

Summer Fruit-Part 3 **Fruit of the Spirit: Peace**

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We'll go with me, if you would, in your mind, back 75 years. Imagine yourself in the East China Sea, April the 1st, 1945. You've been dispatched from the embattled U.S. fleet that was bombed in Pearl Harbor. You have been assigned to go onto the shores of Okinawa and to fight. You are making steady progress in the battle. It's monsoon season on the island and so it's raining and there's lots of wind and you're in the foxhole preparing the next assault. And over the ridge, you've got a whole slew of enemies who are seeking to kill you. Question, as you think about putting yourself in the boots of that person. Can you be at peace in that situation?

"Oh, Pastor Mike, that's not a great scene you painted for me. I can't imagine being at peace." Well, OK, let me add a few things. Does this help? You have the best equipment to dominate the battlefield. You've got the best that the world can provide in terms of technology and 1945 can provide. You had just received the Bronze Star. You are really popular among the leaders. You're CO, your commanding officer, is very proud of you. You are in a very tight and harmonious platoon. Really the tightest that the Marine Corps has ever had. I suppose best of all, you've just heard some backroom intel from the generals that we're about to win this war and World War II is about to be over. That this really is the last battle of World War II. Can you be at peace in that situation?

"I know you want me to say yes, Pastor Mike, but that..." I mean, you're still in a foxhole in the rain. You could make that next charge and get shot. You could be wounded. You're eating your meals out of plastic bags. You are surrounded by enemies. People are actually shooting live ammo at you. This is not a peaceful situation.

But I suppose if you let all those things sink in, those four things, in particular that you know that the war is going to be over here soon. You're well equipped, the CO's all for you. You've got a great platoon. I mean, you start to think, "OK, I guess I can. It's going to be hard. But I could be at peace." That's a kind of peace that would defy circumstances. Right? If you could find it. Not the kind of peace that you want. The kind of peace you want is to be in your recliner back at home 6,400 miles away where you're, you know, watching sports. That's the kind of peace you want. But you can't have that kind of peace because your assignment is Okinawa and it's April 1945 and this is where you are. I certainly don't think you want to be freaked out. You don't want to be anxious. You don't want to be worried. Oh, you got to be careful, you got to be sober, you got to be clear-minded.

The Christian life used to be painted in the scenario that I just laid out for you. It was "Onward Christian Soldiers" they would sing at church. It was organizations like the Salvation Army. It was, you know, campus evangelism, they called it Campus Crusade. I mean, this was the motif of the Christian life. Now it's changed much as people have made a lot of money off of a prosperity gospel that can give you more of a genteel and softer, gentler kind of Christianity. But Christianity, at least in the pages of Scripture, is that you are a soldier and you are to please your



commanding officer, to quote Second Timothy Chapter 2, and you're to suffer hardship as a good soldier.

But in the middle of all that, the Bible says you are supposed to be granted peace, as Jesus said in John 16, as he says, "You're all going to be scattered." Right? The implication is there, they're going to attack you. You're going to be in the midst of a battle, he said, but "My peace, I leave with you. Not a peace that the world gives, but my peace I'm going to give to you," because you're going to be an embattled people, but you're going to be at peace. "In this world," and I'm quoting now the rest of that, the next verse, verse, 33. "In this world you'll have tribulation. But take heart." See, that's the line. If you're looking for a kind of peace that the world wants to offer you, it's going to say you can feel good when everything around you is calm. The Christian life says, no, no, no. The real fruit is a kind of peace that is inside and it should not matter what the outside is really like. It's about a peace that defies circumstances. That's the kind of peace God has called you to.

So as we look at this passage that we've been trying to study, and we won't even need to look at it this morning because you know it by heart. But in Galatians 5:22, the Fruit of the Spirit we've already seen is love and joy. The third thing here is "peace" and that we know can be somehow manufactured artificially. And the world's going to say, here's what love is and here's what joy is, and then here's what peace is. All these things are defined differently. We have to get the right mindset about these things. To do that, it always starts with something vertical, something the world ignores because they can't see it and because they can't see it, they don't much care to concern themselves with it. But the first thing the Bible would tell us to say is that we've got to think about what we're doing as it relates to our God. You've got to think about the commanding officer. I know we'd all like to be our own commanding officer. As a matter of fact, that's the philosophy of the world. Right? It's all about you. You make it yourself. You do it. You're the boss. Your number one. And though we'd all like to be the General, we're not the General. Matter of fact, we have a commanding officer and we're to think in those terms.

