive power to a people who nurture and tend. The peace of Christ moves us into new places. This holy peace requires that we change and move, not stay stagnant.

Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the trust that God can transform conflict into reconciliation. Peace is not calm because the disparate voices are silenced, but the courage to stand within the waters of righteous anger, hear the wails of suffering, and work for change. Peace is crossing from the bank of oppression to the side of justice, and having the faith to walk in the shifting sands and strong current that would make us turn back, except that God call us to cross to the side of love ... every single time.

Advent sits us in the holy darkness of peace and waiting and invites us to search our souls for how we experience peace. Do we settle for human peace that swords and spears inflict? Or are we as Christians willing to have this peace of God, this calm, meandering, raging, and daunting peace like a river, in our souls?

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Monday, December 2, 2024

## Deepening Our Understanding of Peace

*The peace of Christ moves us into new places. This holy peace requires that we change and move, not stay stagnant.*

—Laurie Brock

In yesterday's reflection, Laurie Brock deepened our understanding of peace by helping us to better understand its multifaceted nature. She wrote how, at times, it is something that calms and soothes us, while at other times it challenges and changes us.

Peace is a word, like love and joy, that we use so often that we may take for granted that we know exactly what we mean by peace. Many churches practice the “exchange of peace” during worship where the “peace of the Lord” is shared among the people gathered there. While I have enjoyed the exchange of these greetings thousands of times, I have seldom paused to reflect on what I truly mean when I say those words to someone.

As we take time to reflect more deeply on what it means to practice peace with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, know that we are honored to walk with you on your journey of spiritual reflection through this season of Advent. Our hope for this daily devotional is that it will help you both to deepen your understanding of peace, and to examine how you practice peace, with yourself and with others.

“Peace on earth” is at the heart of the Christmas story and so it is our hope that making peace the focus of our Advent journey will prepare our hearts and souls to receive the Peace of Christmas more fully.

**Making it Personal:** How do you understand peace? Do you believe that peace may require you to grow and change? If you were to write a one- or two-sentence definition of peace, what would you write?

Are there others with whom you might want to share this Advent journey through this devotional? See pages 2 and 10 for additional suggestions on engaging this resource.

Tuesday, December 3, 2024

## Peace Is More Than the Absence of Conflict

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives.*

—John 14:27

**F**or many, peace is often thought of as the absence of conflict. While there may be partial truth to this, it is a limited perspective. For example, when a pianist performs a beautiful piece of music, we wouldn't say that what makes it beautiful is the absence of wrong or poorly played notes. We would know that what makes the performance beautiful is the presence of timing, phrasing, and the seemingly effortless playing of complex notes and chords.

The peace that Jesus offers to us and calls us to live into is not just the absence of conflict, but is the active and abundant presence of love, justice, reconciliation, and compassion. As a pastoral psychotherapist, I often work with couples who report that they feel distant and estranged from each other, while at the same time indicating that they never fight or disagree. They clearly are not satisfied with a peace that is really only a lack of conflict. They are seeking a deeper peace, one that is characterized by connection, love, and a willingness to be vulnerable with one another.

Jesus speaks of a deeper understanding of peace when he calls us not just to love people who love us, but also to love our enemies. It is important to note that he is not calling us only to have no conflict with our enemies, which we could do simply by distancing ourselves from them. Instead, he is calling us to actively practice and create a more profound, more authentic love and peace with the people in our lives we find the most challenging. As Laurie Brock wrote in Sunday's reflection, "The peace of God is not the peace of humans."

**Making it Personal:** What do you think of the idea that peace is more than the absence of conflict? What is your response to John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives"? Do you ever feel challenged or uncomfortable with this deeper understanding of peace to which Christ calls us?





Wednesday, December 4, 2024

## Peace Deeply Rooted in Faith

*We are not at peace with others because we are not at peace with ourselves, and we are not at peace with ourselves because we are not at peace with God.*

—Thomas Merton

This time of year, Christmas tree lots appear in every city and town across our country. Millions (more than 35 million) of trees are cut and sold each year to adorn homes, churches, and offices.

A month from now, just as they are turning brown and losing their needles, all of these trees will be tossed to the curb. Cut down and no longer connected to their root systems, the trees cannot live, which seems an apt metaphor for deepening our understanding of practicing peace.

As Christians, our desire and efforts to practice peace need to be deeply rooted in our faith and our relationship with God. If our efforts to practice peace are cut off from this rootedness, they will most likely wither.

Thomas Merton makes this point in the quote above. The state of our peace with others and with ourselves will directly reflect the state of our peace with God. In order to strengthen and extend branches of peace to others, we first need to water and deepen the roots of our faith and our relationship with God. If we are struggling in our efforts to practice peace with others and with ourselves, we are wise to pause and reflect on the current state of our peace with God.

**Making it Personal:** What are your thoughts about the quote from Thomas Merton? Do you see a connection between your spiritual life and your capacity to practice peace? Does the metaphor of our spirituality being like the root system of a tree speak to you?

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Thursday, December 5, 2024

## The Risks of Practicing Peace

*I speak not for myself but for those without voice ... those who have fought for their rights ... their right to live in peace, their right to be treated with dignity, their right to equality of opportunity, their right to be educated.*

—Malala Yousafzai

As we continue to deepen our understanding of what it means to practice peace, we realize that sometimes this practice will call us to move beyond our current level of comfort. When we seek to bring peace and healing to a conflicted relationship, this process will likely involve conversations that initially may be uncomfortable. Our attempts to bring peace and healing in our world by directly addressing instances of injustice and marginalization will require us to step outside our “comfort zones.”

In our Living Compass wellness programs, we teach that in order to grow, we need to risk moving out of our “comfort zone” and into our “growth zone.” We talk about how the growth zone is always outside of and beyond the comfort zone. That is why all growth is initially uncomfortable. As people of faith, God is always calling us to grow beyond the places where things are easy and comfortable. Choosing to stay safe, to ignore God’s call to grow, may give us a false notion of being at peace, but upon deeper reflection, we will eventually see that this peace is superficial; it is not the more profound expression of peace to which God calls us.

Malala Yousafzai, whose quote appears above, received the Nobel Peace Prize for the “struggle against the suppression of children and young people and for the right of all children to education.” You and I do not need to aspire to such global recognition for our efforts to practice peace, but we do want to aspire to have the courage to practice peace even when it stretches us beyond our comfort zones.

