

*Esther 9:18-23*

## A good celebration



**REFLECTING:** We don't often think of the end of the book of Esther as a good resource for peacemaking. After all, Esther's people killed their enemies! But in Esther 9:18-23, Mordecai calls the Jews to a celebration of remembrance, not to honor those who fought, or to rejoice about being victors in a righteous cause, but to be thankful for their salvation. They will feast and exchange gifts every year to express their thanks that they are still alive. Read Esther 9:18-23.

These days of feasting and gladness are to be shared. Everyone feasts together, and the poor are not forgotten. It isn't a time for the rich to share presents just with their friends. It isn't a time for the poor to be sad. It is a time for all the people to rejoice together. Perhaps we would have this sense of overflowing gratitude if we were aware of how fragile our lives are. Whether we have survived a refugee camp or lived in relative ease, we owe our lives to God's grace.



**PRAYING:** God, we rejoice in the life you have given us. As we celebrate, remind us of those with whom we share life, so they may know your peace.



**RESPONDING:** How would our holiday celebrations change if they were more like the feast that Mordecai proclaimed? Consider planning a celebration to express gratitude for life. How can our celebration honor the Prince of Peace and share our joy in living?

*Carol Bucher Bixler  
Indianapolis, Indiana*



*Matthew 25:31-46*

## Praying to God among us



**REFLECTING:** What does it mean to pray to a God who is living and active throughout the whole created world? With what kind of ears does God hear our prayers? Jesus' sneak preview of judgment contains a clue. Read Matthew 25:31-46. In this familiar text Jesus tells his disciples that when the Son of Man comes in glory he will say to the righteous, "Just as you [fed, welcomed, clothed, cared for, visited] one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

The resurrected Jesus lives in suffering people. Two thousand years ago God looked into people's hearts through Jesus' eyes. Today these same eyes look into our hearts from jail cells, ghettos, refugee camps, and hospitals. Though most people try to stay away from places like these, God is pleased to call them home, and from them to hear and work out answers to our prayers.

Praying is like going to a big meal in God's house. We sit down at the table together with everyone from the "greatest" to the "least" of God's family. Anyone who is tempted to tell another, "You don't belong here," must remember that God invited each one. Our prayers go hand in hand with how we treat our neighbors who are suffering. May our prayers and our sharing keep drawing us together into closer communion with God who is among us.

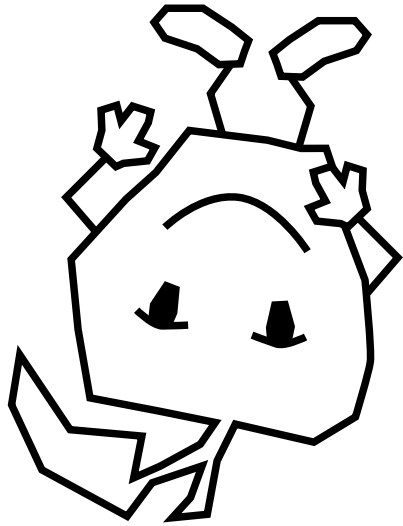


**PRAYING:** Make a silence early in your prayer time. Sense your connection with members of God's family, particularly "the least." Ask that God help your prayer to be harmonious with theirs.

*Duane Ediger  
Dallas, Texas*

**RESPONDING:** Be on the lookout for an opportunity today to exercise compassion. Richard Rohr has said, "You can act your way into a new way of thinking, but you can't think your way into a new way of acting."





## Just stand and watch

Mark 9:33-37



**REFLECTING:** Read Mark 9:33-37. A couple years ago our family went out to a restaurant. We gave our name at the desk and were told it would be about 30 minutes until a table was available. We decided to wait outside so we could enjoy the beautiful Kansas evening. As we visited, the beauty of the moment was interrupted by a screaming child dangling from the grip of an out-of-control father storming out of the restaurant. The father threw the child to the ground and yelled, “If you don’t do what I tell you, I’m going to break you in two.” Without hesitation our daughter Kristin (then 20 years old) walked to them and hovered over the child. There she stood, right beside the furious and threatening father. She had left her place of safety and entered a place of conflict. Her determination to protect this child was clear.

How did Kristin respond so quickly that evening? What gave her the courage? How did she know what to do? Why was she willing?

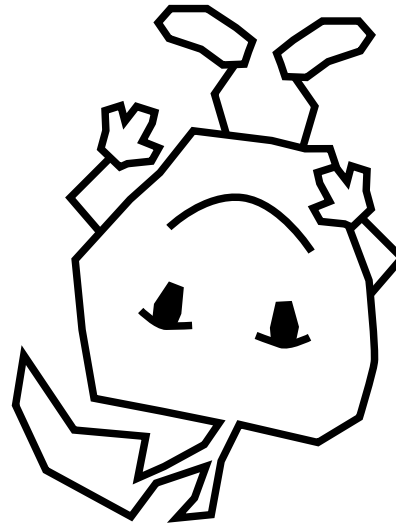
Kristin has always loved children. Even as a small child, she often had a little one on her hip. She grew up as part of Community Mennonite Church (Markham, Illinois). The congregation benefitted from her gift, and when she was 12 years old, they decided to acknowledge and celebrate it during a worship service. They commissioned her to care for children. Undoubtedly this is one of the experiences that has made Kristin who she is today. She knows she has a heart for children. She knows she has the power to advocate on their behalf. She knows she has the imagination and creativity to work and play with them. She knows she can devote herself to their protection, even at some risk to her own safety. The congregation’s affirmation is part of her inner security about this.

Chuck Neufeld  
Markham, Illinois

**RESPONDING:** In what concrete way can you or your congregation acknowledge and support those who are gifted to care for children?



**PRAYING:** God who cherishes children, help us to mirror as Kristin did your love and concern for little ones, for those who are vulnerable and dependent.



## Let's go do something else

Proverbs 15:1-4



**REFLECTING:** When my son Robin was nine years old, he befriended a boy in his class who had many emotional and behavior problems. Dan had an easily triggered violent temper, and a colorful vocabulary to go with it. Their teacher was puzzled by this attraction of opposites. She observed that Robin did not get drawn into Dan’s undesirable behaviors. Instead Dan tried to be more like Robin.

One day I went to meet Robin after school. The principal met me at the door and told me about an incident on the playground. Dan had gotten into a conflict with another boy. What began as a verbal disagreement was escalating to physical violence. A crowd of children had gathered to cheer on the combatants. The other child had kicked Dan, and Dan was about to throw a punch (punctuated by choice expletives), when Robin stepped into the volatile situation. He quietly put a hand on Dan’s arm, and led him away from the scene, saying, “Come on, Dan, let’s go do something else.” End of fight.

Read the wise words recorded in Proverbs 15:1-4.



**PRAYING:** God, give me courage and insight to intervene as Robin did when a potentially explosive situation needs a calming word and a friendly gesture.



**RESPONDING:** Think of someone with whom you live or work or play or worship whose temper is easily triggered. Robin defused Dan’s rage with a quiet word, while responding to his need for friendship and acceptance. How can your words and responses cool hot situations and address the need we all have to be loved and to belong?

Kathy Cutler



**REFLECTING:** The time was 1917-18. Young men from the Sonnenberg (Ohio) Mennonite Church faced the draft. Earl Gerber, Aldis Gerber, Menas Nussbaum, and David Baumgartner were drafted on October 4, 1917. Earl and Aldis went to Camp Sherman where Earl was discharged several months later for physical reasons. Not long after he was home he got a questionnaire from the draft board. Since he had already served and been discharged he ignored the questionnaire.

To his surprise in late March 1918 Sheriff Miller came to take him to the Wayne County jail. They had barely left home, gone over the railroad tracks and the bridge over Sugar Creek in that small valley, when they began to ascend the steep hill with the Model T Ford with which the sheriff had come to get Earl.

In shifting from high gear to low gear, the clutch slipped. Much to the consternation of the sheriff the auto refused to continue. Farm-boy Earl recognized quickly what was wrong, but said nothing. Sheriff Miller finally asked Earl, "Where is the nearest phone?"