Here's a line from the book of James. "There is only one lawgiver and judge." Think about that passage. "There's only one lawgiver and judge." That's a great text. Do you want the reference on that? James 4:12. Listen to the rest of the passage. "Who is able to save and he's able to destroy. There's only one lawgiver and judge." That has to be a vertical concern and most people are not concerned with that in Orange County today. If they were, we would have thousands and thousands of people in our parking lot this morning. They'd be rushing to all the churches that were open because they'd want to say, "I want to make sure that my relationship vertically is right." So I guess if you're taking notes, four things, the first thing and I've already kind of forecasted these, is make sure that you are at peace with your commanding officer. Make sure you're at peace with the commander-in-chief. Make sure you're at peace with the lawgiver and judge. Make sure you've got this vertical peace.

Now, I turned you a few weeks ago to Isaiah Chapter 5, where God looked at his people and he said, "This is a vineyard. I am the farmer. I want to produce fruit in this crop. I've watered it. I've tilled it. I've cared for it. I've nurtured it. I came to find fruit and I didn't find good fruit. I found

bad fruit. And that was a bad thing. Thorns and briars. And now I'm just going to judge that, that vineyard." I'd need you to did turn to Isaiah 27, as the recurrence of that theme appears. This time not with a threat of judgment. After five chapters, we get to that, you know, all the bad things that are going on in Israel and he says, I wanted to find good fruit here. He says, but here's the promise. I'm going to produce good fruit in my vineyard and it's going to be good. But it starts with this vertical peace. You've got to have peace with the farmer, with the vinedresser, to use the terminology of John 15.

So let's look at this together. Isaiah Chapter 27 to think through what we're dealing with when it comes to our relationship with the one who we are called to please. Look at verse 2, Isaiah 27:2. "In that day," he's looking forward, here's the forecast of a fruitful field here, "a pleasant vineyard," and he says, let's "sing of that." Sing of it. "I, Yahweh, am its keeper; every moment I water it. Lest anyone punish it, I keep it night and day." Like he said in Chapter 5. It's like I build this wall around it. And again, God looks down from heaven, if you will, at this group of people and says, "This is my garden. This is my field. The Father is the vinedresser." Right? "I am the vine. You are the branches. I'm calling you to bear fruit." He says, "I have no wrath." This view, this forecast, "Would that I had thorns and briars to battle!" I mean, this is sarcasm here. Right? I mean, "I would march against them, I would burn them together." Well, that's what he said he would do in Chapter 5. But now he's looking down the corridor here, I'm going to produce fruit in my field. Or "Let them lay hold of my protection, let them," here it is, repeated twice, "Make peace with me." God does not stutter. But here it is again, "Let them make peace with me."

See if you're going to bear fruit, you've got to focus on this vertical relationship. If we are going to have peace, which is the fruit that God wants to bear among us, not only love and joy, but peace, we've got to make sure that we make vertical peace, "make peace with me, make peace with me." He repeats it. It would be great to say, if you're listening to my voice on a podcast or on a stream or you're sitting here in front of me this morning, well, of course, you're at peace with God. You wouldn't be here if you weren't. Of course, we're on the right side of history. We're on the right team. God is our commanding officer, of course. But as Matthew 7 says, the scariest thing of all is one day getting to the end of life and having him look at people who were in the foxhole with us and say, "depart from me. I never knew you." And they're like, what are you talking about? They say, "Lord, Lord, captain, captain, commanding officer, commanding officer, we did all kinds of things for you. We were in the foxhole together. We took shots. And we were out there making shots. We were advancing the kingdom. We cast out demons. We did all kinds of wonders in your name." And then he says, "but depart for me. I never knew you, you who practiced lawlessness."

Really, you had something there that convinced other people because you were there with the right uniform on in the foxhole. You seem to be fighting with us, but much like Judas, what was really happening, as John points out later, is that you were in it for your own advance. You were in it to steal from the treasury that you were in charge of. You used every opportunity within even your Christianity to do this for your own good. Second Corinthians 5:15 says we as Christians "no longer live for ourselves." Some of you are in with Christians, you watch Christian, you know, podcast or blogs and you come to church, but this is all about you having God merge with your life to have you accomplish what you want. That's not biblical Christianity. To make



peace with God is repentance. Repentance. Repentance is saying what I am here and who I am here has to turn. There are two great words in the Greek New Testament "Metanoia" and "Epistrepho." These words have to do with turning around. Matter fact, they appear together sometimes. You need to repent and turn to God. You need to turn from where you're at, which is all about, Second Corinthians 5:15, is living for him. People don't like that. They think it's legalism. They think, you know, you're trying to earn your salvation. It's a reorientation of saying, "I know that I am here," to quote Second Timothy 2 again, "to please my commanding officer." That is a focus on saying I'm letting my dreams and my aspirations go to the side and I'm looking out for God's agenda in my life. I see my job as an opportunity to glorify God. I see my family as an opportunity to glorify God. I see my time and my vacations and my weekends as a chance to glorify God. That is a perspective Christians have, real Christians have.