**Making it Personal:** Can you think of a time when you risked moving out of your comfort zone and risked practicing peace in a situation or relationship that made you anxious? Is there a particular situation right now where God is calling you to grow in your capacity to practice peace?



Friday, December 6, 2024

## Practicing Peace Through Gratitude

*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.*

—Colossians 3:15

This time of year, it is especially easy to focus on what we feel is lacking in our lives. This can be especially true if we are facing a new challenge for the first time this holiday season.

This sense that something is missing in our lives is also more common during the holidays because, thanks to social media, it can look like everyone else's life is perfect. Everyone else has more than enough money and time to buy all the presents they want, an exciting array of social invitations to holiday gatherings, and has what looks like the perfect friends and family. The often-false front of social media can cause us to feel like we are the only ones who are struggling.

The passage from Colossians reminds us that authentic peace and happiness do not come from material possessions or perfect friends and families (as if these existed), but rather they come from allowing the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts. The passage goes on to add that gratitude is also an essential component of peace. To be at peace enhances our capacity to be thankful for what we already have, however imperfect it may be. And the practice of gratitude increases our capacity to be at peace.

**Making it Personal:** Reread the passage from Colossians and note your thoughts and reactions. What do you think about the connection between peace and gratitude? Feelings of not having enough are not uncommon this time of year. To counteract these feelings, pause and reflect on what you are genuinely grateful for in your life right now. You might even want to make a list and keep it with you throughout Advent.

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Saturday, December 7, 2024

## Practicing Peace in Thought, Word, and Deed

*The peace of God is transformative. It changes us from those who would use oppressive power to a people who nurture and tend. The peace of Christ moves us into new places. This holy peace requires that we change and move, not stay stagnant.*

—Laurie Brock

**E**ach Saturday we invite you to pause, reflect upon, and integrate into your life what you have learned during the past week. The most important learnings from the week most likely will be personal, those that emerged for you as you interacted with the reflections and the prompts.

The process of change usually happens in stages. First, we have a thought, a new idea, or insight into something that we might want to change, and then we often speak that thought out loud in a conversation with others, or in our prayers. For example, “I am starting to think that I am ready to \_\_\_\_\_ and I may need your support in doing \_\_\_\_\_.” Finally, change involves action, doing something different. We describe this three-step process as changing through thought, word, and deed.

While we have focused on deepening our understanding of peace this week, the overall focus of this Advent devotional is *practicing peace*. The quote above, from Laurie’s reflection, reminds us that “the peace of Christ moves us into new places.” Our prayer is that each of us may be open to the new places Christ may be calling us to practice peace this Advent season.

**Making it Personal:** What was the most significant insight you had this week as you read and reflected on deepening your understanding of peace? Are you aware of a new way in which Christ is calling you to expand your practice of peace this Advent, perhaps in a way that moves you out of your comfort zone?

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# *The Second Sunday of Advent*

December 8, 2024

## **Practicing Peace Through a Crucible**

Reflection by The Rt. Rev. Audrey Cady Scanlan

*[John] went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”*

—Luke 3:3-4

When I think of being in a peaceful state, I do not automatically think of broods of vipers, unquenchable fire, or snacking on locusts while stepping into my camel’s hair and leather girdle. I prefer to think, rather, about scented candles and warm sunlight, ocean waves lapping softly on the shore, and whisper-traces of foam in the sand.

When I think of practicing peace, I don’t imagine a wild prophet standing waist deep in the muddy Jordan telling me that what he’s doing with water is only half the game—that the rest will be done through refining fire. I like to think, rather, about quiet, confidential conversations with friends in coffee shops; about offering an apology to someone whom I’ve hurt; or being the first one to break an estranged silence.

Yet the prophet John teaches us that sometimes reconciliation and peace are achieved by a trial or crucible. And the wisdom gleaned from this wild prophet reminds me of a crucible in my own life.

Ordained when I was 45 years old, I was also 45 years old when I made my first confession with a priest. A Franciscan friend had suggested that making a private confession might be a good idea before I was ordained. The idea of it scared me half to death. Sit in a room with another human being and talk about my lifetime of offenses? Now, it’s not like I had criminal acts in my past (except for that lipstick shop-lifting episode in 4th grade) but I was intimidated, nonetheless.

## THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

I waited until my pre-ordination retreat. The kindly monk who was serving as my spiritual director told me to go to my room and write down every sin that I had ever committed. I thought that he was joking. He was not. It took me all night as I scanned my life, year by year, season by season, relationship by relationship. I tossed and turned all night, getting out of bed more than once to add to the list as my memory illuminated still another trespass. I skipped breakfast in the morning, too anxious to eat. The clock dragged until my 10 a.m. appointment. Sitting in a comfortable chair in the corner of his room, the dear old monk invited my recitation of the list. He sat quietly with his thumbs rubbing the soft leather of his prayer book as he listened with the ear of his heart. Handing me a folded white handkerchief, he let me compose myself before offering God’s absolution. And when he did, it was a sweet gift of grace that brought with it a feeling of cleanness, of holiness, of peace.

It wasn’t fun or easy. In fact, the whole exercise felt like refining fire, but it was, perhaps, the first time that I had ever practiced making peace with myself.

What difficult road toward practicing peace awaits your footfall?

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Monday, December 9, 2024

## Making Peace with Ourselves

*Nobody can bring you peace but yourself.*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Our focus for this week will be making peace with ourselves. Lest we think this is self-indulgent, as Thomas Merton has written, “We are not at peace with others because we are not at peace with ourselves.” We cannot offer others what we do not have ourselves.

On the surface it may seem obvious that we all want to be at peace with ourselves. Yet, in yesterday’s reflection, Audrey Scanlan reminds us that seeking a deeper peace within ourselves requires honest, soul-searching self-reflection. It is a road less traveled. So much so that Audrey, a person who takes practicing peace seriously, concludes her reflection with the unexpected words, “It was, perhaps, the first time that I had ever practiced making peace *with myself*.”

We will structure our emphasis this week on making peace with ourselves by focusing on the Living Compass Model of Well-Being and its four points: *heart, soul, strength, and mind*. Each quadrant will be the focus for one day’s reflection, and we will invite you to model Audrey Scanlan’s practice of honest self-reflection by pausing each day to reflect on what it means to be more at peace in different dimensions of your life.

