

The
ONE
YEAR®



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devotions for **Women**

BECOMING A WOMAN AT PEACE

ANN SPANGLER

Author of Praying the Names of God



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The One Year Devotions for Women: Becoming a Woman at Peace

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INTRODUCTION

Peace. What wouldn't we give to have a little more of it? Peace in our relationships. Peace at home and at work. Peace despite painful memories. Peace in the midst of the pressures and demands that threaten to crush us. Is there a way to find peace in all these areas of our lives? What if we could build a moment of peace into every single day of the year, intentionally opening our hearts to the peace God has promised? What would it be like to live with less fear and anxiety and with more confidence and joy?

The mission of *The One Year Devotions for Women: Becoming a Woman at Peace* is to help you take hold of the peace God is offering. This peace is far richer and more satisfying than anything you or I can imagine.

When the Bible speaks of peace, it often uses the Hebrew word *shalom*. Like many Hebrew words, this one contains depths of meaning that the English word *peace* cannot fully convey. In addition to the idea of serenity, tranquility, and the absence of conflict, *shalom* also means wholeness, healing, success, completeness, soundness, perfection, and good relationships. *Shalom* sums up all the blessings God can give to those he loves.

I hope that as you join me this year, you will become a woman who is capable of enjoying more of the peace God has for you. As his Spirit works in your heart, I pray that God will show you how to spread his peace to others so that they, too, might come to know that no matter what has happened in the past or what might happen in the future, they are safe in God's keeping.

As you begin this year, remember the ancient prayer God instructed Moses to pray over his people. Although first prayed thousands of years ago in the midst of a Middle Eastern desert, the words emanate from the mind of our eternal God, expressing his heart toward us today.

May the LORD bless you
and protect you.
May the LORD smile on you
and be gracious to you.
May the LORD show you his favor
and give you his peace.

NUMBERS 6:24-26

—Ann Spangler

January 1

BEGIN WITH THE END

I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart.

JOHN 14:27

You have probably heard of Stephen R. Covey's book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Covey's second habit for living effectively is to begin with the end in mind. What does he mean by that? Simply that there are two steps to creating anything. The first step involves envisioning exactly what it is you want to create, and the second involves making sure that your life is aligned with that vision so that every day you can do something toward achieving your goal.

To put flesh on the bones of this concept, Covey explains that before you build a house, you've got to know exactly what kind of home you want. Once you know that, you can have a blueprint drawn up and can develop construction plans. Before digging the first shovelful of dirt or hammering the first nail into place, you have to have a plan. After that, he says, "you put it into bricks and mortar. Each day you go to the construction shed and pull out the blueprint to get marching orders for the day. You begin with the end in mind."¹

Similarly, if you want to live a life of greater peace, you need to begin by envisioning what that life will look like. Fortunately, you needn't develop this vision on your own because God has already provided it. He has also graciously offered a blueprint that, when followed, will lead to a life characterized by deeper levels of his peace.

Why not respond to his offer today by asking him to help you envision the rich and enduring peace he wants to give? Then use the devotions that follow as your "construction shed," a place where you can pore over God's blueprint and receive your marching orders for the day. As you go through the year, who knows what wonderful things may happen as you earnestly seek God's peace?

Consider taking a few moments now to commit the months ahead to the Lord. As the months unfold, I pray you will experience him drawing near, showing you how to put the bricks and mortar of a more peaceful life into place.

Father, I want to experience your peace in deeper ways. Please open my soul to your grace, so I will miss nothing of what you want to give me.

January 2

GOD UNDERSTANDS

The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust.

PSALM 103:13-14

I had a meeting recently with two people who were helping me get up to speed on social media. Both have extensive experience working with nontechs like me. During the course of our time together, they happened to mention a couple of phrases that caught my attention. For instance, when speaking with colleagues about a computer problem, they sometimes say, "There seems to be a problem between the keyboard and the chair." Translation: nothing's wrong with the computer; it's the person operating the computer who's causing all the difficulty. Or they'll talk about a "defective end user." Same translation.

As someone who's not a quick study when it comes to computers and technology, I've always appreciated how patient and nonjudgmental computer techs can be when it comes to dealing with people like me. Though "defective end user" doesn't exactly roll off the tongue, it does inject a note of humor and objectivity into their quest to help the less technologically gifted.

I like to think that God deals with us in a similar way. Seeing our struggles to live for him, he realizes that we are all "defective end users," and he does not judge us harshly. He knows how difficult it can be for us to get it, to respond to his leading or to do his will perfectly. He understands that, at times, our ignorance can create unintended havoc.