Everyone thinks they're good with God. But the Bible says you got to make sure that you're on the team. "Test yourself," Second Corinthians 13, "to see if you're of the faith." Test yourself. Say, God, am I really, really on your team? Am I going to hear from you, "Well done, Good and faithful servant," or am I going to hear from you, "Depart from me. I never knew you?" And by the way, for all the people who, and occasionally they do, they write me that "You always question our salvation, Pastor Mike. You make us feel bad. This isn't what I come to church for." I don't think a hundred years from now I'll have any complaint letters about people saying, you really made us question our salvation too much because you're going to look around and you're going to say, "I thought this guy was going to be here and he's not. I thought she was going to be here and she's not. I thought these people, I had a couple of people in my small group. Where's the rest of our small group? They're not here." I think you're going to say, "Pastor Mike, you did not warn us to test ourselves enough."

I don't want us to be anxious and worried. Actually, I want us to have assurance that we know God. But to do that is not to allow our definitions of Christianity to be telegraphed on to what we are seeing on the pages of Scripture. We've got to let Scripture inform us of what Christianity is, which is not just putting on a uniform and marching with the armies of God. It's really making sure that my heart is directed to following Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, the King. Oh, and by the way, if you want peace, you're not only need to make sure you're on the right team, but you can be on the right team and not be bearing the kind of fruit that you should. Matter of fact, there are people bearing fruit thirtyfold when they should be bearing fruit a hundredfold. There are people who are doing a lot of wood, hay and straw in their life when they should be producing more gold, silver and precious stones. I know people don't like to hear this, that God is a righteous judge and he loves righteous deeds. But you've got to think about what your life is producing and say, I want to make sure that I am not unsettled in my vertical relationship with God because I'm running from what God wants me to do. I'm running from his will. I'm not forsaking the sin that's in my life. I'm really fighting God on areas of my life. I've scooted away from God. So I have this sense that he's not going to be so into the details of my life. And the Bible says, listen, all of that needs to change. James Chapter 4, "You need to draw near to God and he'll draw near to you." But you need to draw near to God. There's nothing more unsettling than running from God. Psalm 32. We read it not long ago in our Daily Bible Reading. When you are having unconfessed areas of your life that you know God is not pleased with, then it's like the



fever "heat of summer" on you. Your vitality is drained from you. You will not have peace even though you're on the right team, if you are not having short accounts with God. If you're not confessing your sins, as John says to Christian people, confess your sins to him. "Confess it and he's faithful and righteous to forgive your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness."

"I thought I was cleansed when I became a Christian?" Well, you are cleansed when you become a Christian. That's called justification. But in your sanctification, as you do things that you know are not pleasing to God, just like Psalm 32 says, you're going to feel that uneasiness, that unsettledness, that shame and that running from God. Even Peter as he denies Christ in the courtyard of Caiaphas, things aren't good for him. He goes out and he weeps over that, which is a good thing, because that's the first step toward restoration. And yet even that night that he wept, he did not get it right because later he's out in John 21, fishing on the Sea of Galilee when he should've been out preaching. Here comes Jesus saying, stop fishing for fish. I told you to fish for people. "Tend my sheep," feed my lambs. That may be where you're at in some area of your life. I just want to call you and encourage you to make peace with your commanding officer.

It's so clear in that Second Timothy passage and I haven't quoted it all, but I'll quote it all now. "No soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs." Some of you right now are entangled in civilian affairs. You're living a life of priority much like the non-Christian counterpart who lives across the street from you. Don't be entangled in civilian affairs. Why does he not do that? Because he wants to please his commanding officer. Make peace with your judge. That's a good line right there. The vineyard, how do you produce the fruit? "Let them lay hold of my protection." That's a place of peace. "Let them make peace with me. Let them make peace with me." The good news is that can happen right now. You can drive out of this parking lot today, even if you have the grossest sin in your life, you can leave at peace vertically with God by confessing your sins. That's a good thing.

Turn with me, if you would, to First Corinthians Chapter 7. First Corinthians Chapter 7. If you were to enlist in the armed forces you would have an assignment. You'd be given an assignment. They would figure out what you might be best at, they would say you're in logistics, you're going to be a trainee for mechanics school, you're going to be, you know, I don't know, you're going to play the saxophone in the band, you're going to be an infantryman. You're going to do something here in the organization. There are all kinds of parts to play, all kinds of roles to play, and this is going to be your assignment. Now, when you're in Okinawa in a foxhole in April, May or June in 1945, you may be wishing that you were in the Marine Corps band, but this is your assignment. You're a grunt. You're on the battlefield. You're advancing the mission here on this island, and you're moving towards success and bringing peace after World War II. That is your goal. So you have a role to play. What you need to know is that this is your assignment, and I know this is my assignment, no matter what the situation, no matter how I got here. Right?