**Making It Personal:** What are your thoughts about the quote from Emerson: “Nobody can bring you peace but yourself”? Do you see a connection between the practice of honest self-examination and reflection, and making peace with yourself? As we begin our focus on making peace with ourselves, take a moment to rate your own sense of inner peace. On a scale of 1–10, where 1 represents deep inner conflict and 10 complete inner peace, what number represents your current sense of being at peace with yourself?

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Tuesday, December 10, 2024

## Practicing Peace with All Your Heart

*If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.*

—Mother Teresa

The *Heart* point on the Living Compass focuses on *Relationships* and *Emotions*. Today we will briefly reflect on what peace looks like in these two areas of our lives.

Peace in our relationships means that our connections with others are characterized by stability, trust, mutual care and respect, honesty, and integrity. Emotional peace means that we are comfortable feeling and expressing the full range of emotions (sadness, anger, joy, happiness, laughter, just to name a few) in healthy ways, and that we are comfortable being present to this range of emotions in others. All emotions are God-given and are neither good nor bad. It is how we handle our many emotions that creates either peace or feelings of uneasiness.

It is only by first honestly acknowledging and accepting things as they are that we can begin to make changes, to make things how we want them to be. The holiday season is often a time when tension in our relationships and an uneasiness in our emotions can be more obvious or magnified. Perhaps such magnification, rather than being a source of stress, can become an opportunity to make intentional changes, ones that can create a new sense of peace within us.

**Making it Personal:** Take a moment to reflect both on your relationships and how you handle your emotions. Where do you experience peace, and where do you experience feelings of dis-ease right now? What is a specific step you could take right now to create a greater sense of peace in a relationship that is tense or awkward, or in one aspect of your emotional wellness? Be specific, pray for God's help, and then bravely, begin the step today. How could this make your life more peaceful?

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Wednesday, December 11, 2024

## Practicing Peace with All Your Soul

*Be still, and know that I am God.*

—Psalm 46:10

The *Soul* point on the Living Compass focuses on *Spirituality* and *Rest & Play*. Today we will reflect on what peace looks like in these two areas of our lives.

*Rest and Play* have to do with how we are honoring sabbath time in our lives and how we are engaging in truly re-creative activities. In a culture that overvalues busyness (especially this time of year), taking time to be purposeful about slowing down requires intentionality. Playfulness is also not highly appreciated in our culture, and yet it is both foundational to, and an expression of, well-being.

*Spirituality*, as with all dimensions of wellness, requires regular tending. A garden becomes wilted if it is not regularly watered, as do our spiritual lives. A combination of communal and personal spiritual practices is ideal for enhancing this part of ourselves [see pages 49–52]. Spiritual wellness is grounded in humility, as Audrey Scanlan discovered through her practice of honest self-examination and confession.

The season of Advent provides us with a unique opportunity to be counter-cultural by both slowing down and focusing on the deeper spiritual dimensions of Advent and Christmas. Making this counter-cultural choice will surely help us make peace within ourselves and with others.

**Making it Personal:** Take a moment to reflect on the current levels of rest and play in your life, as well as the state of your spiritual life. In the metaphor of a garden, where do you see a need for watering? What is one thing you could do right now to “water” your spiritual life and/or your need for rest and play? How might this new thing help create a deeper sense of peace within yourself?

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Thursday, December 12, 2024

## Practicing Peace with All Your Strength

*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.*

—1 Corinthians 6:19

The *Strength* point on the Living Compass focuses on *Care for the Body* and *Resilience*. Today we will pause and reflect on what practicing peace looks like in these two dimensions of our well-being.

Not only can this time of year magnify whatever losses and stressors we are experiencing, it can also bring with it unique challenges and temptations to neglect caring for our physical health. Physical well-being depends on proactive habits and disciplines that energize and strengthen our ability to care for the God-given gifts of our bodies. If the only time we pay attention to caring for our bodies is when they are sick and hurting, then we are falling short of caring for these “temples of the Holy Spirit,” as they are described in 1 Corinthians 6:19.

We all experience stress. Sometimes it is of our own making, and other times it is because life is hard, or has handed us a setback. This is especially true this time of year when many of us feel additional pressure from too many competing demands on our time and energy. To be resilient in the face of stress is to be able to accept that hardship is a part of the fabric of life, and to then choose to work, with God’s help, to persevere and grow through the challenging times.

No matter what we are facing, we can fill our reservoirs of peace by taking small steps every day to care for our bodies and accepting that challenges are a part of life. While these steps will be different for everyone, when practiced regularly, they can make a big difference in our overall well-being, now and throughout the year.

**Making it Personal:** What is one conscious, small step you can take right now to gain a sense of peace regarding your physical well-being? Identify one particular stressor you are currently experiencing and identify one concrete step you can take to practice resilience in the midst of the stress.



Friday, December 13, 2024

## Practicing Peace with All Your Mind

*Be transformed by the renewing of your minds.*

—Romans 12:2

The *Mind* point on the Living Compass includes *Organization* and *Vocation*. Making peace with ourselves in these two dimensions of wellness, as with all the other areas, involves honest self-reflection and the practice of small regular habits.

The *Organization* area of the Living Compass includes the choices we make regarding how we manage our time, possessions, money, and priorities. When we are not intentional about managing these things in our lives, we may soon find they are managing us. Feelings of not having enough time, money, or possessions are often a sign that we are not being mindful enough about the choices we are making. As the passage from Romans above points out, we will experience greater freedom and peace when we bring our concerns and decisions, especially the seemingly small every-day details, to God. When we do this regularly, we are better able to recognize when we are trying to make our lives align with what we, or others, think they should be, rather than what God desires for us.

The *Vocation* area of wellness involves showing up in our lives—at home, at work, and in the community—as our true, authentic selves. Author Parker Palmer describes it well: “Discovering vocation does not mean scrambling toward some prize just beyond my reach, but accepting the treasure of true self I already possess.” The word *vocation* comes from the same root as the words *vocal* and *voice*, meaning that vocation has to do with both knowing and showing up in the world with our true voice.