In the midst of your struggles, give yourself a break. Remember that you belong to a "tender and compassionate" God who wants to help you. Instead of imagining that he's disappointed in you or judging you, try to imagine him patiently extending his grace to help resolve whatever problem still exists "between the keyboard and the chair."

Father, you know I want to live for you. Yet sometimes I fail. When that happens, help me to get up and keep going, confident that you are there to help.

January 3

WHO'S WATCHING OVER YOU?

The LORD keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever.

PSALM 121:8

I sometimes wonder if I'm spiritually hearing impaired. I wonder if God has to shout to get my attention or repeat things more times than he should have to so that I will finally get the message.

I remember hobbling into Dr. Shirley Kleiman's office one day, nearly bent over with pain from a back that had been twisted out of shape by an ill-considered roller-coaster ride. Dr. Kleiman is one of the best physical therapists my back has ever encountered, and it's tough to get an appointment with her. But I had prayed, and friends had prayed because I was heading out of town the next day on a business trip and didn't think I could endure the plane ride without some help. "Somebody must be watching over you," Dr. Kleiman commented as she walked into the room, acknowledging how hard it was to get a last-minute appointment.

The following week I made some repairs to the roof of my home. I'd postponed them as long as I dared, praying to make it through the winter without problems. That spring, one of the roofers who bid on the job had confirmed what I already knew. Portions of the roof were in a pretty sorry state. He couldn't believe we had made it through the winter without a leak. "Somebody must be watching over you," he said. Then a month later, after he and his men had completed the repairs and I was settling the bill, there it was again: "I can't believe that roof didn't give you trouble over the winter. Somebody must be looking out for you." This time the words sank in. I had prayed, and God had helped. He was looking out for me and my family. He knew exactly what we needed, and he had provided.

I wonder how much more peaceful our lives would be if we could finally settle the question of God's faithfulness. No matter what happens, whether life is hard or easy, each of us will enjoy more peace if we can learn to lean into the relationship we have with God our Father. He will watch over us, just as Psalm 121:8 promises. Today let us pray for the grace to trust in his watchful, loving care.

Father, thank you for watching over me, for hearing my prayers, and for preserving my life.

January 4

PAPER LOSSES

Let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed!

I CORINTHIANS 15:51

A few weeks ago I was on the phone with my financial adviser. “Mark, I have to thank you,” I said. “If it hadn’t been for you, I would have sold everything at the absolute bottom of the market.” It felt good to thank him now that my portfolio no longer looked so anemic. If Mark hadn’t been there to temper my fear, I’m sure I would have gotten rid of everything, locking in my losses when the market was down by more than 50 percent. Fear can have such devastating effects.

That’s true in our spiritual lives as well. God has promised us many things. He tells us that he is good, he is our loving Father, he will never fail us or forsake us. Such assurances may not be hard to believe when life is on an upswing. But what about those times when our lives resemble a bear market? How do we think about God when we’ve lost our livelihood, suffered an accident, fallen ill, been betrayed by someone we love? What then? Do we shake a fist? Do we tell ourselves that God doesn’t care? Do we let doubt corrode our faith? At such times it can be tempting to throw up our hands, to say we’ve had enough of this God and his fantastic promises. But to do so would be turning our backs on everything we know to be true. It would be giving up our hope. It would be selling out and locking in our losses.

Fortunately God has promised to make everything right—if not now, then surely in the end. The last will be first. The hungry will be satisfied. Those who weep will laugh. As today’s verse says, we will all be transformed. Because we are God’s beloved children, we will live and not die. We will also, I believe, be given the grace to look back on earthly sorrows and recognize them for what they are: “paper losses.” At times these losses are painful, frightening, and grievous—but they will one day be redeemed. Today, ask for the grace to keep believing. Refuse to lock in your losses, and instead choose to keep trusting in Christ.

Lord, today I choose to believe. Help me by your grace to keep believing, no matter what happens.

January 5

FACING THE FUTURE WITH PEACE

I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence!

PSALM 139:7

One of my readers wrote to me recently in order to share an experience she had while singing a song about God's names. "There is a point in the song," she explained, "when all the music stops and the choir whispers every name of God that comes to mind. It was so powerful. It moved us all to tears. I felt like I needed to take off my shoes because I was standing on holy ground."