Earl answered, "I guess the one at my home." When he saw they were about to go and call for a repairman to come and fix the auto, Earl piped up, "Do you have some tools? I'll see if I can fix it." So they took the back seat out and fumbled for some tools. Finally finding a wrench and a pair of pliers, Earl took them and shortly had the clutch tightened. Then he looked at the sheriff and told him, "All right, she'll run now."

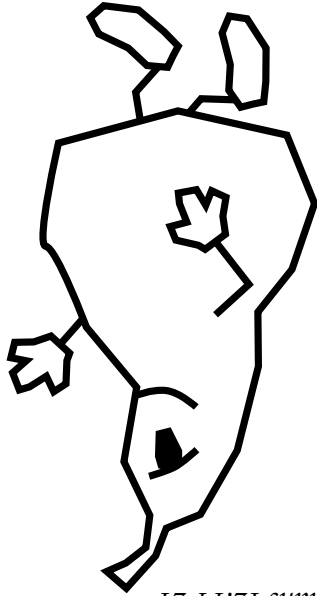
"Are you sure it will run?" asked the sheriff.

"Go on, get in. It will run now," Earl assured him. They restarted the Model T and up over the hill they went, and hauled Earl off to jail!

Read Romans 12:14-21.

## Aiding enemies

Romans 12:14-21



**PRAYING:** God, when I have what my enemies need, help me see them as my neighbors and give them what I can.



**RESPONDING:** Look for an opportunity today to do some surprising kindness for someone who is not seeking your good.



James O. Lehman  
Harrisonburg, Virginia

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**REFLECTING:** My daughter Heidi (12) and I have a friend in prison. We write letters back and forth. He and Heidi like to exchange jokes. He tells us about his work assignments. He tells us about his relationship with Jesus. He tells us about his painful childhood. He tells us about an organization he works with to discourage young people from ending up where he is. He talks about the boredom of prison life. Recently, after two years of corresponding, he has starting writing about his crime, and about how sorry he is for having hurt his victim.

In his last letter he was pleased to announce that he is about to move to the honors dorm. Along with this move come increased privileges. He can get some new clothes. Could we possibly send him some? He assured us we should not feel obligated to do so. I wondered whether he really needed the clothes. If we sent clothes, would he ask for something else next week? Would he take advantage of our generosity?

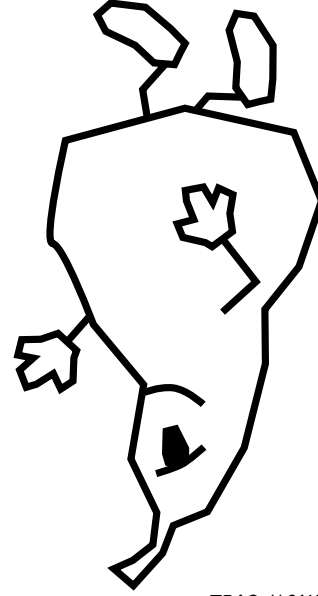
Read Matthew 5:42. Jesus' words, "Give to him who asks," answered my questions. Heidi and I had great fun studying the J. C. Penny catalog and choosing clothes for him. We hope he enjoys receiving the package as much as we enjoyed ordering. Our friend is sending us some clothes, too. They are no longer allowed to have black clothes. He is sending his black clothes to us. He wants us to have them.



**PRAYING:** God, help us to live today with gratitude for your great generosity to us. Make us generous and joyful givers.

## Joyful giving

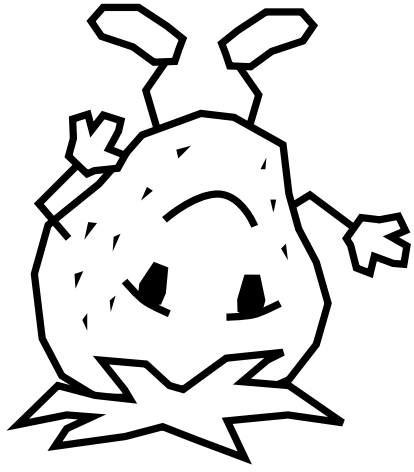
Matthew 5:42



**RESPONDING:** Today give something to someone who doesn't expect it. Have fun!



Elvera Johnson  
Versailles, Missouri



## Peace play

*Philippians 4:8-9*



**REFLECTING:** While living in Goshen, Indiana, a mother born in Korea wanted to plan some peace play for her three children. She tried several times, but couldn't capture their interest. When the Peace Factory stopped at Goshen College, the children asked, "Can we go see it?"

They went to the children's zone. There they transformed playdough bombies representing the cluster bombies still imbedded in Laotian soil into a plate, a spoon, a vase. They made rubbings of "peace" in different languages. They tossed bags of corn to hungry people in Africa.

When the children got back home, seven-year-old Hannah declared, "The pictures of the bombs scared me. I wish there wouldn't be war." To her brothers she said, "You guys have to throw away all of your war toys." John, the oldest, agreed. "You have too many violence toys," he told David. David retorted, "You have, too."

Hannah wanted many people to come see the Peace Factory. She thought of Ryan. "He likes gun play. And his dad loves Korean food. Could we invite them to eat dinner with us and then go to the Peace Factory?" Her mother agreed. As the children cleaned up the toy room before their guests arrived, Hannah asked David to put away his toys that encouraged violence. "Why?" David asked. "Because I don't like violence. I like peace and quiet." "I like peace and quiet, too," agreed David. He finally added, "You can put these toys into the box, but don't throw them away. I have to think more."

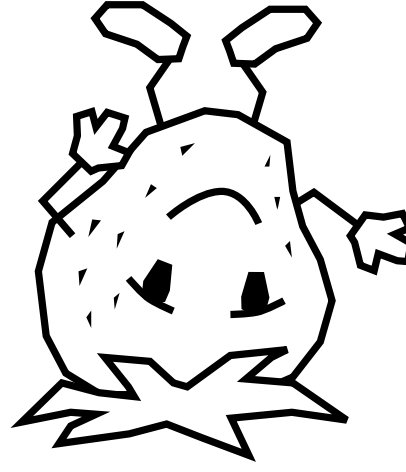
Read Philippians 4:8-9.



**PRAYING:** God, help us think about the subtle influences that undermine what we have learned from the Prince of Peace.

*Kathryn Aschiman  
Goshen, Indiana*

**RESPONDING:** At the Peace Factory, Ryan's mother added her name to the list of those who were asking Taco Bell what can you do to support play for children and adults that reinforces what is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, worthy of praise?



## Enemies no more

*Luke 6:27-36*



**REFLECTING:** Read Luke 6:27-36. During the eighties, when civil war was raging in Lebanon and dividing the population into factions of Christian, Muslim, and Druse militias, a young Christian told this story to Hildegard Goss-Mayr (honorary president of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation):

"I belonged to a Christian militia. I was ordered to investigate the Druse position. A young Druse soldier was surveying the tree-covered slope of a hill near their camp. He discovered me there and took me prisoner. He led me up the hill towards his camp. But I was better trained than he, and I was able to set myself free and take his gun, thus reversing our positions.

"As I was walking with my prisoner, ready to kill him if he should try to escape, I suddenly saw inside myself the image of Christ on the cross. The passage from the gospel, 'Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you,' resounded powerfully in my mind. With great urgency I felt I had to follow the example of Jesus. I threw down the gun and walked away, ready to die, knowing my enemy could pick it up and shoot me. I heard steps behind me. I did not turn around. Suddenly I felt the arm of the young Druse around me, and heard him say to me, with deep emotion, 'You have spared my life. I also will not kill you. We are brothers!'

"We separated, each one walking back to his camp. Later I found out that the Druse soldier had been executed for disobeying orders. I left the militia and refused ever to return to it."

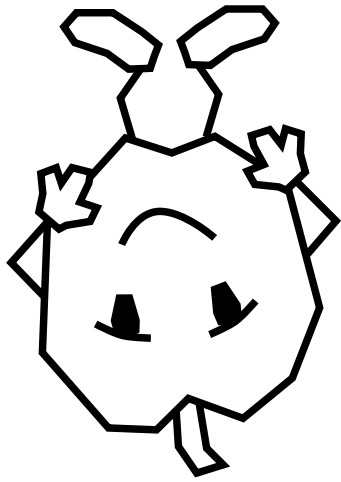


**PRAYING:** O Lord, help me to remember you and follow your example when I must choose between risking my safety and harming someone else.

