

March 23-27, 2026 Edition

Following
The Year(s) Of Jesus Part 220
Peace, Perfect Peace

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March 21/22, 2026



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;D) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that. If hey help you, great. If not, sorry.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

**** Also you can also get these devotionals on Riverside's website (EagleRiverside.com) by going to the resource section and choosing "Reflections Download".

**** Also Jesus is awesome.

Monday Reflection:

And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?

Mark 8:36 (NLT)

There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her. Luke 10:42 (NLT)

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. Daniel 3:17-18 (NLT)

It is difficult to cultivate peace if we don't understand what it is. For many, peace seems like the absence of conflict or difficulty, but to Jesus peace went much deeper than that. Jesus knew peace and displayed peace. He didn't lose His peace when He felt troubled. And Jesus did feel troubled. He was so overwhelmed in the Garden of Gethsemane that He sweat blood - a condition that can occur when the body experiences profound trauma. Jesus, although He had the power to do so, did not remove Himself from temptation, pain or disappointment. He experienced the full range of human experiences, and therefore, felt the full range of human emotions. Jesus was no Spock. He had empathy for those who mourned, and cried at the tomb of Lazarus, even knowing that He would raise him from the dead. Jesus wasn't afraid of sorrow. It didn't threaten His peace.

Profound loss, sadness and disappointment are all part of the human condition. Jesus jumped right into our mess without a life vest. He was born in a stable and died a criminal's death. Both would have smelled intolerably and involved a lot of flies. In between the two, Jesus let Himself depend on others - which always goes hand in hand with being disappointed. On the night that Jesus was betrayed He felt deeply troubled that His three closest friends couldn't even stay awake to pray for Him while He contemplated carrying the sins of the world on His shoulders. In this world people will let you down, even the good ones. And whether you're mature enough to admit it to yourself or not, you have and will let the people you care about down too. That's just part of the messy package of being human. We can't even count on ourselves 100% of the time. Sometimes we fail no matter how important it is to us.

Jesus could say "It is well with my soul." Despite His frustrations and His tears, Jesus knew deep in His being what it means to be anchored in God. He knew heaven. He knew wholeness. He knew the experience of being one with God. And no one could take that away from Him. It was real and eternal - more permanent than human tears, more compelling than the feelings of frustration, more enduring than anything He suffered. In the Garden of Gethsemane, and later on the cross, Jesus knew the terror of not being able to regulate His own body. How did He move forward? He could assure Himself that all His suffering would lead to victory, and victory would be worth it. He had experienced, first hand, a higher reality and He invested His life in that unseen reality, even when His body was protesting with profound physical and emotional suffering. He was willing to bear great pain because He had great love. He knew that pain and sin and death itself were no match for the One who loved Him, no match for the love He carried inside of Him.

Jesus had the peace of knowing and experiencing God so that now we might have the peace of knowing and experiencing Jesus. Jesus is our peace. His presence and love can never be taken from us. Being anchored in love is the gift Jesus bought for us. Great feats of achievement, having all the answers, or feeling in control of our environment can never give us the peace that lies in betting on love. It is available to us in times of quiet and it is available to us in times of war. It accompanies our great victories and it sits on the floor with us through our deepest sorrows. It is bigger and more real than anything we will ever feel. It is a hope built on an invisible reality purchased for us. It cannot be lost or stolen. It lives inside us like a seed of power that can't be consumed by physical or emotional overwhelm. It was so real to Stephen that even as he was dying, he glimpsed heaven opening to receive him and allowed him to face his own death with a calm that seems other-worldly- because it was other-worldly. Peace can seem like less than what we hoped for - victory or justice in this earthly reality. But it is also so much more.

Tuesday Reflection: WARNING - TODAY'S DEVO IS RATED PG-13 (or maybe even R)
FOR MORE MATURE AUDIENCES ONLY - NO ONE WILL THINK LESS OF YOU IF YOU SKIP IT...

Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash. Matthew 7:24-26 (NLT)

"For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says, 'The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.' There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved." Acts 4:11-12 (NLT)

Biblical peace is standing on the firm foundation of a changeless God. The Bible teaches us that we can see most clearly who God is when we look at Jesus. He came to provide a firm foundation for our lives. We all build our lives through faith. Some have faith in the belief that matter cannot be created or destroyed. (After all, we've proven that humans can't create or destroy matter.) Some have faith in the belief that God created all matter. Matter matters because it shapes our experiences - we see it and touch it and trip over it - but no one can prove where it came from. We all get to choose what we believe, what to build our security and hope on. Some of us are intentional in making the choice of what to believe. Researchers call that reality architecture. Some don't acknowledge their power to choose because they take for granted that the views they were taught are sound. No matter what we claim to have faith in, faith is revealed in our actions much more clearly than in our words. For some, it's power or money or pleasure. For others, it's achievement or significance or being right. But none of those things endure past this life. God doesn't ask us to build our lives on Him because it's "right." He does so because Jesus' love is the only foundation that can stand up to the storms of life. And a life without storms is fiction.

The opposite of the greek word for peace is "in pieces." When we lack peace we feel like things are falling apart. There's validity to these feelings. Quite often the things we want to be able to count on ARE falling apart. Take a good look around. Nothing we can see or touch

is going to last forever. It's called impermanence. This is true of the good things as well as the bad. The mantra, "This too shall pass," is both reassuring and heartbreaking. Change is relentless in this place. And it is uniquely frustrating to modern humans. We can't hold on to what we love and we can't prevent what we believe we need to avoid. And yet, with all our technological advances, we feel like we should. We can land on the moon but we can't prevent disease. We can grow more food than the planet needs, but we can't make people stop exploiting each other. Some things are up to us, but our jurisdiction is limited and temporary. As Americans, tragedy and profound loss often catch us off guard. Ancient civilizations, and those living in third world countries today, lack the false sense of peace that prosperity has provided us. Mothers didn't expect all (or even most) of their children to make it to adulthood. Everyone experienced the realities of slavery, poverty or war.

Sure, we know intellectually that this life has an expiration date. One scientist described human life as a "sexually transmitted, terminal condition." Yikes! Our minds know that everyone dies. But for the first time in history, we have whole populations that grew up with little direct experience of death, disease, poverty, slavery or warfare. Our hearts and bodies are shocked when the person who was right there yesterday, is no longer there, and never will be again. I don't know about you but this fall has pulled the rug right out from my sense of stability. If it's not hurricanes and earthquakes, it's suicide and heart attacks. And it's right next door. I feel the feeling, "how could God let that person die?" while my brain tries to remind me that EVERYONE dies. My heart and body fail to accept what my mind knows because it just feels impossible. This is the nature of storms. They disrupt everything, without our permission, beyond what we believe we can endure.

We become overwhelmed by all the things we can't control when a big storm hits. We MISS the rug that's been pulled out from under us. It was our rug! We bought it so we feel entitled to keep it. Rugs are soft. They're stylish. They're comfy. But they can't be used as the foundation for a house. Often we're tempted to choose materials that we find comfortable and fashionable to lean on rather than invest in something that looks too hard, too impossible to understand or control. We want life to be reasonable and fair and comprehensible, and then it goes and reminds us that life is none of those things. And God is no rug to be picked up from Target. He is eternal and unchanging. He doesn't sit us on His lap like Santa Clause, making a list of things we want while His elves magically make toys. We are His elves, and we're not magical (though we often feel like life should be). This life can be beyond what we feel we can accept or endure. But when we build our lives on the truly unshakable, dependable, eternal strength of God we will survive life's storms. We may, like Jesus seemed to have on the cross, look up at heaven and cry, "Why!?!". Jesus gets us, that's why He can be our peace. He knows exactly what we're feeling. He has the power to bring life out of death. We cannot understand that math until we see the other side. Some days I feel peace and faith and hope. Some days I'm barely placing my bet on love against the protests of my heart and body. But this faith has meaning for me. I can't prove it. I can't always feel it. But I'm willing to bet the quality of my life on it. What you do is up to you...

Wednesday Reflection:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, Ephesians 2:14 (NLT)

No power in the sky above or in the earth below--indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:39 (NLT)

Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses... Oh, that you would choose life, so that you... might live! You can make this choice by loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life. Deuteronomy 30:19-20 (NLT)

We've been talking about peace as a foundation, but it is also a bridge. Jesus is our anchor in the storms of life, our peace in times of trouble. But Jesus is also the one who makes our peace with God. Without Jesus we cannot bridge the gap between us and God. When I was younger I sometimes resented Adam and Eve's choice in the garden. Maybe I wouldn't have made their mistake, I'd reason. But the truth of the matter is, all of us have chosen "having it our way" (as Burger King offers) rather than following God's way. We all demand our independence from God at one time or another. We let sin in the door only to regret how it taints every aspect of our lives. Sin is a problem we just can't fix. We long to be in community with perfect love, to have the sense of belonging to something that gives our lives greater meaning and purpose. We ache for the redemption of this world. That's who Jesus is – the power and sacrifice to redeem this world, one heart at a time.

