

MISSIONAL INITIATIVES

Monthly Newsletter

JANUARY 2024

This month we are highlighting contributions by Missional Initiatives Team Member Deb Judas, in support of her new book.

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF PEACE

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

There are certain times of year that naturally lend themselves to reflect on life. Entering a new year with the old year coming to a close is one of those times. Humans seem to be wired to periodically take stock of their life and evaluate things. Held within this is also a longing to dream about the future, set new goals, and make new plans. And so, in our determination to affect change in our life, we start thinking about New Year's resolutions. Usually, we are focusing on eating more healthy, engaging in a new fitness regime, or setting a budget. We might even make a list of books to read or put travel plans in place. As well, there is often a renewal of spiritual goals as we work toward creating a new rhythm of life.

I've spent many January firsts making my resolutions for the year, only to fall off the wagon by February 1. I don't really do New Year's resolutions anymore. I hope I don't sound cynical or skeptical. I am not meaning to. It's just that I have often found the disciplines themselves ended up becoming my focus, instead of the outcome I wanted. For example, in the area of a healthy lifestyle, my measurement of success became making sure I was eating well and working out every day rather than becoming a healthier person. This inevitably became tedious instead of life-giving, producing little to no change in my life.

Right now you might be asking, why do we always have to talk about New Year's resolutions at the beginning of every year? Bear with me for a moment because I think this pattern of behaviour happens in our spiritual journey as well, more often than we would like to admit. Bible reading, for instance, often becomes more about being committed to reading the Bible every day than about who we are becoming. This year, I am digging more deeply into spiritual goals and disciplines and why we engage in them. Is the goal to be disciplined or to be transformed?

As I look around the world, I see perpetual uncertainty everywhere. I really don't have to look too far to see the despair... it's in my neighbourhood, my church, and my own family. It is obvious the world is in great need of peace, but it's difficult not to feel helpless in bringing hope and joy to others, especially if we are struggling ourselves. I can't help but ask, will regularly reading my Bible actually help these people?

Immediately, John 14:27 popped into my mind. Jesus is speaking to his disciples when he says,

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

So there it is... the WHY of spiritual disciplines. They open the door to transformation. We read scripture not only to enable passages coming to mind when needed, but to be reminded of the Story we are part of and the call on our life as followers of Jesus. In this passage, there is a call to bring peace to the world. But it's more than that. It's a call to become...

Jesus' words summon us to not worry and to not despair. But he also invites us to literally *become* people of peace. We are to BE peace in a world that desperately needs us in such a time as this. In the midst of all the uncertainty, Jesus was giving the disciples his peace, and this still stands true today.

As we practice being a person of peace, there is a movement from the inner journey of "becoming" to the outward journey, where we discover opportunities to bring the shalom of Christ into the darkness of despair. This is transformation!

So this year, if we are seeking spiritual growth and renewal, what if our overarching goal was not to be disciplined people but to become people of peace? What spiritual practices would help us accomplish such a thing? Why not make things interesting and try out some new spiritual disciplines, remembering that transformation is not a quick fix, but takes time and intention?

What would it look like to be a person of peace in your neighbourhood, your workplace, or school, and of course in your own church?



An adapted excerpt from *Cultivating Shalom: Finding Peace in the Midst of Disruption, Uncertainty and Ordinary Life*

The word shalom is a rich and heavily loaded word. It is impossible to simply insert an English word to use in its place. We have tried to do this by using the word "peace". Shalom does mean peace, but that merely scratches the surface. It is so much more! Author and theologian, Cornelius Plantinga, describes *shalom* as this,

In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Saviour opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be. (*Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995, Wm. B. Eerdmans, page 10)

The underlying intent is that this wholeness (shalom) is given to us by God and can only be fully realized in relationship with him. True shalom is both an internal and external condition independent of circumstance. To be welcomed by our Creator is to experience a state of sheer contentment and peace with God, ourselves, and all of creation, as well as a deep knowing of God's love.

The concept of shalom is all-encompassing. We are not only invited into the shalom of God but we are also called to bring his peace to others. When Jewish people used the word *shalom* as a greeting or a goodbye, it was also a blessing. They were bestowing God's favour in the form of wholeness and restoration over the other person.

In our world, we often talk about peace in terms of the absence of war or conflict. As we look to the ongoing Ukraine–Russia war or the more recent conflict in Israel, we pray for shalom. We cry out for peace and for a ceasefire. Shalom, as God designed it, is also the presence of something more. Shalom is not merely a ceasefire

but rather both parties working together to restore what is broken. This kind of peace is not only for countries at war but also for relationships, which includes marriages, family, workplace, schoolmates, all friendships and acquaintances.

The shalom way of thinking is that life is messy, complicated, and broken with lots of moving parts. Whenever something in life is missing or out of alignment, whether a relationship or a situation, then shalom breaks down. Life is no longer whole so it needs to be restored...

True wholeness is not merely bringing the conflict or misalignment to an end. That is only half the story. If we stop there, we miss the best part of the story. True wholeness, or shalom, is going full circle, repairing the damage, returning things to new, and making things right.

This is what cultivating shalom is all about. It is living a life of action rather than complacency. Becoming people of peace requires intention and work. It is setting our eyes on God's vision for the world and arranging our lives around that. It is about embracing the new life that Jesus ushered in through his death and resurrection. As we live this out, we catch glimpses of the kingdom of God as he intended. At the same time we are enjoying these kingdom breakthroughs, we are also given a palpable hope for a time that is still to come, when all things will be restored.

RESOURCES



CULTIVATING SHALOM

NORTH AMERICAN BAPTIST CONFERENCE

SPEAKER

ONLINE WEBINAR

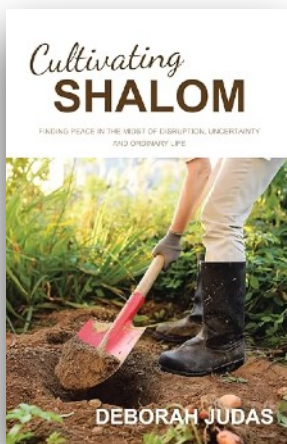
THURSDAY 25 JANUARY
AT 09:00 AM (PST)

REGISTER NOW

Deb Judas
Author & MI Team
Member

Join the Missional Initiatives Team & author Deb Judas as they talk about *Cultivating Shalom* using the imagery and wisdom of Psalm 23 to uncover new insights on what it means to flourish and experience a deep sense of wholeness, delight and wonder in all seasons of life.

We will examine how paying attention to the small things and putting simple practices into place will cultivate the wonder of shalom in your own life.



Deb's book, *Cultivating Shalom: Finding Peace in the Midst of Disruption, Uncertainty and Ordinary Life*, was published September 2023 and can be purchased on Amazon or [indigo.ca](https://www.indigo.ca).