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information, contact Fellowship of  
Reconciliation, Box 271, North Broadway,  
Nyack, NY 10960; phone 914-358-4661.

**RESPONDING:** In times of conflict we tend to think and react to each other in polarized, us-and-them ways. Think of a conflict you are part of, and call to mind someone who is on the other side of it. How can you think about this person in a way that keeps your common humanity in view? How can you seek a solution that values the other person's good?





*Matthew 5:38-48*

## Jesus changed all that



**REFLECTING:** I live in a community where most Christians do not think much about peacemaking. Although many oppose abortion, many also strongly support the death penalty. Pro-life and pro-death do not seem contradictory to them.

Twice people have quoted Scripture to me in defense of the death penalty. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," they told me. I protested: "But Jesus changed all that. Jesus said, 'You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer....Love your enemies....'" Read Matthew 5:38-48.

I don't know that I have changed anybody's mind, but I have stopped the argument. How can you argue with Jesus? During last year's political campaigns, I was sad to see how many state and national politicians announced their support for the death penalty. One member of my church, a candidate for state representative, had such an ad in the local paper. I let him know his ad had lost him my vote. He won the election anyway. Does my voice have any impact?

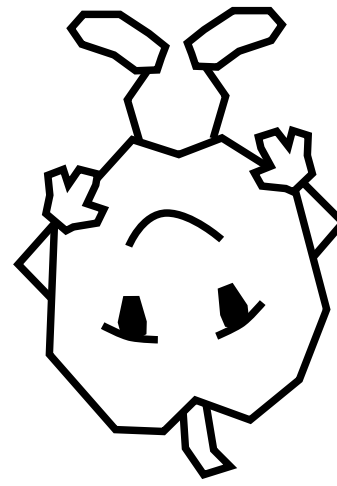


**PRAYING:** Lord, give me courage to continue speaking up, even when I doubt I am heard and understood. Help me hear those who encourage me to live your peace with greater integrity and consistency.



**RESPONDING:** Be aware of opportunities to challenge people around you to follow Jesus' way. Do so without arrogance.

*Elvera Johnson  
Versailles, Missouri*



*Colossians 3:12-14*

## What shall I wear today?



**REFLECTING:** Read Colossians 3:12-14. What peacemakers we would be if we were clothed as Paul suggests! Wouldn't it be amazing if we could SEE compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience? If you decided to put on compassion, what color would you be wearing? And kindness? The other virtues? Could we wear them all at the same time? What about forgiveness? Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, "Forgiveness is not an occasional act. It is a permanent attitude." Over all these other clothes, imagine putting on love as a coat, wrapping us warmly.

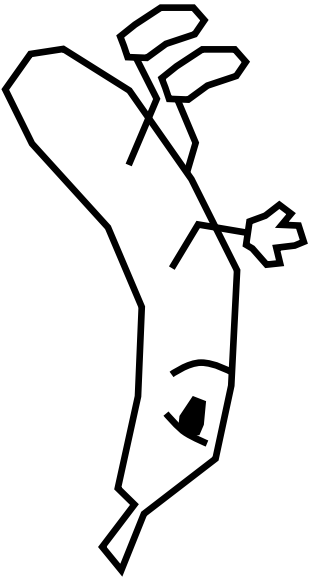


**PRAYING:** O God, creator of everything that is good, clothe me with all I need to show your love to those I meet today. Fill my heart with your peace, so I can bring that peace to others.



**RESPONDING:** As you dress, think about adding to your attire one (or all) of the virtues Paul commends, and being a colorful peacemaker wherever you go.

*Ethel Umble  
Goshen, Indiana*



Genesis 1:27a

## Labels



**REFLECTING:** In every community, large or small, rural or urban, there are people whom others label as “different.” In my home community, in rural Minnesota, there was a man we called “Dirty Mike.” People would talk about Mike’s dirty house, filthy clothes, and weedy garden. Mike was never invited to our community gatherings, and I don’t think anyone ever invited him to church. We gave him a label, and saw him only as “Dirty Mike.” We didn’t recognize him as “Mike,” a human being created and loved by God. Read Genesis 1:27a.

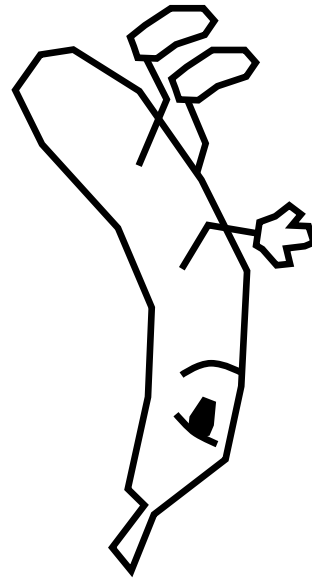


**PRAYING:** Forgive us, God, for labeling others. Give us new eyes to see people as you see them.



**RESPONDING:** Think of someone your community has labeled as “different.” How can you relate to this person as one created in God’s image? How might you help this person experience Jesus’ deep love for them?

*Al Mortenson  
Louisville, Kentucky*



Habakkuk 1:2; 2:2, 4

## Crying for peace



**REFLECTING:** Read Habakkuk 1:2; 2:2, 4. The seventh grade Sunday school class came bounding in to experience the Peace Factory. Some visited the Peacemakers Galleries, which had pictures of biblical and modern people involved in peacemaking. Some checked out the Manufacturing Area, which presented ideas for dealing with militarism, crime, and other forms of violence and injustice. Other class members worked through the computer exercise to understand ways of responding to conflict. In the midst of all the hubbub, Sara Kawira, who is equally at home in Shirati, Tanzania, and Goshen, Indiana, stood at the writing table and composed this letter:

As President of the United States, you have a huge responsibility.  
Try to make peace in the world. No more fighting. No more quarreling.

Don't you hear it?  
Don't you hear the world?  
It's crying. It's weeping.  
The world wants peace.

Peace among nations.  
Peace among tribes.  
Peace among races.  
Black and white people.  
Indians and others.

*Kathryn Aschmann  
Goshen, Indiana*

for peace do you hear? Try putting your thoughts into poetry, as Sara did. You may want to use some of the prophet's words from Habakkuk, or Sara's first and last stanzas, with your own middle verse. Share your work with someone else.



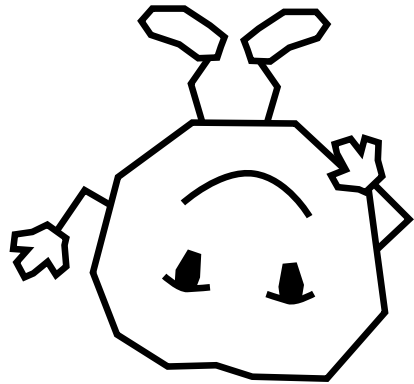
**RESPONDING:** What cries for peace do you hear? What cries injustice.

**PRAYING:** God, give us peace as we work to relieve injustice.

I know one day peace will be on the earth. When Jesus comes, then there will be peace.

The world wants peace. It's crying. It's weeping. Don't you hear the world? Don't you hear it?





*Psalm 139:1-9, 26*

**Love more  
constant than  
the stars**



**REFLECTING:** Read Psalm 139:1-9, 26. I enjoyed seeing comet Hale-Bopp in the sky this spring. But a comet is a brief and infrequent visitor in our sky. In contrast, the stars are always there. Just think: the constellations we see are the same ones that Abraham and Jesus saw! No wonder mariners have followed the stars to navigate. God’s love is even more constant and faithful than the stars in the sky. God is always reaching out to us.