It may be that in your mind you're thinking, "Well, I almost signed up for the Navy or I almost signed up for the Air Force, but I'm here on the ground." This you need to know, even if you see yourself as the reason in terms of volition and decision making, you got to this place or even the mistakes and the sins that got you to this place, and you're sitting here saying, "Well, you know, I

smoked for years and now I have lung cancer," or "I was I was a jerk spouse and that's why now I'm divorced," or "I was a bad and unfaithful employee and that's why I lost my job." Or you may be a victim of circumstances, so to speak, and say, "Well, you know, this COVID thing, it shut my business down and I'm in trouble financially," or "I have a situation in a relationship and I had nothing to do with contributing to that." Fine, whatever the situation, here's the thing, we saw it last week in Ecclesiastes. God has given you a lot. A lot. There is a situation, I going to call it an assignment here.

First Corinthians Chapter 7, drop down to verse 17. First Corinthians 7:17. There's a lot going on in the church of Corinth. The issue on the table has to do with singleness and marriage. Of course, there's more of this, as you'll see, more than just that, as you'll see in verse 18. But let's just get this principle from verse 17. "Only let each person lead the life." There's a command for us to lead the life, live there, do the thing "that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches." This is what I'm always saying. This is what I'm always teaching. That this is your lot. This is your assignment. Because Paul believes, as we should, because it's true, in the sovereignty of God. No rogue molecules, God is in charge even though you see human decisions affecting where you're at right now, and you can say, right now, my diseases, my problems, my relationships, where I live, when I live, all these things all the way down to the color of your hair, these are things that God, in his sovereignty, this is your lot right now. Your lot, your assignment. The text here is that you should "lead the life." You should live that out. You should do that thing. You should walk in that manner. I mean, that's the word literally, "to walk."

Now, dropped down here when he deals with issues of circumcision and uncircumcision, which isn't the issue of our day. Right? But he says this. He's going to talk about the position in life, a very non-advantageous one to be owned by someone else, to be a slave. But he says this in verse 20, "Each one should remain in the condition in which he is called. Were you a bondservant when you were called?" Here's the phrase. Here's the opposite of peace is if you're concerned. "Do not be concerned about it." Now, this doesn't mean whatever your lot is, if you're a grunt in a foxhole and you really aspire to be, you know, a sergeant or you aspire to be a medic or you just aspire to be the logistics manager, it doesn't mean you're not going to change your position. As he says parenthetically, "If you can gain your freedom," if you are a slave, he says, well, then sure, "avail yourself to the opportunity." But the command here is don't be concerned about it. Do not stress about it. "For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is the freeman of the Lord." In other words, it doesn't matter to me where you play in this role. You're mine. "Likewise he who was free when he is called," of course, well, he "is the bondservant," the slave, "of Christ. You were bought with a price." You're God's. Do not become bondservants of men. Right? You know, you don't feel locked in this situation even if you are locked in a situation. "So brothers," verse 24, "in whatever condition each was called, let him remain." I love this. Not in your position. What are the last two words of verse 24, interactive eight o'clock crowd? What is it? "With God? Here's the good news. God is in every position. God is in the foxhole. God is in the medic tent. God is in the logistics and the communication. He's in the mechanics warehouse. He's everywhere. He is the one who says, "I am with you. Do not be afraid. Don't stress." Don't be concerned about it.

Number two, you've got to be at peace with your assignment. Your assignment right now, you need to say, "I'm going to be at peace with it. I've lost my job. I'm sick. I'm ill. I'm old. I'm whatever I am. Even if I see myself as the contributing factor, even if it was sinful. Of course, I need to repent of the sin that got me to this place. But I'm not going to say, "But I'm really doing this as a concern and a stress to get out of it." You may not get out of it. But whatever the situation, as we saw in Ecclesiastes 5, that is your lot. So we're going to say, "OK, I'm going to be unconcerned."

Now in the back of your worksheet, which we don't have physical worksheets any more, do we? The discussion questions..., though, do you? Do you print them out before you come? It's amazing. You're showing what a Luddite you are, by the way, of showing me your printed worksheets. Do we pass them out? No, we don't pass them out. Right? OK. You printed them out. OK. Wasting trees are you? Hurts my heart. You know me well enough to sense the sarcasm in that statement.