**Making it Personal:** Have you ever experienced the kind of transformation that Romans 12:2 describes? For many, organizing time and money are especially stressful this time of year. If you find that is true for you, what is one specific thing you can do right now to bring a greater sense of peace to how you, with God’s help, are organizing these areas? What is one small thing you could do to honor your true voice during the season of Advent, and beyond?

Saturday, December 14, 2024

## Everything Is Connected

*Love and peace of mind do protect us. They allow us to overcome the problems that life hands us. They teach us to survive ... to live now ... to have the courage to confront each day.*

—Bernie Siegel

Today, as is our custom at the end of each week, we reflect on what we have learned and how best to integrate our learnings into our lives. This week we reflected on what it means to make peace with ourselves in the four quadrants of the Living Compass Model of Well-Being. While we looked at each point on the compass separately, it is essential that we recognize that all eight areas of wellness are interconnected.

Imagine a mobile, like one that might hang from a child's ceiling or crib. Imagine that eight separate pieces are hanging from this mobile. If you were to shake one piece of the mobile, what would happen to the other seven pieces? Though separate, they would begin shaking, as well, because the eight pieces, like the areas of wellness, are connected. This is why when we experience disturbance or lack of peace in one area of our lives, it often will manifest as disturbances in other areas of our lives.

The good news is that when we choose to focus and make changes in an effort to bring greater peace to one area of our lives, this too will radiate out to the rest of our lives. If all the pieces of a mobile are moving around and you take hold of just one and stabilize it, it will gradually bring stability to all the other parts of the mobile, as well.

**Making it Personal:** Can you think of a time when you made a choice to bring peace and calm to one area of your life and then noticed that your choice also created greater peace and calm in others areas of your life? As you reflect on what you learned about making peace with yourself this week, what is one insight you want to be sure to remember? Is there a change or a choice that you have made this week that you want to stay with for the remainder of Advent, and perhaps beyond?

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# *The Third Sunday of Advent*

December 15, 2024

## **Pathways to Peace**

Reflection by Robbin Brent

*Do not worry about anything, 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 your minds in Christ Jesus.*

—Philippians 4:5-7

**F**or me, cultivating pathways to peace has long involved the interweaving of books and conversations with Jesus, what I now recognize as my earliest prayers. As a child, I sought peace from God in an often-tumultuous home. Jesus offered a loving and safe harbor, actively listening and responding.

Just as the conversations with Jesus were prayer, so were the books I read in those formative years. The voices of the writers of the books and my inner awareness from God/Jesus of a more peaceful space were happily mixed. Both offered an oasis of possibility, wonder, and assurance that things would work out. And both nourished an abiding hope within me and a sense that I wasn't alone.

On a recent morning I pulled all my books off overflowing bookshelves to reorganize them. As I began sorting, I noticed recurring themes that represented questions and spiritual longings that have guided me most of my life. It became apparent that the purpose behind many of the books I'd acquired as an adult was to shore up my fears and insecurities. That "fixing" these would somehow make me more deserving of God's protection and love.

As I sat with this uncomfortable discovery, Paul's advice to the Philippians came as an answer to unspoken prayer. I decided to pretend I was a private detective searching through the books for important clues. Approaching them with curiosity and playfulness helped me relax and focus on the present moment. My intention was to understand, rather than to judge, avoid, or change something I didn't like. I began to ask

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

spacious questions, which became a form of prayer. Questions like, “What gift has God offered through this book? What gift from this book might God be inviting me to offer to others?”

During this process I discovered that I continue to value the voices of writers who speak to my inner journey and the voice of God, which comes in all kinds of ways. I’m sure that each of us has books and writers that have helped us to both understand and experience God’s peace. I have come to realize that when we explore questions that keep our minds and hearts open and receptive, we create a sacred space where God’s love and peace can take hold.

Yet, even when we bring our fears and concerns to God, finding peace is not always easy or straightforward. In this season of preparation and expectant waiting, we can choose to embrace the pathways to peace available to us. We can seek nourishment in Scripture, the wisdom of spiritual writers and practices, and in the still, small voice of the Divine found everywhere. When we practice peace, we open ourselves to the transformative power of God’s love, and we become agents of that love in a world that so desperately needs it.

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Monday, December 16, 2024

## Becoming Instruments of God's Peace

*Lord, make us instruments of your peace.*

*Where there is hatred, let us sow love.*

—Prayer of St. Francis

Last week we focused on making peace with ourselves. For people of faith, making peace with ourselves is not an end in and of itself, but a necessary step toward our being able to be instruments of peace for others. Tuning a musical instrument is simply the first step in being able to make beautiful music.

In her reflection yesterday, Robbin Brent wrote so beautifully about how she has learned and experienced a deeper understanding of God's peace throughout her life through the words of numerous spiritual writers. Most of us, too, have been nourished by the words of other spiritual teachers. For example, many have been inspired by the words of the *Peace Prayer*, a prayer attributed to St. Francis. The prayer begins with the words that will be our focus for this week: "Lord, make us instruments of your peace." Throughout this week, we will reflect on the entire *Peace Prayer*, allowing us to deeply consider how each of us is called to serve as instruments of God's peace. You can find the text of the *Peace Prayer* on page 46.

**Making it Personal:** Whose words, writings, and examples have inspired you to be instruments of peace and to sow seeds of love in the midst of challenging circumstances? In what ways might you be called to move outside of your comfort zone right now to be an instrument of God's peace?

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Tuesday, December 17, 2024

## Let Us Sow Pardon and Union

*When we practice peace, we open ourselves to the transformative power of God's love, and we become agents of that love in a world that so desperately needs it.*

—Robbin Brent

There is often a connection between the next two lines of the *Peace Prayer*: “Where there is injury, [let us sow] pardon,” and “where there is discord, [let us sow] union.” Discord is often rooted in the experience of one or both parties feeling injured by the other.

At some point in the past, when you experienced difficulties in a relationship, did you notice how easy it was to believe that the other person was responsible for the injury that created the dissonance? I know for myself that it is so much easier to see the speck in my brother's or sister's eye than the log in my own (Matthew 7:3). If I persist with this kind of self-righteous attitude, I am perpetuating injury, sowing seeds of hurt and anger, both within myself and in my relationship with the other person.