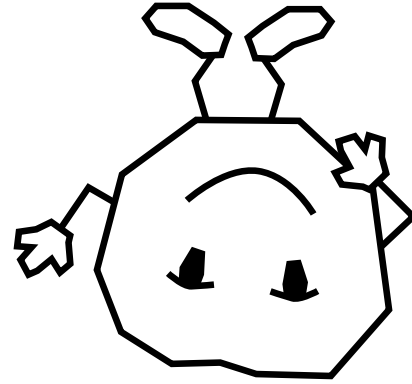


**PRAYING:** Lord God, thank you for creating such a marvelous universe. We praise you for being Someone we can always count on. In a society that seeks what is new, we find comfort in knowing you are more faithful than the stars!



**RESPONDING:** Sing “Great is thy faithfulness” (*Hymnal: A worship book*, 327). Renew your commitment to being faithful to your family, church, and friends. Ask God to direct you to one new commitment of faithfulness today.

*Jeff Hackman  
Salem, Oregon*



*1 Samuel 1:1-28*

**Now what do  
you say?**



**REFLECTING:** Read 1 Samuel 1:1-28. Hannah had asked the Lord for a child, and she received Samuel. She was so grateful that she dedicated him to the Lord’s service. We often ask God for things, and often we receive. That shouldn’t be the end of the story! Do we rejoice in God’s grace and power, as Hannah did? (See 1 Samuel 2:1-10. You may want to compare Mary’s experience, and her song in Luke 1:46-55.) Do we dedicate to God what we have received, remembering that God is the source of it all?

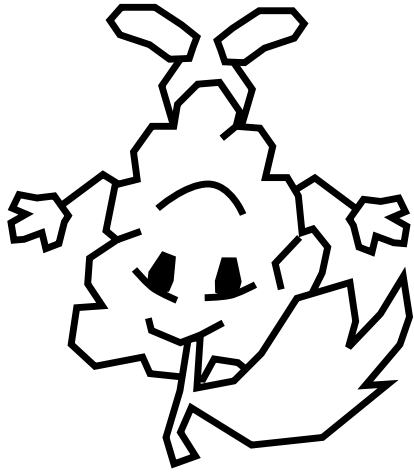


**PRAYING:** Lord, help us to be like Hannah, who recognized your faithfulness. Thank you for all you do for us. We dedicate to you all we receive from you.



**RESPONDING:** Look back at the title of this devotional. The question is one parents use to help remind their children to say “Thank you.” Today, let’s take that a step further. Think of something God has given you: a talent, some time, a relationship. Ask God what it will mean for you to dedicate that gift to God.

*Jeff Hackman  
Salem, Oregon*



Hebrews 12:14

# The wolf and the lamb lie down together



**REFLECTING:** I recently spent three weeks visiting Mennonite Board of Missions and Mennonite Central Committee workers in the Middle East. One man told us about his modest effort to work at reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians who regard each other as enemies. He lends his camel to an Israeli and a Palestinian, and invites them to go on it to the desert together, and spend three days there. He has found that they come back as friends, having realized that there is little difference between them. Read Hebrews 12:14.

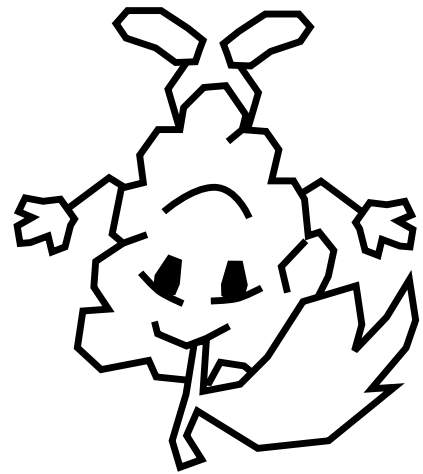


**PRAYING:** God of peace, give us a desire to pursue peace with everyone, and to help enemies come to recognize their common humanity.



**RESPONDING:** Where are there tensions between groups in your community? In what modest way might you contribute to members of these groups coming to see one another as friends?

Wayne Liechty  
Archbold, Ohio



Proverbs 22:6

# Intergenerational service



**REFLECTING:** A group of Goshen College faculty and staff members were caroling. Retired college personnel were the recipients of their musical proclamation of a child, a Prince of Peace, born for us. Ten-year-old Josiah helped 18-month-old Ryan tumble out of his car seat at a number of stops. At times three-year-old Elsa was glad to be lifted in her mother's arms to get a better view of the carolees.

The carolers were preparing to leave President Emeritus Paul Mininger's room at Greencroft Nursing Center. Paul said quietly, "Wait just a minute. There's something I want to say, and I'm trying to think how to say it." We waited, and then listened as he spoke to us about the importance of including children when we do things for others. "What better way to bring them up to a life of service? Thinking about other people and how to help them is the essence of 'Culture for Service,' the motto of Goshen College."

Parents who had brought their children left with a special blessing. The rest were reminded to teach the ways of peace, and learn them by doing. None of us is too young or too old to work out our faith. Read Proverbs 22:6.

Paul died six weeks later, on the day before his 89th birthday.

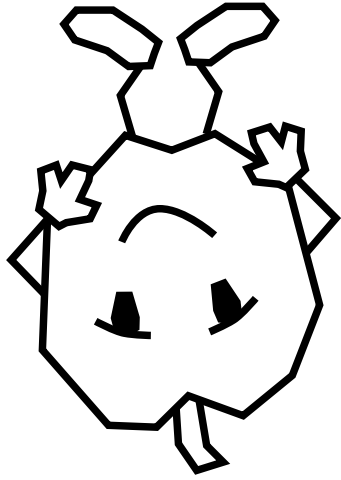


**PRAYING:** Think of people who have helped you value the presence and participation of children in proclaiming peace by serving others. Think of people who encourage(d) you as a child to be involved in such activities, and include(d) you. Thank God for them.



**RESPONDING:** Plan a peacemaking service activity involving adults and children.

Kathryn Aschliman  
Goshen, Indiana



*Romans 12:21*

## Overcome evil with good



**REFLECTING:** One day, several years ago, I walked up to the window of a bank teller and stated my business. The teller's first comment to me was harsh. His abrasive remark bothered me, and I responded in like manner, wanting to give him a taste of his own medicine. When I walked away, I felt rotten about the way I had reacted. Together we had built a wall between us. A different response on my part could have led to a better outcome.

To build peace instead of walls, we must first keep from being overcome by evil. When we are overcome by evil, we echo back the bad that comes to us. We let the initial evil consume our thoughts and dictate our reactions. When someone hurts us, we want to even the score, to retaliate, to extract at least an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. We may respond to a put-down with a put-down, an insult with an insult, a hurtful word with an even more biting comment. This reaction to evil breeds more evil; like falling dominoes, the violence spreads.

Read Romans 12:21. Paul reminds us not to repay evil for evil. Positively, we are to repay evil with good. This is the only way to stop the spread of evil and overcome it. And it is the only way to start the spread of goodness in a bad situation.

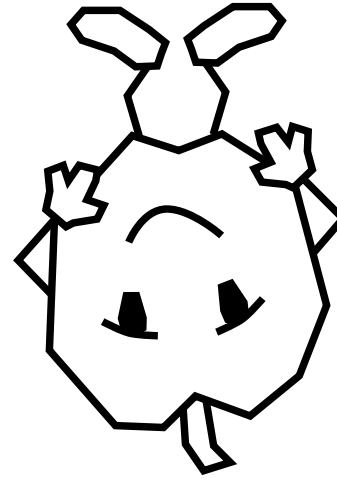


**PRAYING:** Lord, fill us to the brim with your goodness, so that when evil comes our way, we will not reflect it back, but will be ready to overcome it.



**RESPONDING:** In what situations are you likely to try to hurt someone who has hurt you? Think of an example, perhaps in a close relationship, perhaps from a brief encounter. Try to become aware of the impulse to retaliate before you act on it, and consciously stop the automatic response.

*Ted Lewis, Pawnee  
Rock, Kansas*



*Isaiah 65:17-25*

## Bombies to roses



**REFLECTING:** Among the visitors to the interactive traveling Peace Factory was a group of sixth graders and their kindergarten buddies. Together pairs of sixth graders and kindergartners worked with various activities, including the How to Handle a Bully board. They used the Channels of Peace to make decisions so water could flow through the pipes into the globe below. They saw pictures of the province in Laos where even today, decades after the end of the war there, people are often hurt when bombies that remain in the ground explode. The children could hold the shell of a real bombie, and see dinner plates people have made from the shells. Then they got playdough bombies and changed them into bowls, hearts, a house, food, a dove with an olive in its beak.