As you scroll down on your digital worksheet, you see the questions on the back of the worksheet. I'm going to send you to a passage in Philippians Chapter 4. I'm going to say there are all kinds of instructions here for you to secure peace in your assignment. Whatever your assignment is and Paul goes on to talk about it, "Whatever my assignment is, I have figured it out. I know the secret of contentment. I got peace." Matter of fact, I just real quick, as though I had time for this, let us go to this text and just quickly, I mean, there are so many sub-points I want you to pull out of it. But I want you to see here, there are great instructions for us in Philippians Chapter 4, beginning in verse 5. One is just affirming what I just said, God is in every situation. "Let your reasonableness," your forbearance, let that sense that you can be solid and unswayed by circumstances, "be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand." That's the thing you have to affirm. You have to know that. You have to say God is in this divorce with me. God is in this business with me. God is in this transition with me. God is in my aging, painful body with me. God is there, whatever that situation is.

Then I'm going to say I'm "not going to be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer," well, there's an instruction, "with supplication." There's a sub-point to that instruction, "with thanksgiving," another sub-point, "let your request be made known to God." And if I can do that, and that's the first part of this, something about affirming and practicing God's presence, something about the expression of this to God and affirming my desires and giving my thanksgiving, well, then it says, verse 7, "and the peace of God," this gift, this fruit, this thing that God wants to produce, "it surpasses all understanding." It defies my circumstances. "It will," love this word, "guard your hearts and your minds," even in the rainy, soggy, fox hole of my life right now, "in Christ Jesus."

And then there's another thing. Verse 8. You can break this one down into a million sub-points, which, of course, you can see. He talks about what I'm going to do with my brain. What am I to do with my mind? I need to think on ultimate truths. Whatever, he says, "Finally, whatever his true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, anything worthy of praise," now, here's the command, the imperative, the second person plural imperative, "think about these things." Think about them. Think about them. Think about them. Then another one, verse 9. This is your



homework. You're going to outline this. You're going to look at all these instructions. "What you've learned and received and heard and seen in me," Paul said, "I've been your teacher, I've lived among you, you've watched us -- practice these things." Then here it is again. The promise recurs, "and the God of peace will be with you." Live in the place and the assignment that God has given you. If you get an opportunity to get a better assignment. Fine. But I'm not going to stress about it. I'm going to have peace in it.

Now, here's a set of instructions and I'm going to call you to do something that's very hard to do. Evaluate yourself in how you're doing with each of those things. How am I doing? You can just keep it with the four points or the sub-points. But break it down and say, "I want to think about how I'm doing, because the extent that I ignore all of this stuff is the extent to which I'm leaving that promise on the table." "The God of peace will guard your hearts and minds." Practice these and "the God of peace will be with you." Two of the five times in Scripture, God is called, not the God of holiness, the God of justice, the God of righteousness, but the God of peace. That's what he wants to give. Be at peace with your assignment, please.

Another passage, I'd like to turn you to Jeremiah Chapter 20. Jeremiah Chapter 20. Find this passage with me, please. And again, if I could just go through Scripture and show you the military motifs for the Christian life -- everywhere. There is a lot of military, literal military context in the Old Testament, of course, because they are a nation among nations and they have to fight, they have to defend themselves. They're an arm and a tool of God's justice in the world. But here's Jeremiah talking about the fact that his job as a light of truth in his society, this is not a military thing, this is his ministry to be an ambassador of the truth of God. He sees this as a military thing. Look at verse 11. "But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior," one who really makes people shake. I mean, I am a warrior. I'm a fighter, he says. "Therefore, my persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me. They'll be greatly shamed, they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten." This a bad thing. "The Lord who tests the righteous sees the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I've committed my cause."

Now I see the guy here in the world like being apart from a New Testament perspective of the Church where the gates of hell will not prevail against them. And he's a fighter. Talk about Onward Christian Soldiers, Campus Crusade. Right? He is Salvation Army. He's moving forward in the world of ideas out there. He's doing his thing and that's great. He's talking about all those pressing against them. I get it. I get it. I get it. But that's not the context. Look at verse 10. "For I hear many whispering. Terror is on every side! 'Denounce him! Let us denounce him!' say all my close friends, watching for my fall. 'Perhaps he'll be deceived. Then we can overcome him "and take our revenge on him.'"