Our faith calls us to a different attitude, one of pardon, forgiveness, and, when possible, reconciliation. In the end, it doesn't matter “who started it.” What matters is our commitment to sow seeds of pardon and union so that we may begin the healing process.

During the holiday season we often see people we rarely encounter during the rest of the year. This may mean that we will be spending time with people with whom we are currently at odds. In these situations, we have the choice to continue to nurse our resentment and injury, or to be instruments of peace and to sow at least a small seed of pardon. And if others offer seeds of pardon to us, we can choose to let go of our sense of injury and to receive their gift with an open heart.

**Making it Personal:** Is there a relationship in your life in which you have been injured, in which you would like to sow a seed of pardon? Is there someone you know that you have injured, with whom you would like to sow a seed of forgiveness? In both cases, what is one specific step you could take now to become an instrument of God's peace?





Wednesday, December 18, 2024

## Let Us Sow Faith and Hope

*Did I offer peace today? Did I bring a smile to someone's face? Did I say words of healing? Did I let go of my anger and resentment? Did I forgive? Did I love? These are the real questions. I must trust that the little bit of love that I sow now will bear many fruits, here in this world and the life to come.*

—Henri Nouwen

The next two lines of the *Peace Prayer* are: “Where there is doubt, [let us sow] faith; where there is despair, hope.”

I recently heard a story about a high-school girl who was part of a card ministry at her church, sending cards of encouragement to people facing challenges. Suddenly, she developed a serious health condition herself that required major surgery. Waiting in her hospital room the day before her operation, she received a surprise she would never forget: a large box containing over two hundred cards from members of her church, offering her hope and encouragement. The hospital staff reported they had never witnessed such a tangible outpouring of love and hope. The surgery went well, and the girl brought all of her cards home to help keep her spirits up during her recovery.

When someone is experiencing doubt and despair, there is no greater gift we can give them than our faith and hope. There are countless meaningful ways we can offer these to others, from simply sitting with someone, to providing a simple encouraging call, text, letter, or card.

In a world full of trouble and fear, we are called to be God's instruments of faith and hope. The opportunities for doing so are all around us.

**Making it Personal:** Can you think of a time when you were experiencing doubt or despair and someone sowed a seed of faith and hope in your life? Is there someone during this season to whom you might be called to offer these gifts? Consider not only people you know, but also those in your wider community who could benefit from seeds of faith and hope in their struggles.

THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Thursday, December 19, 2024

Let Us Sow Light and Joy

*Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.*

—The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The next two lines of the *Peace Prayer* are: “Where there is darkness, [let us sow] light; where there is sadness, joy.”

The quote from Martin Luther King, Jr. is a powerful reminder that God’s call to us to be instruments of peace extends to confronting injustice in our society, wherever and whenever it occurs. Darkness and hate are always at the core of racism, discrimination, and marginalization, in whatever ugly form it takes.

Jesus is our model for confronting systemic injustice. He regularly confronted and unmasked the political and religious authorities of his day by lifting up and empowering the oppressed, the poor, the sick, and the powerless. He worked to shine the light of Truth into the darkness of despair. As Jesus’ followers, we are called to do the same.

On Christmas Day, many churches will read from the first chapter of the Gospel of John: “What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:3-5). Whenever we encounter darkness in our world, the light we are called to shine is not our own; it is the Light of Christ that we are to shine into the darkness of injustice.

**Making it Personal:** What is your response to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. quote: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that”? Where might God be calling you to stretch yourself and become an instrument of peace and light in the face of some expression of injustice and darkness in your family, community, or the world?

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Friday, December 20, 2024

## Let Us Seek to Console, Understand, and Love

*Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness  
without which no one will see the Lord. See to it  
that no one fails to obtain the grace of God.*

—Hebrews 12:14-15

The Prayer of St Francis continues with these words: “Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.”

The question of “whom and what do you seek?” is a question that Jesus asks throughout the gospels. It is an insightful question because the answer, in many ways, defines who we are. We have a core teaching in our Living Compass wellness programs that similarly speaks to this: “Whatever we pay attention to is what will grow.”

One of my favorite hymns is *Seek Ye First*. The first line, based on Matthew 6:33 is: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and God’s righteousness; and all these things will be added unto you.” These words echo for me the *Peace Prayer*, to not so much seek to be consoled, understood, and loved, as to console, understand, and love.

In addition to the *Peace Prayer*, “Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words,” is a quote also attributed to St. Francis. We can’t be sure if he said these words, but we can be sure that he worked to live by these words in his daily life, always seeking to be an instrument of God’s peace and consolation to the poor and to all whom he encountered. May we be inspired to do likewise.

**Making it Personal:** As we approach the end of Advent and the coming of Christmas, how would you answer the question, “Whom or what are you seeking?” What is your response to the quote, “Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words”? How do you, or might you, apply this wisdom in your life right now, and throughout the year?

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Saturday, December 21, 2024

## For It Is in Giving That We Receive

*I have found that among its other benefits,  
giving liberates the soul of the giver.*

—Maya Angelou

The Prayer of St Francis concludes with these words: “For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. *Amen.*”

At last year’s Christmas gathering, our seven-year-old grandson surprised us all. Rather than opening his gifts first, he wanted us to open the special gift that he had made for each of us. His new-found delight in the giving of a gift was as precious as the gift itself.

“Remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive,’” says Acts 20:35. Joining these words with the quote from Maya Angelou, we see that the giving of ourselves to others not only blesses them, but blesses and liberates our souls, as well. Connecting these words perfectly exemplifies what Robbin Brent shared with us earlier this week: God speaks to us through Scripture and through the sacred words of spiritual writers like Maya Angelou.

As you consider the theme this past week of becoming an instrument of God’s peace, perhaps there was a particular insight that came to you from a reflection, quote, or a particular line from St. Francis’ prayer. One that stood out for me in the final two lines of his prayer is the awareness that the peace and truth of the Gospel is often paradoxical: “It is in giving that we receive. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned. And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

**Making it Personal:** Can you think of a time when you gave to someone and yet received more back than you gave? Was there a particular portion of the *Peace Prayer* that inspired you to consider new ways to be an instrument of God’s peace in the world? How might you continue to listen for how God is inviting you to share God’s love and peace?