After their visit, the sixth graders sent thank-you letters. Mike wrote, "I think I speak for the kindergartners as well when I say the Peace Factory is very interesting. I had fun." "I feel very sorry for the people who live where the bombies are" was Maria's response. "I hope they find all the bombies. I wish them peace." Michael wrote, "I learned you can make bad things good things."

In the last group of visitors at the Peace Factory's first stop on its tour across North America, Jay Phoun, a high school senior born in Laos, walked away from the bombie exhibit while his classmates heard about the destruction that continues in his homeland today. He took his playdough bombie and squashed it flat. Then he began to roll strips of playdough, and formed them into a rose. His classmates, delighted with the transformation, followed his instructions. Soon there was a bouquet of roses!

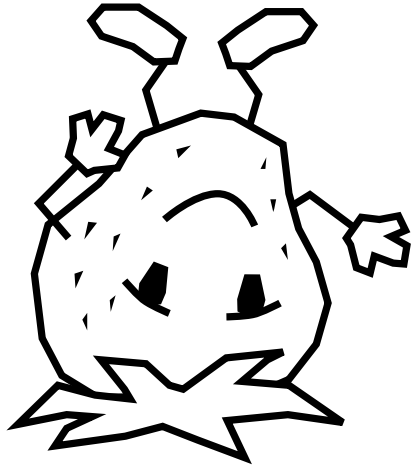
Read Isaiah 65:17-25. Consider the transformation God is preparing: "I am about to create a new heaven and a new earth. . . . No more shall the sound of weeping be heard. . . . They shall not hurt or destroy. . . ." How can we be part of God's new reality?

*Kathryn Aschiman  
Goshen, Indiana*

**PRAYING:** God, forgive us in the United States for contributing to the continuing pain and destruction in Laos. Help the boys and girls and men and women there learn that we are sorry for the harm our weapons have caused them. Help us to be part of making their lives better.

**RESPONDING:** Send money to the War Victims Fund (Laos), Mennonite Central Committee, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501, to help people who have been injured in bombie accidents. Ask MCC for information about programs to find and destroy the bombies before they hurt people.



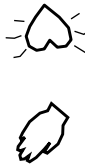


**Graffiti!**  
Psalm 19:14

*Kathryn Aschliman  
Goshen, Indiana*

**RESPONDING:** Study the graffiti samples and talk about their meaning. Create your own graffiti saying or drawing. Put it on the back of the next envelope you send.

**PRAYING:** Help us, O God, so we don't just talk the talk, but also walk the walk.



**REFLECTING:** Read Psalm 19:14. On an Urban Life Center tour we drove through a Chicago neighborhood with brightly colored murals painted on the brick walls of buildings that lined the street. What a contrast to the neighborhood on the other side of the railroad tracks. The graffiti there carried rude messages and symbols of rival gangs.

The traveling Peace Factory has a graffiti wall where visitors can write or draw their thoughts and feelings about peace. Here are a few samples:



- Hate and fear are four-letter words, but so are love and care.
- One day I went out to find my enemy; That day I found no friends. One day I went out to find my friend; That day I found no enemy. (*Native American proverb*)



- Apart we can't, but together we can.
- Love others as you love yourself.
- World peace cannot be found until it is found within ourselves.

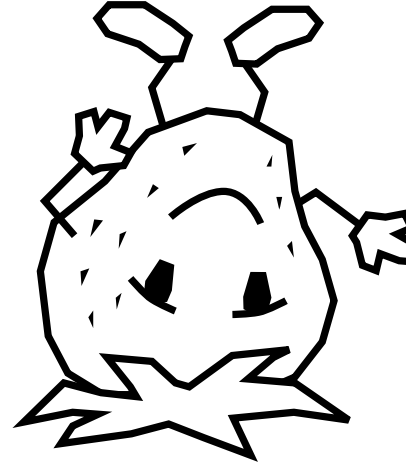


*Smile God  
Loves  
you*

- No Jesus/No peace. Know Jesus/Know peace.
- An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and the whole world will be blind and toothless.



- How would the world be different if we remembered that everyone is someone's brother, or sister, or parent, or child, or good friend?



**There was nothing else I could do!**  
John 18:19-24

*Anne Meyer Byler  
Champaign, Illinois*

**RESPONDING:** What are some ways of dealing with conflict you want to use more? Next time you have a disagreement with someone, try using one of them.



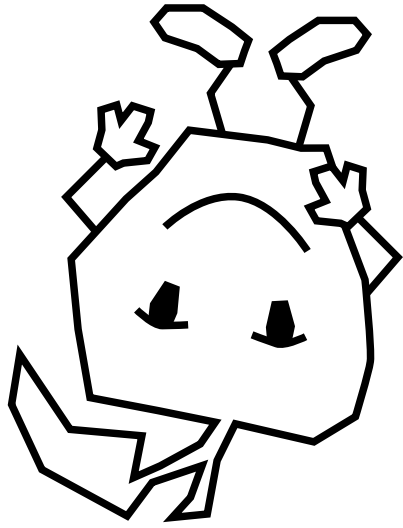
**REFLECTING:** "There was nothing else I could do!" Have you ever felt like this when you did something you were sorry for later? It's hard to think of better ways to respond when we're angry or frustrated. But just as soccer drills can make the right move automatic in a tight spot, practicing thinking of ways we could respond in a tough situation may help us when we get there.

How many ways can you think of, right now, to respond when you're in a conflict with someone? (A conflict is when two or more people disagree and it bothers at least one of them.) Your ideas can be serious or silly. It might help to write them down. Keep your list in mind, and read John 18:19-24.

"The high priest questioned [Jesus] about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world;...I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me?' ...When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest!' Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?'" Were any of the ways that you came up with to respond to conflict ones used in this Bible passage? Were there some used that you hadn't thought of?



**PRAYING:** Sing "Teach me kingdom ways" (*Sing and rejoice*, 102). Dear God, help us look to you today for new ways to deal with frustrating situations and annoying people. Thank you for giving us lots of choices and lots of chances as we grow to be more like you.



*Psalm 62:8-10, Psalm 20:7-8,  
Jeremiah 17:5-8*

## What if . . . ?



**REFLECTING:** Read Psalm 62:8-10, Psalm 20:7-8, and Jeremiah 17:5-8. We all know what it is like to be afraid. We may be afraid that people won't like us or that we won't have enough money saved if something bad happens to our family. We may be afraid of being lonely, or left out, or last! What are some things you are afraid of?

It's okay to be afraid. There are real things to be afraid of in our world. Jesus was afraid when his friends left him and he knew he was going to die. It's normal to try to find places to put our trust in times like this, but it is also easy to get carried away. We can trust other people, but we shouldn't expect them to keep us from ever feeling lonely or sad. We can try to make sure we have enough money, but it's hard to know how much is enough, and sometimes we just try to get more and more. We can trust in ourselves and our strength, but sometimes we are tempted to try to force others to do what we want.

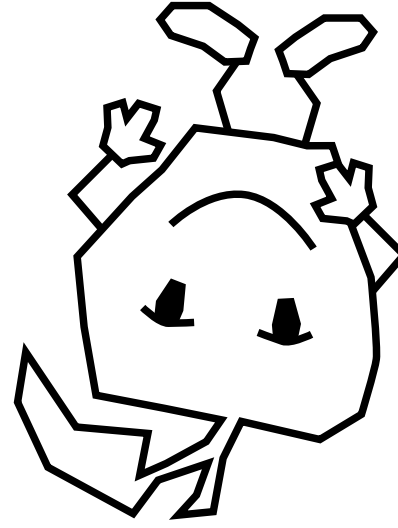
The Bible says in lots of places that we can always depend on God to be with us and take care of us. When Jesus was afraid, he prayed, "My Father, if there is no other way, and I must suffer, I will still do what you want." It wasn't easy, but God did take care of him in the end!