Her words reminded me of times in my own life when I have experienced the Lord in a particularly strong way. One of the most vivid was in Jerusalem. During the hottest part of a sweltering midsummer day, I decided to walk over to the Western Wall. Called the "Wailing Wall," it is part of the ancient retaining wall of the Temple Mount and Judaism's most sacred site. Although the heat was excruciating, that afternoon ended up being the highlight of my time in Israel. It's hard to describe the awe I felt, not because of the ancient stones, but because of a sense that I was in the presence of the Father.

I had been to the Western Wall on a previous trip and felt nothing out of the ordinary. But in that moment, in that place, all the devotion and reverence I had witnessed since I traveled to this ancient land seemed to coalesce. Sensing the greatness of God as never before, I was aware that I was standing in the presence of the one the Bible calls *Yahweh Shalom*, a name that means "the Lord is peace." I wish I could tell you that I commonly experience God in this way. I don't. But I will not forget the peace I experienced in that moment.

Fortunately, you needn't travel around the world to experience more of God. He is near right now, regardless of whether you are aware of his presence. As the year begins, join me in praying for the grace to become mindful of his presence and open to the peace he wants to give.

Father, bring me into your presence today. Help me this year to experience you as Yahweh Shalom.

January 6

TRY HARDER?

“Peace be with you,” [Jesus] said. . . . They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! Again he said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

JOHN 20:19-22

I imagine that you are at the starting line of a race. You have been training for months. You’ve competed on this track before, but today you are determined to win. As soon as the starting gun goes off, you break out in a burst of speed. Amazingly, you keep it up, rounding the track twice and then heading across the finish line. But guess what? Despite your heroic efforts, and the fact that this was your best time yet, you lose again. It isn’t for lack of trying. Your problem is that you aren’t properly equipped to win a race against a Porsche!

That’s only a rough analogy to highlight the fact that merely trying hard won’t win the race when it comes to living our lives as Christians. Even though many of us are working very hard at it, we rarely, if ever, experience the joy and peace that are promised in the Bible. So what’s the problem?

Perhaps we are still holding the reins of our lives too tightly, afraid to surrender ourselves to God’s Spirit. Pastor Jim Cymbala points out that “the irony of Spirit-filled living is that we have to give up power in order to gain a greater power. How many times in your Christian walk,” he asks, “have you come to a place where you struggled to do something, so you just tried harder? . . . How did that work out for you? Trying harder has never gone well for me.

“Christianity is not a self-effort religion but rather one of power—the ability and might of the Spirit. . . . The Spirit is the only one who can produce self-discipline, love, and boldness. But to do so, he has to control us daily.”²

Join me today in forsaking the temptation to retain control of your life. Together, let us ask for the grace to surrender more fully to the Holy Spirit, allowing God to guide and energize our lives with the power that comes from him.

Father, you know how afraid I am of letting go, even into your good hands. Please help me to surrender myself to you daily, confident that your Spirit, who lives in me, is more than able to do the things I can’t.

January 7

THE PEACE GOD PROMISES

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

NUMBERS 6:24-26, NKJV

More than thirty years ago, at a site just south of Jerusalem, archaeologists unearthed two rolled-up pieces of pliable silver, about the size of a credit card. Delicately etched on each plaque were words drawn from the priestly blessing enshrined in Numbers 6:

The LORD bless and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and give you peace.

Dating to the late seventh century BC, these small silver plaques contain the earliest written citations of Scripture ever found. Perhaps they also bear witness to what must surely have been a primordial longing of our species—the desire for peace.

But what exactly is peace? When most of us think of peace, we think of an absence of conflict or the sense of tranquility we sometimes feel after a walk in the park or a day at the beach. But the Hebrew word *shalom* is far brawnier than the English word *peace*, encompassing these ideas and more. Shalom contains the idea of completeness. It is the sum of all the blessings God can bestow—healing, prosperity, soundness, well-being, good relationships, perfection. It is what happens when God shines his face on you, when he turns toward you in all his greatness and brings you good.

After the daily sacrifice, the Israelite priests would extend their hands to pray this blessing over the people. As the priests prayed, it became customary for them to leave an opening in their fingers and for the people to cover their heads with their prayer shawls. They did this to express their reverence, believing the *shekinah* (the cloud of God's presence) was hovering over their heads and its light was streaming through the open fingers of the priests.

What a beautiful image of the kind of peace God has promised to those who love him. As you seek God for a greater measure of peace this year, ask him for his shalom. Today as you pray, bow down before the Lord in reverence, asking him to shine his face upon you and give you peace.

Father, I want the shalom you promise. Please bless me and protect me, smile on me, and be gracious to me. Show me your favor, Lord.