The pain of this passage as a Christian soldier, so to speak, is that he does not have peace with the people in his own foxhole, that he is in a situation with a platoon of people and he's got some Judases there who are betraying him. Have you been reading through the Daily Bible Reading with us, the Old Testament Psalms? How many of those strike a chord with you whenever you read about the betrayal of a close friend? That's hard. Here's a passage where Jeremiah says, "I'm being portrayed by my close friends," plural. We got to work hard at this because so much



depends on how I'm doing with my fellow soldiers. I put it this way, you need to "Pursue Peace With Your Fellow Soldiers." You have to. I have to say, I have to work to have this tight, as I put it, and harmonious platoon in my team. I've got to try to make sure this is good. I got to fix this. I mean, if I'm driving to the church parking lot and I think something's not right, I'm not even going to walk into the service until I get on the phone and fix the problem. That's how Jesus, I mean, that's the update of the Jesus statement. Right? I'm going to bring my offering and I'm going to get it right with my brother or my sister in Christ. We talk about seeking peace and pursuing it. We saw that passage in First Peter. I'm just saying that is the perspective that we need to have. We need to seek it and we need to pursue it. Pursue peace with your spiritual siblings, with your fellow soldiers. It all starts in the inner circle. Your best Christian friends here at church, your small group here at church, your sub-congregation here at church. Try to be at peace with them so far as it depends on you. That's what the Bible says that you and I must do.

Now, here's the problem. When there's not peace between siblings, there's a problem with our commanding officer. We've got a problem with our Father. I know that because if we all did what we should do vertically, the Bible says as Christians, it's all going to work out horizontally. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another," to quote First John 1. "If I walk in the light and you're walking in the light," man, "we have fellowship with each other and the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sins." I'm going to be in fellowship with you if you're in fellowship with God. But we think, wow, that's not how it's working out in my small group. I got Christian friends and it's not working out that way. We've got to work at that. We always do it by the triangle, if you will, of my relationship with God, I realize I've got to make sure there's nothing wrong with me and God. Then I got to work to figure this out. There's something that should spill over in our right relationship with God. I quoted there First John 1:7, "Walking in the light as he is in the light."

Listen to this passage in Colossians 3:15. "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called into one body." One body. You got one group. We as a team ought to be unified. You cannot have fighting among the ranks. You remember the contrasting lists that we read when we started this series in Galatians Chapter 5 verse 20. We saw things like anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy. That was a list right in the middle of the list of the works of the flesh. Those are the kinds of things where Satan is fueling that and our flesh and humanity are fueling that. That's the thing we got to fight. We can't have that. Listen again, anger, rivalries, dissension, division, envy. Those things have to be extracted. They need to be put off. They need to be put away. You need to put those things to death as much as we can.

While we could preach a whole series on being at peace with each other, can I at least say this? The one thing you're going to need more than anything else when it comes to imperfect soldiers who you were fighting the Christian life with? It's the word forgiveness. Right? It's the word forgiveness. It's a great Greek word, not that it has to be said, but "Aphiemi." this great Greek word, has to do with the idea of letting something go, releasing it. Aphiemi, I'm letting it go. As my old pastor used to say, it's not palms up. I don't release it this way and open my hands with palms up. I mean, that's just a good image of things. I'm not going to still have it there in my palms. I want to let it go palms down. I want to say this is the problem between you and I and I'm going to

let it go. That's forgiveness. Again, all of that is calibrated by my understanding of my relationship with my commanding officer, because as Jesus tells these stories about you being sincerely forgiving one another from the heart, as he says, the illustration is that when the servants have been forgiven by the master, how is it that we're holding grudges against each other? Of course, the summary of that in the New Testament epistles is "forgive as the Lord forgave you," forgive each other "just as" there's a great Greek word there too, "Kathos," just as to the same extent, in the same way that the Lord has forgiven you. So I've got to think vertically. Then I got to look horizontally and I say, I'm going to forgive, I'm going to let it go. Sincerely and completely let it go. Let it go. Drop it.

That's just a word. Again, there are many things we could look at as to how that's applied, how we work that out. But you have to learn to let it go. That doesn't mean that you weren't right and he was wrong. But it means you let it go because you know this, that even if it is that way, God is a God who says, leave room for me to deal with this. You don't take this on yourself. Let it go. Drop it. Peter said to Jesus, "How many times should I drop it? Seven? Seven? Seven? Would that be good?" And then he leans forward waiting for the pat on the head and Jesus would go, "Ah, that's really good, because I would have said four, but you said seven. That's awesome, Peter." How many times should I forgive when my brother sins against me. Jesus throws some math at the fisherman, "70 times seven," which wasn't meant to be a math problem to figure out. It was, "You don't want to do math, do you, Peter? Would you stop counting? I want you to continually, repeatedly," and as he had taught before, "completely and sincerely forgive your brother." Some of you came to church, God led you here just to hear that this morning. Forgive your brothers and sisters.