**PRAYING:** Sing "God of our strength" (*Hymnal: A worship book*, 36, verses 1, 3, 4). Dear God, we want to trust you. Thank you for the people and money and things you've given us for our safety and enjoyment. Show us what trusting you means for the way we treat the people and money and power you have given us. Help us keep you at the center of our lives.

*Anne Meyer Byler  
Champaign, Illinois*

**RESPONDING:** Ask God to help you see one thing in your life that would change if you trusted God more deeply to be with you and take care of you. Pray for that trust, and take a concrete step (it could be big or small) to live your prayer.



*Exodus 15:1, 11; Mark 4:35-41;  
Psalm 46:8-11.*

## Powerful, peaceful



**REFLECTING:** The Bible often testifies to God's power. Read Exodus 15:1, 11; Mark 4:35-41; Psalm 46:8-11. How is God's power seen in these passages? What other stories or texts in the Bible remind you of God's power?

In Psalm 62:11, the psalmist writes, "Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord." Jesus tells his followers (in Matthew 5:9) that God blesses people who make peace; "they will be called children of God."

Reflect on other Bible stories and texts that show God as peace-loving and peace-making. Consider God's response to Cain, in Genesis 4:8-15, and how Jesus responds in Luke 22:49-51. Sing "To us a child of hope is born" (*Hymnal: A worship book*, 189).

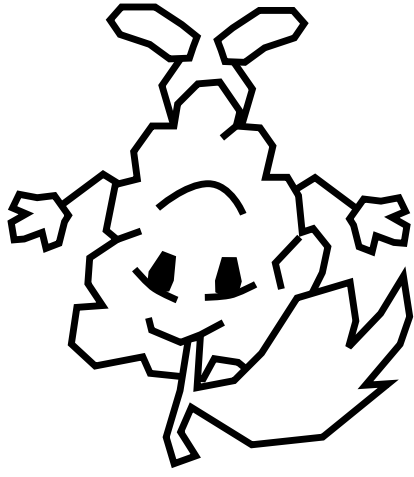


**PRAYING:** Dear God, help us look to you today and every day for power to be your peacemaking people.



**RESPONDING:** Rewrite Psalm 46:8-11, using modern images, today's weapons. The meaning of verse 10, usually translated "Be still," may well be "Put down your arms." In other words, "Stop fighting, and know that I am God." How can our peacefulness today reflect our trust in the power of this God?

*Anne Meyer Byler  
Champaign, Illinois*



## Fig trees and grapevines

*Micah 4:2-5*

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*Anne Meyer Byler,  
Champaign, Illinois*

**RESPONDING:** Sing:  
"And every one 'neath their vine  
and fig tree shall live in peace and  
unafraid and into plowshares beat  
their swords; nations shall learn  
war no more."



**REFLECTING:** The prophet Micah lived in Judah (the southern part of Israel after it divided) about 700 years before the time of Jesus. The prophet Isaiah lived at about the same time, in the northern part. They both called God's people to trust God instead of armies and to turn back to God by treating the people around them more justly. Micah 6:8 summarizes this message beautifully.

Read Micah 4:2-5. Compare Isaiah 2:2-4. Micah looked forward to a time when people would pound their swords and spears into rakes and shovels, when they wouldn't make war ever again, when they would all rest under their own grapevines and under their own fig trees. How might Micah's prophecy still be good news for our world today? Where are there arguments now between distant and powerful nations? How can we as God's people help turn destructive weapons into useful tools? If in Micah's vision of a peaceful world people would sit under their vines and trees, what would people in today's world need in order to rest and be at peace?



**PRAYING:** Dear God, inspire us with the vision you gave Micah of a peaceful world. We pray for countries at war [name some], for people who are in danger because of violence. We pray for people who are trying to help change weapons of war into tools of peace [name some peacemakers]. We thank you for food and shelter and much, much more that we have. Help us spread this wealth around to your other children [name some ways you could do so]. Show us how to follow your way of peace today.



## It really works

*Romans 12:17-21*

*Lynn Miller  
Chicago, Illinois*

**PRAYING:** O Lord, you  
thought of me when you faced  
death. Help me think of some-  
thing other than my own safety  
when the gun is pointed at me.  
**RESPONDING:** Think of  
as many responses as you can to  
the demand "Give me your  
money or I'll shoot." Now rate  
each of them: Is it win-lose,  
lose-lose, or win-win?



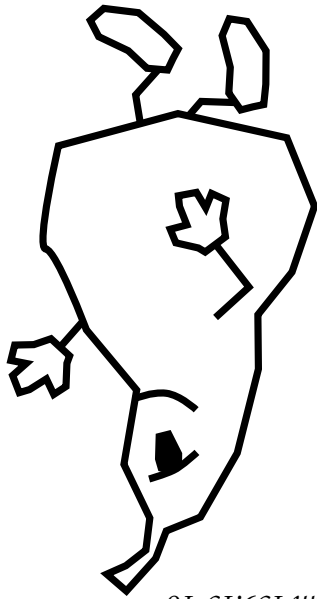
**REFLECTING:** Well, it finally happened. My wife Linda and I got held up as we were walking to the church. When we were almost there, a guy came up to us, pointed a gun at me, and said, "Give me your money or I'll shoot."

Now we had been warned about this neighborhood, and I had considered ways to respond nonviolently in such a situation. I had practiced some great alternative responses, like "Wow, neat gun. What caliber is it? How about selling it to me?" and "I must tell you, at this moment I am wearing boxer shorts and I know how to use them!" But things happened so fast, I didn't have time to think of any of them.

What I did do was tell him that I didn't have any money, but that if he would come with us to church we would try to find something for him. He shouted again that I should give him "the money," and I repeated that I didn't have any but we could find something for him at the church. Then Linda told him that we needed to go visit a woman whose mother had just died, and we both turned and started to walk down the narrow path that led to the back of the church.

Halfway there, I turned back and said, "Come on," and motioned for him to follow us. But he just stood there a minute, and then turned and ran away.

Most people here have since told us that we were lucky, or crazy, and advised us to carry a roll of bills for just this kind of eventuality. In other words, we need to learn how to be better victims. In retrospect I think that giving the assailant an invitation that had his needs in mind may be what made our response work. So now I am practicing in a different way. Instead of rehearsing nonviolent responses that are self-protecting, I am working on responses that seek my assailant's good. Nonviolent self-defense is still self-defense. The work of Jesus is to seek good for the other. Read Romans 12:17-21.



*Psalm 139:13-16*

## Luis's shark

*Cindy Detrow  
Dalton, Ohio*

God does, and think about his/her strengths before you try to talk with him/her about what's bothering you.



**REFLECTING:** One of my duties as a volunteer teacher's aide was grading second and third graders' art projects. As I was looking through a stack of the third graders' shark paintings, I was disappointed to see that Luis hadn't put much effort into this project. His shark was very small, not large and detailed like the sharks painted by the rest of the class, and most of the page was covered in sloppy blue splotches. The poor shark looked like a raggedy patchwork quilt. Its head was yellow, its tail orange, its fins purple and green, and its body pink.

When I showed the picture to the art teacher, though, he smiled and said, "Luis is doing something that no one else in the class thought of. He's showing that the ocean is much bigger than a shark. His brush strokes show the movement of the water. And just look at his creative use of color on that shark!" As I looked at Luis's shark through the art teacher's eyes, I began to see its beauty and Luis's creativity. I just hadn't known what to look for.

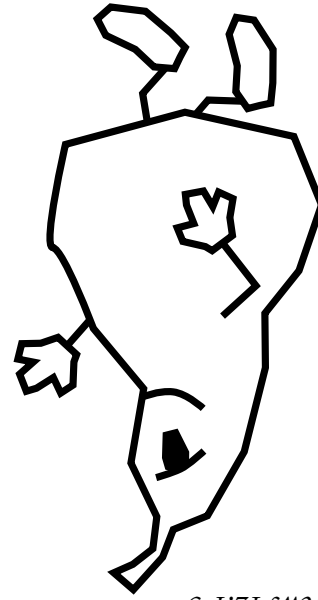
Read Psalm 139:13-16. People are God's artwork. Sometimes, especially when people annoy us or hurt us or frighten us, it's hard to remember that God made every one of us fearfully and wonderfully. Like the art teacher, though, God will show us, if we ask, the goodness and kindness and beauty and creativity in each person.



