

Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed...

Genesis 18:4-5 (NIV)

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## RADICAL HOSPITALITY

**T**his story of Abraham and Sarah's welcome is a model of hospitality. When he notices three strangers on the horizon, Abraham is recovering from his recent circumcision, resting in the midday sun. Yet he runs to greet these unknown travellers, welcoming them to stay for refreshment. He orders the fattest calf to be slaughtered. Sarah bakes cakes, and together they prepare a feast for their guests. Abraham stands by to serve and converse with them, and before long he and Sarah discover they are not the hosts after all. It is their guests who came to deliver a gift – the message of a long awaited son.

The hosts are now guests – the tables are turned. And this is a model for our own hospitality to strangers today. Do we welcome those who are far off – unknown or unnoticed visitors to our homes and churches? Are we willing to be their guests also – to sit and eat in their places? When we reach across a divide in a moment of radical hospitality, we can find ourselves welcoming not only the stranger, but Christ himself.



### PRAYER

*Father God, we know that you are the great reconciler of all things. We pray that we would see with your eyes, notice your image in unlikely people and reach out to them with your hospitality. Ask God to show you, then take action.*

### ACTION

*What does radical hospitality look like in your context? This week, who could you welcome to your home or your church?*

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

2 Corinthians 4:7 (NIV)

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## BIG DREAMS

**W**hen we think about reconciliation, we're dreaming of a big picture. We're imagining how we can be involved in the renewal of this world, making the earth a kinder, fairer, more equal home. We're galvanising the activist within us, the pursuers of peace and changemakers. But sometimes life is much more ordinary than that sounds. The reality of our life is that we're just hoping the long list of jobs won't overwhelm us. The risk of talking about changing the world and being a force for good could make us end up feeling more guilty and creating an

even longer to-do list. But God is reconciling the world to himself, that all of creation may find freedom, liberation and peace within him. We are the ordinary people - the jars of clay - that he uses to make it happen. Even in our mundane every day lives, he is working to make his big picture our reality.

### PRAYER

*We pray that God would work powerfully through us, showing the treasure of his peace through our chipped, broken and ordinary lives.*

My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions... Because they lead my people astray, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash.

Ezekiel 13:9-10 (NIV)

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## LASTING PEACE

**P**ease would do wrong to our undying dead. The sons we offered might regret they died If we got nothing lasting in their stead.

Written by Wilfred Owen, 23 September 1918, in his poem Smile, Smile, Smile \*. He was killed in action on 4 November 1918 at the age of 25, one week before the Armistice.

\* Wilfred Owen: The War Poems edited by Jon Stallworthy (Chatto & Windus, 1994)

### PRAYER

*God of peace we thank you for those who sacrificed their lives so that we could live in peace. We pray for nations where peace is the polar opposite of their daily reality. We pray also for those whose peace is shattered within the nations that benefit from peace that was bought at such a high price. Oh that the price that was paid would be worth it: that all may live with peace without and peace within now and always. Through Jesus Christ. Amen*

**19**  
SEPTEMBER  
54 DAYS

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write this: blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them.'

Revelation 14:13 (ESV)

## WASTED LIVES?

**T**he shocking waste of lives cut short. How can these dead be 'blessed'? What comfort is it for those barely begun to 'rest from their labour'? Who knows what fruit might have grown from these fledgling lives? God seeks not for our faults, but for signs of his life in us. Each act of kindness, sacrifice, or love – however small – he sees, nurtures, and grows. The smallest deed of grace is a seed he cultivates. It follows us not just as a memory, but as a gathering maturity of God's nature sowed in others.

What astonishment when we turn and see what he has made of our lives. 'In the Lord,' their labour – and ours – will not be in vain.

### PRAYER

*Lord Jesus Christ, who completes every good work, may we rest from our striving to make a name for ourselves, for it leads only to strife; may we know the peace that comes from serving you; and may we hope in the fruitfulness that only you can bring forth.*

Amen

**20**  
SEPTEMBER  
53 DAYS

Do not repay evil for evil... but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing...

1 Peter 3:9, 11 (ESV)

## FORGIVENESS IS NOT EASY

**D**on't repay evil for evil; that is a hard lesson. I have seen some extraordinary examples of this on the battlefield where colleagues have been killed or injured yet the soldiers hold the line. Or the wife of one of the pilots in the 9/11 attacks who publicly forgave the terrorist who killed so many on that day. The gymnast who, after being abused by her doctor, was able to say in court that she forgave him so that he might come to know grace, to 'find grace

where none should be'. How can these people offer forgiveness? At least in the last two accounts it is because they know the peace that comes from knowing Jesus; they can seek peace and pursue it.

### PRAYER

*Lord, in a world which often seems so evil, let us hold on to your Word, to seek peace and pursue it.*

**21**  
SEPTEMBER  
52 DAYS

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

John 14:27 (NRSV)

## DO NOT BE AFRAID

**F**or as long as we manufacture fear, we will look for warrior heroes. Not only heroes, but machinery of war and order, and the everyday safeguards of privatised living, ringfenced land and water, property and fuel stocks, gated homes and borders, nest-eggs and reputations...

But blessed are those who consider birds and lilies, risk persecution and peace-making, and despite being hurt, refuse (more courageously than any warrior) the temptation

### PRAYER

*Teach us, Peaceful Prince, the art of living without harmful defences, so we might bear the mystery of your passion in resurrection hope.*

to harden defences. If you love me you will keep my commandments, he said. And then the strange commandment, unreasonable imperative: Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

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**22**  
SEPTEMBER  
51 DAYS

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NIV)

## PEACE IN OUR CHURCH FAMILY

Important it is for us to oil the wheels with our prayers and so ensure that our church family stands firm to be a beacon of light, peace and hope in our communities.

### PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, we ask you to help each person in our church family (name those in your small group) to be completely humble and gentle in our life with each other, and to be patient, learning to bear with one another's faults in love. Help us Lord, to keep the unity of the Spirit. Bind us together in peace. Amen*

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