



LIFEGROUP

RESOURCE GUIDE

for the week of January 22

*He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;
He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. (Psalm 23.2,3).*

The World Health Organization estimates that 12 billion, yes *billion*, working days are lost every year due to mental health issues and they expect this rate to continue through 2030! (The Guardian, 12 April 2016) In the United States alone we spend over \$200 billion dollars treating mental health (<http://content.healthaffairs.org/content/early/2016/05/13/hlthaff.2015.1659>).

It appears that a true, deep peace of mind, heart, and consciousness is increasingly rare today. In stark contrast, these verses breathe a glorious atmosphere of peace. Lying down suggests contentment and rest. Green pastures speak of the tender, sweet grasses which are always rich, fresh, and satisfying. There is nothing stagnant about the quiet waters mentioned here; they are as refreshing as they are peaceful. Restoring makes one think of something broken being mended. Today we see all around us broken hearts, homes, marriages, lives, and health.

Only Jesus can make these magnificent promises come true for us.

The New Testament is full of references to the peace He offers. The gospel is called the “gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6.15). Six times God is called the “God of peace” (e.g. Philippians 4.9). The fruit of the Holy Spirit includes peace (Galatians 5.22). The most common greeting in the New Testament letters is “grace and peace” (e.g. Colossians 1.2). Jesus promised peace to His disciples (John 14.27; 16.33), and Paul prayed that the Christians in Rome and Colossae would be filled with peace (Romans 14.17; Colossians 3.15)

On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, John records, “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.” (John 13.3-6). Here is a picture of a man at peace!

Peace is an essential attribute of the godly woman or man. Without peace our thoughts, speech, and actions will reflect fear, selfishness, greed, suspicion, and/or restlessness. Peace cultivates compassion, self-sacrifice, fortitude, and risk. It allows us to exercise strength beneficially rather than destructively. Peace brings freedom to love beyond the boundaries of our current circumstances.

I think I am writing on peace because I need it! I do not appreciate downtime... These 2 weeks since my surgery have been challenging for me because they require patience and they require me to be content to move at the “speed of slow”. So I invite you to join me in taking time to ask the Lord to give you peace for any area that is fraught with restlessness, turmoil, and anxiety. Then look around you this week— at home, at play, and at work— I think you will see that you

are surrounded by people who are looking for peace. Do you realize that you can make a difference in their lives? Remember, you know the One who gives peace unconditionally.

Enjoy your LifeGroup!



Getting to know one another better...

How old were you when you first learned/heard about God? Do you remember what you thought?

Romans 12.1-2

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Commentary

NOTE: as we return to Romans this week I would like us to go back and review, reflect, and reassess as we start this new year...

12.1. When Paul begins Romans 12.1 with the word, "**Therefore**", he is saying that what follows is the consequence of what preceded. ***Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you... "all he has done for you"*** is literally "by the mercies of God". Everyone in Christ has the same starting point: the mercies of God. God does not extend His mercy as a response to our faith. Our faith is a response to His mercy. Surrendered lives is the response of people who recognize that their lives have been overtaken by God's grace. A community of surrendered lives will recognize that it cannot indulge or practice racism. How can we? How can we have prejudice towards others in our community who share the *same mercies of God*? There can be no superior and inferior saints since all were trapped in sin and all have been redeemed through the same cross by the same Savior. In Christ's community-- the Church-- there can only be a fellowship of equals who share a common Redeemer, have been adopted by the same Father, and who possess the same testimony of the Holy Spirit that each member of the community is adopted into the same family.

12.2. If 12.1 exhorts us to present our **bodies as a living sacrifice**, 12.2 tells us *how* we can surrender our bodies to God **holy and acceptable to God**. Paul's worldview is radical. He urges this Christian community in Rome to be distinctly Christian in a world that is definitely not! **Do not be conformed to this world** because the Christian should not identify with a world pattern that is broken, conflicted, indifferent/hostile to God's rule, and ultimately on a trajectory towards obsolescence. Instead the Christian is to **be transformed by the renewing of our minds**. But how shall we think about transformation that occurs by minds renewed? The word,

"transformed", occurs here, in Matthew and Mark's Gospels where Jesus is "transformed" (Matthew 17.2 and Mark 9.2) and one time in 2 Corinthians 3.18 where Paul refers to this same incident. This means that the transformation and renewal advocated by Paul is not a call to "think harder" or exchange a "worldly" task list for a "spiritual" one. Renewing minds is not about rules. It is the result our proximity to God's transforming presence. Our minds have a different framework for living because the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life has inspired, influenced, and engaged us. A "renewing mind" is alive to God and longs to see the world as He sees the world.

Reflecting on Romans 12.1-2

How are you feeling about the year ahead? Expectant? Apprehensive? Enthusiastic? Anxious? Indifferent?

Take some time to reflect about your spiritual life over 2016 and look ahead to 2017. As you do so, what might God be calling you to surrender to Him for 2017?

Paul writes: "Do not be conformed to this world." As you look ahead to 2017 are there areas, choices, aspirations, pursuits, etc. that you sense God would have you make a "clean break" from because they represent the "world's will" more than "God's will" for your life?

God cares about our minds— how we think and what we fill it with.

— How do you think God wants to "grow your mind in 2017"?

— In what areas do you think God wants to challenge your thinking or “change your mind” in 2017?

God wants us to live lives that are “good, acceptable, and perfect (i.e. whole)”.

— What does this mean for you in 2017?

— What do you feel is the next concrete step of obedience God is challenging you to take in 2017?

How can your LifeGroup encourage your spiritual life in 2017? Be as specific as you can...

My prayer requests (write in advance what you want your group to pray for...)

Praying for my group...