We can't rush this process because no one else's heart is within our jurisdiction. We have to settle for "being the change we wish to see in the world." The power that changes us isn't our own. It is bigger and better than anything we can produce, but we can reflect it. And when we do, that option becomes conceivable to those around us. To the extent that we invite Jesus to heal and change us, others will see His power in action. Jesus doesn't whisk us away from this fallen world the moment we let Him set up His home in our hearts. Instead He asks us to serve as bridges to bring hope and light to those around us. We have the peace of knowing that even though we will continue to mess up and fall short, God extends to us His full support through Christ. We can be confident that Jesus has secured our relationship with God. No one can take away our salvation. In Jesus, God demonstrates that He is for us, never against us. Nothing can remove us from God's view of us as His beloved children.

Our job on this earth is to continually cultivate God's character in our hearts so we can harvest that fruit in our lives. We don't work to be saved. We are already saved. We work to unleash greater blessings through our faithfulness, blessings that can encourage and heal the world around us. This may mean a cup of cold water to one who is thirsty. It may be a kind word to someone who feels unvalued or unseen. It may be the example that we don't even realize we're setting as we struggle to live meaningfully with all the tragedy around us. Jesus does the healing and the redeeming, but He asks us to demonstrate that He is still a viable

and powerful option in this confusing modern world. He asks us to be His voice of hope, His look of grace, and His example of peacefulness. Jesus came to give us life, but we can easily let the discouragements and distractions of this world strangle all the blessings out of our lives. Then we're not nearly as powerful as reflections of God's care, because we've failed to prioritize our own blessing and wellbeing. It takes a meaningful life to have anything meaningful to offer anyone else. Christ offers us Himself as our peace, but we cultivate that harvest one baby step at a time. As we receive His peace, we can reflect true peacefulness. As we cultivate His blessings we increase the harvest for ourselves and others.

Thursday Reflection:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Matthew 5:9 (NLT)

And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness. James 3:18 (NLT)

We live in a world of conflicting powers, and each of us must decide which power to make more real in our lives. The first power is the power of force: might, aggression, coercion and control. The world wants peace, but it seeks to attain it by overpowering others. Wars are fought, arguments are won, good deeds are even done through the power of force. The other power is love. It seeks to empower rather than to overpower. It doesn't try to take away another's choices. It serves and feeds and heals and teaches. Those are the things Jesus spent His time doing. He didn't run for office to gain political power, even though the people wanted to force Him to be their king. He didn't call down heaven's "special forces" to straighten out everyone's behavior, even when they were torturing Him and nailing Him to a cross. Sometimes I think that maybe it would be nice if He did, but that's usually when I'm looking at something someone else is doing and strategically avoiding looking at myself.

Jesus didn't free the slaves, give rights to women, or make it impossible for the strong to exploit the innocent. Instead Jesus came to ignite a revolution within the human heart. Those who receive His kingdom are changed deeply, in their very character, never to look at power the same way again. It is the teachings of Jesus, and no other historical figure, that inspired and fueled modern efforts on behalf of the sick, the poor, the marginalized and the enslaved. Slavery still exists in our world. The innocent are still exploited in our world. The vulnerable are still victimized. Might still passes for right in war ravaged countries, and behind the doors of civilized seeming families in our neighborhoods. But it is the life and teachings of a Jewish carpenter that caused us to aspire to live any other way. I was blown away to learn the extent to which Jesus has shaped our modern concept of human dignity. John Ortberg's "Who Is This Man?: The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus," was a shocking revelation to me. But now that compassion and human worth have caught on, I can't help but notice that the church isn't always in the lead on these matters. So many churches seem to be putting their energy into political solutions and arguments about rights and morality. It is so much easier for us to demand our rights and point fingers than to look honestly at the needs of the marginalized.