If you've got someone who is just an irritant, and the point is they're just trying to cause problems. I think I had that as my community imperative yesterday or the day before. It's that passage that is a tough one. But we need to be the kinds of people who when we have people who do not want to live this way, they're causing divisions, it says in the book of Romans Chapter 16, I am to avoid them. The ones who are out there trying to constantly make problems, they cause division. Yeah. Again, we could spend a whole series dealing with this.

I'm going to give you one more verse on this before I let it go, because we're coming in for a landing here. Second Corinthians Chapter 13 verse 11. Here's the end of Paul's two letters to the Corinthians. He's coming in for the final statement. He's about to give the greeting and all that and say, the grace of the Lord be with you. But here's how he ends it starting with the word "finally," verse 11. Second Corinthians 13:11, if you can find that real quickly. He says, "Finally, brothers," which is a good way to remind us of our horizontal relationships, fellow soldiers. He says, "Rejoice." There's last week's Fruit of the Spirit, "aim for restoration," which is an interesting word. Sometimes it's translated perfection. But it has a compound word, it has to do with arranging things, put things in order, put things aright, put things the way they ought to be. I think there are relationships in view because I see the next things here. Well, first I saw the word brothers, now I see this "comfort one another." Can you comfort? Be kind and gentle, sweet to each other. Can you? Then can you do this? "Agree with each other," and then, "live in peace: and the God of love and peace," there is the phrase again, "will be with you." And the God of love and



peace. There are all the top three, by the way, of our Fruits of the Spirit. Love. Right? The God of love. Joy. We're to rejoice, top of verse 11, and peace.

It's all about God saying, "I want to be with you. I want to be in your relationships. I want to be in that foxhole with you. I want to be in that tough situation and that sickness. I want to be there with you." That's the thing that's going to bring not only more love and more joy, but it will bring peace. You've got to aim to make things right. Aim for restoration. You've got to comfort. You got to be kind. You got to soften up. You got to agree with each other.

I said in trying to paint a picture of you finding peace in the foxhole, I said, well, the best news of all would be if you heard intel that, as was the case in Okinawa, that this was the last major battle. It was a bloody battle, it was a terrible battle in Okinawa but the last battle of World War II. Of course, there was firepower that was about to be unleashed as was said five years earlier when they attacked Pearl Harbor, that "you're going to rouse the sleeping giant." Sure enough, they rolled up their sleeves and with the most advanced technology of the 1940s, the war was about to be ended. That's the best news of all. If you were in a foxhole knowing this is it, this is it. We're almost done with this war. I think that could bring you some peace.

I think to anticipate it, here is an imperative to help you get there and many things are channeled through this one verb, but let me put it this way. We need to "Pray For the War To Be Over." Pray for the war to be over. It will be because the kind of peace I'm talking about is not tranquility externally. You're always going to be in a war. If they hated Christ, they're going to hate you. The world's never going to be copacetic with the Church. It's always going to be a fight. It's always going to be a struggle. It will always be hard until the war is over. According to Isaiah Chapter 9, we keep looking for the arrival of the Prince of Peace. Do you remember that phrase? Every Christmas we talk about that, "Wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Now, it's easy for us to think that that was what the first coming was all about, particularly when we misquote Luke Chapter 2, we misquote the Song of the Angels that says, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on Earth." Right? That's what we think it says. "And goodwill toward men." That's not what it says. It says "Peace on Earth among those with whom he is pleased." That's what the text says.

Now, that means that the army together here, that's on the same team, we ought to be at peace. But later in the book of Luke, he was asked, or he asked the question himself, "Do you think I came to bring peace on Earth?" And the answer was no. I didn't come to bring peace, I came to bring division because I'm calling my people out from the rest of the world. It is the "Ekklesia." That's the word "the Church" called out of the world. We are here. This is the group. I want that group to be at peace because they're on my team. The good news is in the interval between the first coming and the second coming, I will then bring the peace that was promised in Isaiah 9. Oh, it was quoted by Gabriel when he came and announced the birth of Christ, that he would be the fulfillment of Isaiah 9. Do you know where that passage goes in verse 6? It says that "the government will be on his shoulders." "And to the extent of his government," or his kingdom, "there'll be no end." The extent of his government, his peace, his power, his reign - no end. And so peace is coming. So you need to be praying for the arrival of the peace to come on Earth. I mean,



it's not just something that, you know, gals say the vapid response to: "What you want?" "I want world peace." Well, OK, yeah, we know there's no way to have that world peace until the Prince of Peace arrives. He could show up to get his Church today. He could show up to get his Church tomorrow. That's where the early Church understood, as Nero, the emperor, was bearing down on the Church, they would say, "Maranatha," they wanted the Lord to come quickly. They wanted Christ to come back.