**PRAYING:** God, help me look at others through your eyes. And thank you for people who see me as your artwork.



**RESPONDING:** Think of someone whose goodness and kindness and beauty and creativity you find hard to see. Spend a few minutes identifying this person's better qualities. Next time you are bothered by this person, ask God to help you see him/her as



*Hebrews 12:1-3*

## Finishing the race



**REFLECTING:** It was field day, and Renee was excited because her dad had taken time off from work so he could watch her run the 100-meter dash. Renee crouched at the starting line. "On your mark. Get set. Go!" shouted the teacher. Renee sprang forward, running as fast as she could. About halfway around the track, she felt a sharp pain in her side. Breathing made it hurt more. Renee looked up at the crowd in the bleachers and saw that her dad was cheering her on. Holding her side, she jogged the rest of the 100 meters. She was the last runner to cross the finish line. When Renee joined her dad in the bleachers after the race, he hugged her and handed her a note. It said, "I'm so proud of you, Renee. I saw that your side hurt, but you kept running anyway. Sometimes just finishing the race makes you a winner."

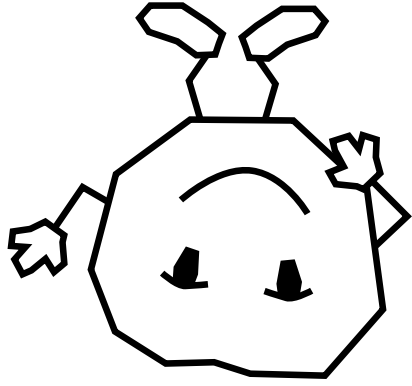
Read Hebrews 12:1-3. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews compares following Jesus to running a race. Following Jesus means doing some hard things, like resisting sin, forgiving people who hurt us, and doing things that people who don't know Jesus don't understand. The race of faith is sometimes exhilarating. Other times, like Renee, we struggle to finish the race. The verses from Hebrews don't talk about winning, but tell us to fix our eyes on Jesus and run with perseverance. We can be sure that God, like Renee's dad, is watching us as we run, and is proud of us just for finishing the race.



**PRAYING:** Jesus, we look to you as we run our race of faith. Help us persevere and finish the race, even when it's difficult. Sing "Guide my feet" (*Hymnal: A worship book*, 546).



**RESPONDING:** Talk about your race. What is fun and exciting about following Jesus? What is difficult? How have you persevered and finished the race?



*Matthew 22:34-40*

## Love your neighbor



**REFLECTING:** Loving our neighbors is important. So important, in fact, that Jesus said the only thing more important is loving God! Read Matthew 22:34-40. The word “neighbor” can have two meanings. When we talk about our neighbors, we usually mean the people who live close to us. When Jesus tells us to love our neighbors, he means that we are to love everyone, people who live near us and people who live far away.

My Aunt Donna and Uncle Paul Detrow and their children, Joe, Beki, Ben, and Lydia, found a creative way to show love to their neighbors. When they moved to a new house, they wanted to get to know their neighbors. It was Christmas time, so Donna and the kids baked cookies and took them door to door. They took the initiative to show their neighbors that they wanted to be friends.

Uncle Paul has another idea. He wants to take cookies to people in town who have to work on holidays, doctors and nurses and firefighters and police officers, to show love and appreciation for these neighbors who can't be with their families to celebrate.

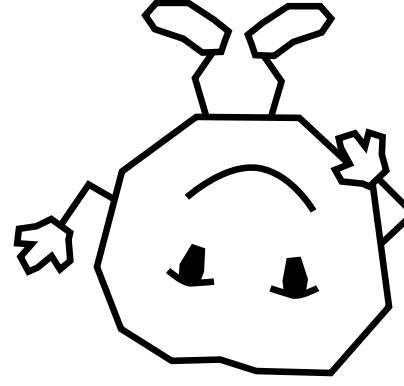


**PRAYING:** God, help us think of new and creative ways to show love to our neighbors, whether they live close to us or far away.



**RESPONDING:** Think of a way your family can work together to show love to your neighbors.

*Cindy Detrow  
Dalton, Ohio*



*Psalms 27:1-3, 12-14*

## On not looking the other way



**REFLECTING:** For the last several years, Washington, DC, has ranked in the top five cities in the nation in per capita homicides, with a murder rate hovering around the 400-per-year mark. In addition, more than 2000 shootings and assaults in the city each year do not result in a death.

Two weeks after I returned from a Christian Peacemaker Team project in Haiti, I was mugged and car-jacked. It tipped the balance for me. Haiti, safer than my neighborhood? Did the peace movement, with its long history, have anything to say to urban violence? What sense did it make for me to walk over the bodies in my front yard to get into a cab, to go to the airport, to go far away, to “make” peace for someone else?

These ruminations led to a program to reduce violence, “The Project in Urban Peacemaking” (PUP). Much of the project’s work has been in 12 square blocks of the Columbia Heights neighborhood, around one of our local partners, the Sojourners Neighborhood Center. In the course of a few months, the PUP was able to help organize community patrols, close some dangerous “crack houses,” teach nonviolent techniques to youth and other neighbors, organize safe and fun community events and surveys, and help with communication among people who were feeling isolated and scared of the violence all around them. We were able to teach that safety and security should be everybody’s business, not just the police’s or the government’s.

The gospel of nonviolence is a long row to hoe. I try to remember that God calls me not to return evil for evil, but to overcome evil with good, to engage the principalities and powers, with faith and conviction. When I feel overwhelmed, I remember that Jesus’ disciples also wondered, If it is so difficult to enter the kingdom of God, “Who then can

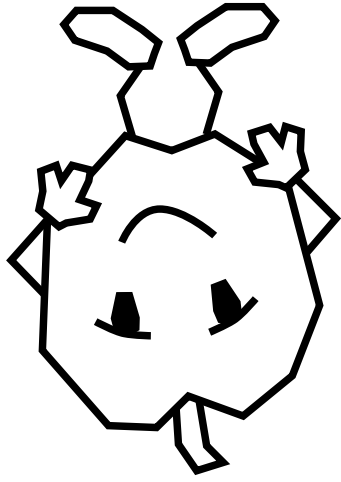
*Cole Hull  
Bethell, Washington*

be saved?” Jesus responded: “You’re right. For people it is impossible. “But not for God; for God all things are possible.” Read Psalm 27:1-3, 12-14.

**PRAYING:** Lord, grant me patience to wait on you. Let my heart take courage. When violence camps all around me, give me confidence that I will see your goodness in the land of the living.

**RESPONDING:** As you pray for the good of your community, invite God to show you how you are contributing to it, and how that contribution can grow. Talk with others about what you hear, and see what comes of it.





*Genesis 28:10-22*

## Shoots and ladders



**REFLECTING:** Read Genesis 28:10-22. At his mother's urging, Jacob has deceived his father and received the blessing intended for Esau. Now Jacob is on his way out of town to save his skin. An outcast, he is journeying toward Haran, and stops for the night. He sleeps, and in his dreams finds that he has stumbled upon the very gates of heaven: a ladder with angels ascending and descending.

There Jacob receives another blessing. God promises to give the land to Jacob and his descendants, who will be as numerous as the dust of the earth. And God tells Jacob, "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." In this revelation and relationship are the seeds of the Jewish faith.

In the West Bank city of Hebron today, this faith informs the outlook of many Israeli settlers. They take literally the promises recorded in Genesis 28. They have come to reclaim their birthright as the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But the Muslims of Hebron also venerate the patriarchs of Genesis, and many can claim more direct descent from them and more connection with the land they walked than can Israeli settlers who grew up in (for example) Garden City, New Jersey.

