

Stretching Exercises

Jesus told his disciples that "I do not give to you [peace] as the world gives" (John 14:27, niv). What do you think he meant by this? How is worldly peace different from spiritual peace? Paraphrase his assurance here:

Think of a very secure relationship that you enjoy with a family member. List the characteristics of that relationship. For example, it is based on love? Respect? Do you feel comfortable telling that special person your deepest fears and regrets? Can you call on that person any time, day or night? Do you refrain from judging each other but, instead, support each other no matter what happens? Now, review your list and put a check by every characteristic that also describes your relationship with Jesus Christ.

In your journal, try to recall moments when you felt sure of God's presence and love. Was the moment marked by a sense of inner peace and tranquility? Or, did you feel energized and empowered?

If you are like many new Christians, you feel most secure in God's love during times of quiet prayer. Plan to spend fifteen minutes in prayer early every morning. Broaden your conversation with God by focusing on different aspects of your relationship.

√ **Dedication.** You are already dedicated to God; now renew that dedication with a vow to walk more closely by his side.

√ **Adoration.** Think about the greatness of God and the wonder of his ability to hear each one of us.

√ **Thanksgiving.** Review all the mercies and miracles in your life. They are more plentiful than you may suspect. Thank him for health, home, love, work, friends, books, fun, a night's rest.

√ **Guidance.** Ask God for guidance all day long. Preview your day. Imagine each task that is in store for you. Plan to complete it together.

√ **Intercession.** Pray for others. Have a prayer list and add to it regularly. Ask for God's mercy on everyone from world leaders to the children in your neighborhood.

√ **Petition.** Prayers should never consist of a laundry list of blessings and creature comforts that we think will make us happy. Certainly we can ask for Christ's touch during an illness. But instead of requesting solutions to all our problems, why not pray for the strength to bear the burden of the problems?

√ **Meditation.** Conclude your prayer as you began it—with meditation. Think quietly but deeply about wisdom, joy, love, beauty, light, peace, power, freedom, and holiness.