# *The Fourth Sunday of Advent*

December 22, 2024

## **“Holy Yes”**

Reflection by The Rev. Mary Bea Sullivan

*Say a quiet yes to God and he'll be there in no time.*

—James 4:8, (*The Message* translation)

“**M**y son died a year and a half ago,” the stranger on the other end of the telephone said. “And I want to inter his ashes before I have to bury my wife.” A week later Stuart walked into my office and took up residence deep in my heart.

Despite the great grief he had experienced during the last five years, he was joyful and grateful. Both of Stuart’s children had died and he was now caring for his wife, Rose, who was in the late stages of dementia. Marriage vows were being fulfilled in new ways as Stuart lovingly met Rose’s ever-increasing needs.

Whenever I mentioned my concern about the burden of caregiving on him, Stuart always responded, “This is exactly where I am meant to be.” A faith-filled peace pervaded his choice to empty himself completely in love.

Eventually, Stuart couldn’t continue alone. With no biological family to assist, his neighbors Scooter and Susie stepped in—a natural progression in their ever-deepening relationship. Years before, Scooter and Susie noticed their octogenarian neighbors were frequently alone for holidays and began including them in family gatherings. That first “holy yes” to expanding the definition of family preceded an incalculable number of others. Happiness and shared faith permeated Christmas dinners and barbecues as the two families melded into one.

Every morning at 4 a.m. Stuart would switch on his lamp, and Scooter would come over to clean and dress Rose for the day. Each evening, Scooter would return to help prepare Rose for bed. Susie cooked meals. Grandchildren provided hugs and smiles. This ecosystem of love grew as Scooter’s and Susie’s unselfish care called forth the better angels of others who were also inspired to assist.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

When I complimented her on their sacrificial love, Susie affirmed the peace that pervaded their costly desire to love expansively. “We never gave it a second thought. We needed them too. They are like parents and grandparents for us.”

Responding “yes” to the Spirit is contagious—it goes viral! Mary’s “yes” to carry the Christ child precipitated Joseph’s “yes” to protect and care for them. And their “yesses” led to millions more, thus transforming the world.

Responding “yes” to the Spirit is often costly. For Mary it meant bearing the Christ Child under less-than-ideal circumstances and witnessing his crucifixion. Joseph took on the shame of Mary’s unwed pregnancy. Scooter and Susie faced increased responsibilities and reduced free time. And yet, there is peace in making a right and loving decision—and knowing that God’s kingdom comes to fruition through all of our brave, costly, and contagious “holyyesses.”

Thankfully, our yeses are not carried out alone. Emmanuel—God with us—gives us the grace not only to bear the cost, but also to experience the new life that can only come from accepting divine invitation.

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Monday, December 23, 2024

## Practicing Peace as a “Holy Yes”

*And yet, there is peace in making a right and loving decision—  
and knowing that God’s kingdom comes to fruition through  
all of our brave, costly, and contagious “holyyeses.”*

—Mary Bea Sullivan

**I**n our Living Compass resources, we emphasize that love is much more than a fleeting emotion. We make the point, as many experts do, that love is primarily a decision that we make each day. Emotions ebb and flow, but love as a decision, an act of the will, remains steady.

We learned yesterday from Mary Bea Sullivan that peace is also more than a feeling. In the inspiring story she shares, she describes the deep peace that comes from a husband’s decision to care for his ailing wife, and from a neighbors’ decision to help with that care.

To stretch ourselves to love in ways, as Mary Bea writes, that are “brave, costly, and contagious,” is to decide to offer a “holy yes” to both our neighbor and to God. Mary and Joseph, as Mary Bea reflects, made the same brave decision to say “yes” to God’s call to them without possibly knowing where their “yes” would lead. And that seems to be how it goes when God invites us to stretch ourselves to give in ways we may not have thought possible. We do not know exactly where our “yeses” will lead, but we do know that God’s peace will be our guide and our companion wherever our “yeses” may take us.

**Making it Personal:** Can you think of a time in your life when you decided to offer a “holy yes” to God’s call to give in ways that were beyond what you might have imagined? If so, did you experience peace in that decision? Is there any way in which God is asking you to say “yes” to a decision to love extravagantly right now?

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# *Christmas Eve*

December 24, 2024

## **Saying “Yes” to God’s Gift**

*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,  
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

—Philippians 4:7

**H**ave you ever had the experience of being hurt by how someone responded to a gift you had given them? Perhaps this person opened your gift, looked at it, realized it was not what they wanted or expected, and then quickly put it aside and never showed interest in it again. If we are honest, we have probably all been on both sides of this gift-exchange scenario. One of the real and often-overlooked blessings and gifts we can give to others is to be a good receiver of the gifts we are given, appreciating the other person’s effort and intent to bring us joy.

Whatever material gifts we may or may not receive this Christmas, we will all be given the most valuable gift of all: the birth of Jesus, the birth of the Word made flesh. As with all gifts, this gift, too, needs to be opened and received with mindfulness and loving attention. To do otherwise would diminish the full potential for the transformation of our lives.

Each day in this devotional we have reflected on the choices we can make to be well and whole and to foster greater peace within ourselves and in the world around us. As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, it is a time to focus not only on these choices, but also on the most crucial one of all: the choice that God has made to become fully incarnate in our lives. Making room in the inn of our hearts to receive this gift from God with gratitude and appreciation is the true foundation for the peace that passes understanding.

**Make it Personal:** In general, how thoughtful are you about receiving gifts and expressing gratitude for what you are given? It is common to have expectations of how Christmas is supposed to unfold, and then to be disappointed when it doesn’t live up to those expectations. Are you aware of any expectations you have that might get in the way of fully receiving the Peace of Christ this Christmas?



# *Christmas Day*

December 25, 2024

## **The Gift of Christ: God’s “Holy Yes” to Us**

*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth  
peace among those whom he favors.*

—Luke 2:14

**C**hristmas blessings to all today as we celebrate the birth of Christ, God’s “holyyes” to us. A priceless gift to assure us all of God’s love and of God’s desire for us to each do our part in creating peace on earth.

We began our Advent journey with Laurie Brock’s reflection, *Peace like a River*, which helped us gain a deeper understanding of peace. Audrey Scanlan was our guide in helping us to practice making peace with ourselves. Robbin Brent reminded us of the variety of ways we can experience God’s peace and how we are called to be instruments of that peace for others. And finally, Mary Bea Sullivan has inspired us to offer our own “holyyeses” in response to God’s infinite love for us.