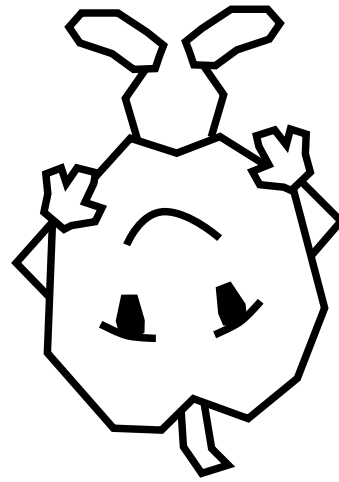
120,000 Palestinians live in the city of Hebron, 45 miles south of Jerusalem. In their midst are 450 Israeli settlers, and 1000 Israeli soldiers to "protect" them. During my time with Christian Peacemaker Teams there, I sometimes felt like Jacob: I was afraid, and I said "How awesome is this place." Like Jacob, we trust that God is there.

In Hebron I saw in Jacob's vow (Genesis 28:20-22) a context for claiming relationship with God: coming home again in peace, with food, clothing, dignity. We wish this for Israeli settlers as well as for their Palestinian neighbors. And we can claim kinship

*Cole Hull  
Bothell, Washington*

**PRAYING:** God of blessings and promises, we pray for peace between Muslim and Jew, Palestinian and Israeli. We give thanks for Christian Peacemaker Teams and others who work for reconciliation among the peoples of the Middle East.

**RESPONDING:** What are the things Jacob asks for (verses 20-21) to claim kinship with God? How can I claim them in ways that lead to the blessing of others from other families of the earth?



*Matthew 13:24-30*

## Wheat and weeds



**REFLECTING:** Read Matthew 13:24-30. During my time as a member of Christian Peacemaker Teams in the West Bank city of Hebron, I saw my task not only as combating the evil there, of uprooting the weeds, but as standing alongside the potentially fruitful plants and encouraging their growth. Whether we were talking with antagonistic Israeli settlers, angry Palestinians, or complacent soldiers, we invited people to recognize the humanity of those they thought of as their "enemies." This way we hoped to nourish seeds of hope and peace in the field.

But these seeds of hope also grew alongside weeds of hatred, fear, distrust, and intolerance. As in the parable, the enemy often came at night, under cover of a curfew or a closed military zone. In the morning there would be news of an arrest, racist graffiti on the doorstep, a broken window, a bulldozer in the front yard. As one seeks to work faithfully in the field, one experiences the efforts of opposing forces to sabotage and choke out promising growth. As a consequence of our witness, the team time and again faced imminent deportation or incarceration, even for acts as simple as accompanying a Palestinian family as they went to harvest wheat in their fields near an Israeli settlement. On one occasion, though we had prior assurances from Israeli civil authorities that these fields were indeed owned by the families seeking to harvest them, the entire team was arrested, and only released after they were ordered not to return to the area. Wheat and weeds.

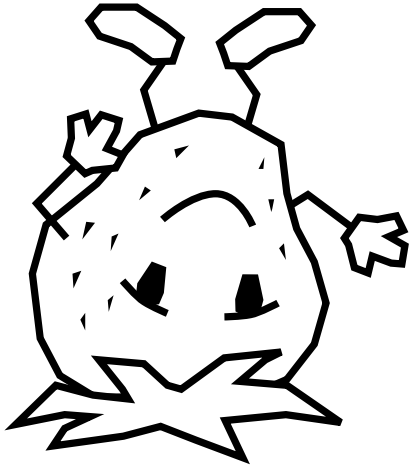


**PRAYING:** God, give us patience to stand and grow with those who embody hope as they live in the midst of hate and opposition. Give us faith to be wheat among weeds, knowing that we can trust you to sustain us until the harvest.

*Cole Hull  
Bothell, Washington*

**RESPONDING:** Are there people around you right where you live that could use your support and encouragement? Do they face threats or violence just because of where they live or what they believe or who they are?





Genesis 26:13-32

## How to respond?



**REFLECTING:** Read Genesis 26:13-32. People in this story respond to conflict in several different ways. Make a list—before reading on! (My list includes: leaving, sending others away, quarreling, confronting, changing one’s mind and apologizing, making an agreement or covenant.) How do you evaluate these responses? When might they be helpful or unhelpful? What are the results of the responses here?

**Leaving** (*avoiding*) may be a good choice when the issue isn’t that important to you, or the relationship isn’t that important to you, or when you are really angry and need some time to cool off. Which of these might be the case at the beginning of the story?

**Confronting** (*problem solving, Win-Win*) is a good choice when you care about the issue and the relationship with the person. For example, in John 18, Jesus confronted the high priest after the soldier had struck Jesus.

**Forcing your way** (*competing, Win-Lose*) makes sense when you care about the issue more than the relationship. For example, you might refuse to join your friends who want to shoplift something, recognizing that your refusal may cost you their friendship.

**Giving in** (*accommodating, smoothing*) makes sense when you care about the relationship more than the issue. Isaac left the conflict, and also gave in by giving the shepherds the wells each time. In this situation, his action may have contributed to Abimelech’s desire for reconciliation, and his admitting that God was real in Isaac’s life.

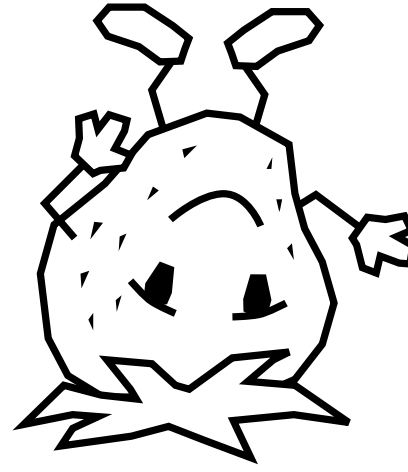
We often get in trouble when we do care about an issue but try to keep the peace by giving in rather than working things out with people we are close to. Or we get in trouble by forcing our way when we do care about the relationship. These strategies backfire later. But there are times to leave a conflict, give in, compromise, or stand by your position even

Anne Meyer Byler  
Champaign, Illinois

**RESPONDING:** Can you think of times in your life when walking away was, or might be, a good thing to do? Or times when it wasn’t, or wouldn’t be? Sing “Teach me kingdom ways” (*Sing and rejoice*, 102).

**PRAYING:** Dear God, help us to know when to leave a conflict, and when to stay and talk it out. When we stay, give us the words to speak the truth in love to those with whom we disagree.

When it may cost a relationship, recognize which choice is appropriate in a particular situation.



Genesis 26:13-32

## How to respond?



**REFLECTING:** Read Genesis 26:13-32. People in this story respond to conflict in several different ways. Make a list—before reading on! (My list includes: leaving, sending others away, quarreling, confronting, changing one’s mind and apologizing, making an agreement or covenant.) How do you evaluate these responses? When might they be helpful or unhelpful? What are the results of the responses here?

**Leaving** (*avoiding*) may be a good choice when the issue isn’t that important to you, or the relationship isn’t that important to you, or when you are really angry and need some time to cool off. Which of these might be the case at the beginning of the story?

**Confronting** (*problem solving, Win-Win*) is a good choice when you care about the issue and the relationship with the person. For example, in John 18, Jesus confronted the high priest after the soldier had struck Jesus.

**Forcing your way** (*competing, Win-Lose*) makes sense when you care about the issue more than the relationship. For example, you might refuse to join your friends who want to shoplift something, recognizing that your refusal may cost you their friendship.

**Giving in** (*accommodating, smoothing*) makes sense when you care about the relationship more than the issue. Isaac left the conflict, and also gave in by giving the shepherds the wells each time. In this situation, his action may have contributed to Abimelech’s desire for reconciliation, and his admitting that God was real in Isaac’s life.

We often get in trouble when we do care about an issue but try to keep the peace by giving in rather than working things out with people we are close to. Or we get in trouble by forcing our way when we do care about the relationship. These strategies backfire later. But there are times to leave a conflict, give in, compromise, or stand by your position even

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**RESPONDING:** Can you think of times in your life when walking away was, or might be, a good thing to do? Or times when it wasn’t, or wouldn’t be? Sing “Teach me kingdom ways” (*Sing and rejoice*, 102).

**PRAYING:** Dear God, help us to know when to leave a conflict, and when to stay and talk it out. When we stay, give us the words to speak the truth in love to those with whom we disagree.

When it may cost a relationship, recognize which choice is appropriate in a particular situation.