And I just don't think that is the desire of Christians. What they want is to be 6,400 miles away in Orange County in a recliner watching football. That's the peace. If somehow I can just get on a ship and get back home, that'll be good. The Bible says, no, no, no, be in the war, you have an assignment. You've got a commanding officer, you've got a team. You've got a circumstance. Now, just know this. The war is going to be over, and the only thing that's going to solve this, the only thing that's going to bring external tranquility is when Christ returns. Which, by the way, the tranquility of that, you've known nothing like it, even when you have sat in your recliner in Orange County watching your sports on a big screen TV. Because the Bible says that in that day, to quote Isaiah, even the peace is going to trickle down to the animal kingdom. Think of the kingdom. The lion will lay down with the lamb. You're going to have the calf and the, you know, the cobra there and the young child is going to be playing in the viper pit and it will be like, "Oh, no biggie, look, my kids playing with a rattlesnake," it'll be no big deal. Why? Because "nothing will harm in my holy mountain." The day is coming when you will have no locks on your doors. You'll have no alarm systems. You will leave your purse with all your money with Christ's picture on it out in the open. No one's going to steal your stuff. We're going to have peace. You ought to love and long for that in your heart because there's something about what that does, when I know my relationship with a commanding officer is good, and then I think to myself, this war is going to be over, then I get the two middle things that everyone pastorally comes in wants counsel for, "Can I be at peace with my assignment in life and can I be at peace, have peace with the people in my life? Those two things are sandwiched between are you at peace with God and do you know peace is coming? Those two things make the middle two possible. But you've got to think that way.

One last passage if I can take you to this text. It's a great one. Turn to the bottom. These benedictions are always good because they look forward to the kind of thing that's going to happen and the present affect of a future promise. We know that all that he had talked about in First and Second Thessalonians kept coming back to the eschatological future when Christ returns and there will be peace. There will be a lot of trouble before we get there, but peace is coming. Which, by the way, this is like the New Testament version of a benediction. Do you know what the word benediction means? "Bene" Right? Means good. Right? "Dictio" means to speak, it's a good word. In Numbers 6, the sons of Levi were taught to stand up before the people and give them the good word, the benediction, the blessing that it's called and talks about God's countenance and his face shining upon his people. And may he grant you peace. Right? Peace in the midst of a battle.

Even the peace, you remember that line that says he'll give "perfect peace to those whose minds are stayed on me." Remember that passage? Even that passage, by the way, the Hebrew is "peace,



peace." "Shalom, Shalom." We don't even know how to translate it, so they translate it "perfect peace." I mean "peace peace." He's going to give double peace to his people. Do you know when that was? It was when they were getting hauled off to Babylon. Well, how are you going to have peace in the midst of that? How can you have peace when you got a wound in a foxhole and you're getting shot at on an island that's not your home? How can you have peace? You can - perfect peace. But your mind's got to be right. So the ironic blessing was to tell the people when God's face shines upon his people, when you have the vertical relationship right, and you know where this is headed, you can have peace.

Look at the benediction here. That's how the English Standard Version titles this last paragraph in Second Thessalonians 3. Are you with me? Verse 16. Now, here's the prayer. It's the prayer that he had for the Thessalonians. It's my prayer for you. "Now may the Lord of peace," there it is again, "give you peace," I love this, "at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all." I mean, that's a good line right there. Right? You want a little verse to put under your signature at the end of a card you're going to write this week. Second Thessalonians 3:16. "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all." You can put that on a card you're sending to someone with cancer, someone going through divorce, someone's having hard times financially. God can give us peace no matter what the external circumstances are. That's my prayer for you. That is the goal of the Holy Spirit that it would be well with your soul.

Let's pray. God, let us see with more clarity the goals that you have for our Christian life. To know that what really matters is that I am right with you. That there's nothing unconfessed between me and you. That I really am genuinely a child of yours. My repentance is genuine and sincere and my faith is real and vital. That you are going to bring and usher in an epic of peace that will have no end. The extent of the government of the Prince of Peace will be complete. How good it will be. Not fooling around with all this human government. We'll have the government of the divine Son of God. We can't wait for that day. God, with those two things firmly in place in our minds, that we have peace with you and peace with a coming kingdom, then we know we can be at peace in our circumstances, and in our relationships. Not expecting a kind of peace for the world that we're never going to have, but finding peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ and knowing that my assignment is not something that can steal my peace. So God give us peace in the midst of the storm, even the one we find ourselves in now, which is not as bad as the storms they've had in the past. But, God, it's a bit different for us. So we need your grace to give us peace.

In Jesus name. Amen.