I speak for all of those who have worked to create this devotional, especially Robbin Brent and Carolyn Karl, when I say it has been an honor to walk this journey of Advent with you. Our prayer is that we all have experienced a deeper understanding of the peace of Christ, and have also been inspired to work on growing toward being a more intentional instrument of that peace for others.

We would like close with a blessing from the Book of Numbers. While not typically thought of as a Christmas blessing, it perfectly captures the grace that God desires for us this day, and always.

*The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.*

—Numbers 6:24-26

# *Scripture, Quotes, Prayers & Practices for Advent*

## **Scripture**

*May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people  
with peace!*

—Psalm 29:11

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*Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.*

—Psalm 34:14

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*Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his  
people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.*

—Psalm 85:8

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*Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing can make them  
stumble.*

—Psalm 119:165 (NIV)

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*Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out  
everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do,  
everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track.*

—Proverbs 3:5-6 (*The Message* translation)

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*Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace— in peace because they trust  
in you.*

—Isaiah 26:3

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*The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness  
and confidence forever.*

—Isaiah 32:17 (NIV)

*But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.*

—Jeremiah 17:7-8 (NIV)

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*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

—Matthew 5:9

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*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

—Matthew 11:28-30

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*By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

—Luke 1:78-79

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*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*

—John 14:27

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*I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!*

—John 16:33

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*To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.*

—Romans 8:6

SCRIPTURE, QUOTES, PRAYERS & PRACTICES FOR ADVENT

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

—Romans 15:13

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*For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.*

—Ephesians 2:14

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*Do not worry about anything, 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 your minds in Christ Jesus.*

—Philippians 4:6-7

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*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.*

—Colossians 3:15

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*Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you.*

—2 Thessalonians 3:16

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*But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.*

—James 3:17-18

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*Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.*

—1 Peter 5:7

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## Quotes

*Never be in a hurry; do everything quietly and in a calm spirit. Do not lose your inner peace for anything whatsoever, even if your whole world seems upset.*

—Saint Francis de Sales

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*When I say it's you I like, I'm talking about that part of you that knows that life is far more than anything you can ever see or hear or touch. That deep part of you that allows you to stand for those things without which humankind cannot survive. Love that conquers hate, peace that rises triumphant over war, and justice that proves more powerful than greed.*

—Fred Rogers

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*If you want peace, you don't talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies.*

—Archbishop Desmond Tutu

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*Peace begins with a smile.*

—Mother Teresa

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*Peace depends on a slowness. Peace depends on acceptance of other people's processes and perception of truth. Peace depends on reverence and awe for this incredible blue/green planet we have somehow lucked into. Peace depends on a faith that there really is Something Larger going on here, and that rushing and anger are irrelevant to that larger process, whatever it, or It, may be. I am slowly beginning to live this peace, but in so many ways, I am a slow learner.*

—Rod McIver, editor of *Heron Dance*

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*Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.*

—Augustine of Hippo

*When you do the right thing, you get the feeling of peace and serenity associated with it. Do it again and again.*

—Roy T. Bennett

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*We are not at peace with others because we are not at peace with ourselves, and we are not at peace with ourselves because we are not at peace with God.*

—Thomas Merton

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*When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

—Wendell Berry, *The Peace of Wild Things*, from *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry*

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*Peace is the work of justice indirectly, in so far as justice removes the obstacles to peace; but it is the work of charity (love) directly, since charity, according to its very notion, causes peace.*

—Thomas Aquinas

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*The first peace, which is the most important,  
is that which comes within the souls of people  
when they realize their relationship,  
their oneness with the universe and all its powers,  
and when they realize that at the center of the universe  
dwells the Great Spirit,  
and that this center is really everywhere,  
it is within each of us.*

—Black Elk



## Prayers

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.*

*Where there is hatred, let me sow love,*

*Where there is injury, pardon;*

*Where there is doubt, faith;*

*Where there is despair, hope;*

*Where there is darkness, light;*

*And where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master,*

*Grant that I may not so much seek*

*To be consoled as to console,*

*To be understood as to understand,*

*To be loved, as to love.*

*[Amen.]*

—Peace Prayer, attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi

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*Deep peace of the Running Wave to you.*

*Deep peace of the Flowing Air to you.*

*Deep peace of the Quiet Earth to you.*

*Deep peace of the Shining Stars to you.*

*Deep peace of the Heart of Love to you. [Amen.]*

—a Celtic benediction

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*When the song of the angels is stilled,*

*When the star in the sky is gone,*

*When the kings and princes are home,*

*When the shepherds are back with their flock,*

*The work of Christmas begins:*

*...To find the lost,*

*To heal the broken,*

*To feed the hungry,*

*To release the prisoner,*

*To rebuild the nations,*

*To bring peace among brothers,*

*To make music in the heart. [Amen.]*

—Howard Thurman



*Let there be  
an opening  
into the quiet  
that lies beneath  
the chaos,  
where you find  
the peace  
you did not think  
possible  
and see what shimmers  
within the storm. [Amen.]*

—Jan Richardson

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*Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth.  
Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust.  
Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace.  
Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe. [Amen.]*

—Universal Prayer for Peace, *A New Zealand Prayer Book*, p. 164

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*Charge our lives and our churches with the power of your peace, O God.  
Overcome our fears and self-deceptions with the promise of your  
presence. Make us signs of your generosity and justice. Light us each  
day with hope, we pray, so that we may walk in your truth and be love  
in your Name. Amen.*

—World Council of Churches

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*Peace is every step.  
The shining red sun is my heart.  
Each flower smiles with me.  
How green, how fresh all that grows.  
How cool the wind blows.  
Peace is every step.  
It turns the endless path to joy. [Amen.]*

—Thích Nhất Hạnh



## Contemplative Practices

### Contemplative Walk

Walking as a contemplative practice is an ancient tradition, as is expressed by both Augustine: “It is solved by walking,” and Friedrich Nietzsche: “All truly great thoughts are conceived while walking.” You can learn more about contemplative walking, also known as walking meditation, on our website: [LivingCompass.org/ro2f](http://LivingCompass.org/ro2f).