I'm not saying that Christians shouldn't vote or protest. I am simply making note of the fact that Jesus didn't take that route. He had the power to overthrow the Roman Empire and even give women the vote. That's the kind of king the Israelites were waiting for. Instead He healed, fed and taught (and He only taught those who sought Him out). No wonder the leaders didn't recognize their king. He was beloved by the sinner, the leper and the prostitute. I'm not sure exactly how Jesus wants modern Christians to impact the world around us. The problem of human suffering and injustice is beyond my comprehension. My hands have never healed a leper. But in my life, I am hesitant to invest in tools that Jesus didn't use, to the exclusion of the tools that He did use. For me, the bottom line is that each of us gets to choose which power to cultivate in our lives - force or love. We choose where to place our bets with our behavior. We can overpower or we can empower. We can try to control everything (often entangling ourselves in useless conflicts or worries) or we can focus on making God's peace and power more real in this world. One path looks mighty, while the other path gets messy. But then I remember how the subversive service of Jesus continues to change the world 2,000 years later. Any rational person would have but on Cezar instead.

Friday Reflection:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me-everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:6-8 (NLT)

They will receive the Lord's blessing and have a right relationship with God their savior. Such people may seek you and worship in your presence, O God of Jacob... Open up, ancient gates! Open up, ancient doors, and let the King of glory enter. Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty; the Lord, invincible in battle. Psalm 24:5-8(NLT)

Faith, patience, joy, thanksgiving – these are the keys to experiencing deep and lasting peace. As we discussed Tuesday, in this world there will be storms. We're not going to like them. We're going to get upset at life's tragedies. Things are going to go wrong. The winds and rains will dampen our spirits, and thwart our sense of justice. Life isn't going to be fair. In this world we will have trouble. Jesus gave His disciples a little "pep talk" just before He was taken from them. He basically said, you're going to see me go through a shocking amount of suffering, but don't worry; they'll do even worse to you. He went on to list all kinds of ways that they would suffer for the gospel concluding with the words,

In this world you will have trouble." His consolation for them and for us was, "Take heart for I have overcome the world. John 16:33

You see, the shocking and horrific nature of death, violence, disease and suffering was already on God's hit list. Jesus came to overcome sin and death, to give us a path to victory in Him. We place our bets on His complete redemption despite the ongoing suffering that continues in this world. We learn to look for the bright spots, the acts of love and compassion in a world where violence is more likely to be rewarded. We celebrate every time love trumps over evil because it can go either way here. Jesus is in the process of redeeming this world one heart at a time. It will take as long as it takes. His Father is patient, not wanting anyone to be lost. He will not force His love on anyone. Love is a respecter of boundaries, a supporter of human dignity and free will.

I don't know about you, but I sometimes resent it when the rain and wind slaps me in the face. I complain to myself, "Hey this isn't right. I'm trying to do the right thing here. Shouldn't God make it a little easier for me?" But the reality is that God doesn't make life easy when we follow Him. We are at war. On one side there is love and grace. On the other side is demand and force. There is no safe and painless side. In fact, life often gets much harder when we choose to do the right thing: give up our addictions, practice patience, commit ourselves to forgiveness. Death and sin continue to fight for each human heart. We find ourselves trying to swim up-stream against the current. The friction that comes from resisting the pull of the world, the pressures of our own bad habits, the extreme discomfort of refusing to go with the flow - we pay a price for all of these. It's not the price Jesus paid, but it still can sting.

Our best investment in our own peace is to remind ourselves that God can be trusted. He is for us, not against us. He's got our back and sees our tears. He gave us Jesus, what else could He possibly hold back? He's giving us what we need to hold onto in this moment, even in the storm. He's going to provide for us, but we best not be too picky about the accommodations. He had His own Son born in a stable. For humble beginnings, it's pretty hard to beat that.

The hard truth is that easy isn't what cultivates our best lives. In our heart of hearts we long for meaningful, beautiful, powerful and satisfying. We want our lives to tell great stories. We want to do the hard work of being one of the good guys. The unfortunate reality is that an easy life doesn't bring out our best game. The key to peace is looking at our lives, with all our frustration and friction, and reminding ourselves how much God loves us. Even when nothing is right, we are okay. Our foundation is firm. Our hope is secured. We can still feel the wind and the rain, but we can focus on our solid foundation. We let ourselves feel our doubts and anxieties, but then we remind ourselves to take heart. We encourage ourselves in our discouragement by remembering who God is. Paul expected us to have worries because he had them too. His advice was to take those worries and translate them into prayers. He teaches us to remind ourselves that even on the most annoying day, there are still things to be grateful for. And he tells us to make our requests to God in a spirit of thanksgiving, telling ourselves that whatever God does in response, He does because He loves us.