The invitation to take a contemplative walk is both for those who are able to walk, as well as for those who are not able to walk. Perhaps you are sick, or confined to a place for other reasons, or you cannot physically walk. If this is true for you, try this practice with your eyes closed, or while watching a video or gazing at photographs of places in nature that inspire you. There are many ways to take a contemplative walk. Here are three simple ideas to help you get started. Note that any of these can be done solo, with another person, or with a small group.

- **Choose a question, situation, or challenge you wish to ponder and wonder about, perhaps related to practicing peace.** As you walk, open your heart, mind, and soul to the wisdom of the Spirit as you consider, silently or aloud, “I wonder what I might do or say about \_\_\_\_\_?” “I wonder what God might guide me to do or say about \_\_\_\_\_?” Allow yourself to be curious. Don’t force an answer or resolution; simply walk and reflect on possible insights you may not previously have been able to see.
- **Walk with a Scripture verse.** The daily reflections in this devotional offer many choices, as well as the collection on pages 40–42.
- **Walk in nature.** Walk slowly, noticing the wonder of God’s creation, perhaps pausing from time to time to pay attention to things you might not notice if you were walking at your normal pace.

### Loving-Kindness Prayer Practice

*May you be happy.*

*May you be healthy.*

*May you be safe.*

*May you live with ease.*

Each time you say this prayer, first think of those you love. Then, as you repeat the prayer, you may want to bring in those you find challenging to love right now, and those you have never met.

### Receive & Release Practice

This practice focuses on two words: *receive* and *release*. Here are some simple instructions for getting started.

- First, find a comfortable sitting position and begin to take deep, slow breaths.
- After you have relaxed and settled into the gentle rhythm of your breathing, begin to say the word *receive* silently in your mind each time you inhale, and the word *release* as you exhale. So, it's *receive* as you inhale, and *release* as you exhale. These two words will also help to focus your mind whenever it begins to wander.
- As you repeat the word *receive*, imagine yourself receiving what God has to offer you and wants to give to you right now.
- As you repeat the word *release*, imagine yourself releasing to God what it is you need to let go of at this time.
- Start by doing this practice for three to five minutes (it can be helpful to set a quiet timer at the beginning).
- If you have a particular prayer concern, you can use this practice to assist you in finding peace and guidance regarding your concern. Bring the concern to mind as you begin the “Receive, Release” practice. You may even find that you are given a different word or phrase that comes to mind to use in place of *receive* or *release*. You might, for example, find yourself mindfully repeating “patience,” “kindness,” or “forgiveness” on your in-breath and perhaps something like “control,” “anger,” or “judgment” on the out-breath.

### Rosebush Examen for Children\* (of all ages)

In this approach to learning the Examen, the authors suggested asking children to picture a rosebush. However we found that metaphor really helpful for ourselves and others either new to the practice, or too tired at the end of a long day to remember all the steps in their proper order. Perhaps it might be helpful for you too.

Here are the instructions: Picture a rosebush, which has roses, thorns, and buds. Then think of them this way: • Roses = joyful thing or things from the day. • Thorns = a painful or challenging experience. • Buds = possibilities for growth (hope).

What roses, thorns, and buds did your day or week hold?

\*From *New Directions for Holy Questions* by Claire Brown and Anita Peebles, shared in *Seasons of Wonder* by Bonnie Smith Whitehouse, pp. 181-182

### Examen Practice

A way of paying attention as we listen for God. The Daily Examen is an ancient and powerful way of reflecting on the day so that we can more clearly identify how and where God has shown up in our lives and where God may be guiding us. Following is a brief description of the practice.

At the end of the day, sit quietly for a few minutes, seeking God's presence. Then:

- Remember times in the day when you felt most alive, and thank God for those moments.
- Remember instances when you felt the least grateful, and offer those with thanks to God.
- Notice times in the day when you experienced being aligned with God's purpose for you, and give thanks for those times.
- Notice any moments when you felt far from living out God's purpose for your life, and offer those to God.
- Ask God to help you live ever more closely to God's plan and purpose for you tomorrow, and then turn everything over to God to hold while you rest.

—For more resources, a good place to start is the Ignatian Spirituality's website: [bit.ly/38De8gc](http://bit.ly/38De8gc)

### Centering Prayer Practice

A way to sit with God without using language. It is to consent to the Divine Presence within. Dwelling in God who dwells in us. The present moment is where we meet God and where we have an opportunity to enter more deeply into the mystery of God's love.

**The Four Guidelines** (from Thomas Keating, *Contemplative Outreach*):

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. (You can pray for God to give you an image/word that is just what you need at this time.)
2. Sit comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and then silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts,\* return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.  
\*includes body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

### Welcoming Prayer Practice

When used consistently, this practice has the capacity to quickly and effectively dislodge us from our habitual reactions, emotional patterns, and limiting comfort zones. Using it can help move us through challenging or painful experiences, times of disturbed emotion or anguish, and even moments where unhelpful control tendencies and self-inflation takes us over.

#### Three steps for the Welcoming Prayer Practice:

1. **Focus or “sink in”** to become aware and physically present to the particular experience or upset without analyzing or judging yourself or the situation. Don’t try to change anything at this stage—just stay present.
2. **Welcome and lightly name** the response that is being triggered by the difficult situation, such as *fear* or *anger* or *pain*. Acknowledge the response as sensation, and recognize that in this moment, if the experience is not being rejected or repressed, it can be endured. Ever so gently, begin to say “welcome,” such as “welcome fear,” “welcome resentment,” etc. Though this step is counter-intuitive and the impulse is most likely to try to push away the unpleasant emotion, Cynthia Bourgeault explains: “By welcoming it instead, you create an atmosphere of inner hospitality. By embracing the thing you once defended yourself against or ran from, you are actually disarming it, removing its power to hurt you or chase you back into your smaller self.”
3. **Transition to a “letting go,”** whereby the intensity of the situation can recede. This enables the natural fluidity of sensation to come and then go.

—For more on the Welcome Prayer/Practice, go to: <https://bit.ly/2Sqtj0R>

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## Vivir una buena Cuaresma en el 2025



*Cultivar el Fruto del Espíritu: corazón, el alma, la fuerza y la mente*

Un recurso para esta estación creado por Brújula de Vida (Living Compass)

## Living Well Through Lent 2025

*Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit in Heart, Soul, Strength, and Mind*

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