

Session Eight

**A WORD + A BREATH + A PRAYER
PROMOTES PEACE**

“Then the angel said to the shepherds ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.’

“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

“Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth **PEACE**, goodwill toward men!”

— Luke 2:8-14 (NKJV)¹



“AND ON EARTH PEACE ... TOWARD MEN (MANKIND).”

God desires peace for us. Christ is described as our peace in Ephesians 2:14 and as the Prince of Peace in Isaiah 9:6. In biblical terms, peace (Shalom) means wholeness and right relationship with God, self, others, and creation — not just an absence of conflict.

Although we tend to drift from this peace in the moments of our daily lives, God invites us to continually return to it. Each day, we are encouraged to embrace God's PRESENCE as his PRESENT to us, in the PRESENT moment of our AWARENESS.

NOTES:

DEFINITIONS:

- A mental health **TOOLBOX**  is a set of coping strategies and techniques used to handle triggers, difficult emotions, or stress. These tools are often gained from therapy, self-help materials, educational programs, or personal experience.
- A **TRIGGER**  is any stimulus that causes an intense mental or physical reaction, usually due to trauma or stress.²
 - **Trauma Triggers** reawaken past danger and activate the body's fight, flight, or freeze response (sympathetic nervous system = SNS).
 - **Non-trauma Triggers** — like stress, pain, or certain environments — can also engage the sympathetic nervous system and worsen issues such as anxiety.
 - The body reacts to threats by reinforcing coping habits, even maladaptive ones, leaving the nervous system on high alert.
 - **Maladaptive behavior** consists of actions or thoughts that ease discomfort briefly but create lasting problems and reduce effective coping.
 - **Trigger samples include** worries, anxieties, burdens, afflictions, pain, ordeals, trials, adversities, hardship, tragedies, traumas, reversals, setbacks, blows, difficulties, problems, issues, misfortunes, back-to-back bad luck, ill fortune, mishaps, misadventure, suffering, distress, misery, wretchedness, unhappiness, sadness, heartache, grief, anguish, agony, hassle, and travails.

- **UNRESOLVED PAIN** — from trauma or challenges — can negatively affect us and those around us, often showing up as bitterness, anger, addiction, or unhealthy relationships.
- **FACING OUR TRIGGERED PAIN** encourages resolution, healthy growth, empathy, and resilience by improving self-awareness of triggers and reactions.

RESPONSE VS. REACTION

- ✓ Initially triggered responses are more reactive than responsive.
 - Reactive response refers to an immediate, automatic, and often unthinking or reflexive response to a stimulus or “trigger.”
 - “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Ephesians 4:26 NKJV).
 - "Anger" represents emotional response.
 - Ephesians 4:26 recognizes emotional reactions as natural but urges managing them to promote adaptive responses. This is also supported by mental health professionals.
 - Emotional or trauma-based reactions are instinctive, not conscious choices. These reactive responses reduce awareness, so building self-awareness strategies enables better adjustment.
- ✓ “Responsive” implies a thoughtful, intentional, and considered action after processing the situation and then exercising choice.
 - This requires a conscious and intentional effort to move beyond the initial automatic reaction.
 - This suggests the need for “toolbox” resources for “practicing.” This also suggests the benefit of a working relationship with a therapist or trained and experienced “spiritual director.”

- ✓ The initial reaction to a trigger is generally an automatic, system-wide reaction.
 - The sympathetic nervous system (SNS) alarm is set off = “fight, flight, freeze.”
 - The SNS reactionary response is a plus (+) when confronted by a bear, avoiding a collision, or rescuing a falling baby.
 - The SNS response becomes a negative (-) when continually being triggered without PEACEFUL resolution.
- ✓ With awareness and practice, people can learn to pause before reacting and respond more constructively.
 - This activates the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) which quiets the SNS alarm.
 - PNS “rest and digest” functions counterbalance the body's “fight or flight” stress response.
 - A healthy PNS helps the body regain calm, supporting emotional regulation, stress management, and mental well-being. These recovery periods are key to overall health.

NOTES:

PRACTICE WATCHING OUT FOR TROUBLES THAT TRIGGER!

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41 NKJV).

(Suggestion: Track with a journal.)

PRACTICE WATCHING OUT FOR TRIGGERS THAT TROUBLE

The “trouble that triggers” refers to a current source of distress, while the “trigger that troubles” describes how unresolved past wounds make someone more affected by new events.

Repeated unhealthy reactions to the same triggers suggest underlying issues remain unaddressed. Here’s where a therapist or qualified “spiritual director” can help.

The “trouble that triggers” activates the “trigger that troubles.”

External triggers can cause trouble, and existing trouble can make one more susceptible to external triggers.

- ILLUSTRATION ONE = THE TROUBLE THAT TRIGGERS: As a child, your family's new dog's barking scared you until your parents reassured you, so you no longer feared it.
- ILLUSTRATION TWO = THE TRIGGER THAT TROUBLES: After being bitten by a barking dog as a child and receiving no support, barking dogs now cause you anxiety and avoidance.

***“Call upon Me in the day of TROUBLE;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.”***

(Psalm 50:15 NKJV)

JESUS: “... 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.”

(John 14:27 NIV)⁵

JESUS: “I have told you these things, so that IN ME you may have PEACE. In this world you WILL HAVE TROUBLE. But take heart! I have OVERCOME the world.”

(John 16:33 NIV)

NOTES:

MY INTENTIONAL “SELF-GIFTING” PLAN

Intentionally, I start the day with “self-gifting.”

Intentionally, I set aside times throughout the day for “self-gifting.”

Intentionally, I set aside time to join with another or others for “mutual self-gifting.”

Intentionally, I look for trigger-related opportunities for “self-gifting.”

I USE A MENTAL CUE SYSTEM

A **mental cue** is a chosen word, thought, or image that activates your body's calming response to help manage stress.

Use stressful troubling moments that trigger as opportunities to shift from trouble to peace. (See Romans 12:2)

NOTES:

A WORD + A BREATH + A PRAYER PROMOTES PEACE

“Yellow Light” = “Caution” / “Red Light” = “Stop” /
“Green Light” = “Go”

A WORD: “Yellow Light” 

- Treat your triggers as “mental cue” yellow caution lights.

A BREATH: “Red Light” 

- Slow your breathing and quiet your soul (mind and emotions). “Ruach” in Hebrew and “Pneuma” in Greek both mean wind, breath, or spirit. Scripture refers to the Holy Spirit as God’s wind, breath, or spirit emphasizing God’s active, life-giving presence — a peaceful presence.

A PRAYER: “Green Light” 

- *“Jesus Son of God, have mercy on me — come Holy Spirit help me.”*
 - Jesus said: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26 NKJV).
 - Your “go” light objective is to turn away from unhealthy reactions and move forward with healthier responses that use better and more beneficial self-control coping tools.

NOTES:

ENDNOTES

1. NKJV = New King James Version (Bible)
2. Google: PsychCentral / What Are Triggers, and How Do They Form? (<https://psychcentral.com/lib/what-is-a-trigger>); Google: NAMI / Understanding Mental Illness Triggers (<https://www.nami.org/recovery/understanding-mental-illness-triggers/#:~:text=A%20person's%20behaviors%20based%20on,lack%20insight%20about%20their%20reactions.>)
3. The use of "mental cues" draws heavily from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and these techniques are also fundamental components of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Mindfulness-Based Pain Management (MBPM).

These therapies all recognize the interplay between thoughts (cognitions), feelings, and behaviors, and use various techniques involving mental cues to manage emotional states and promote behavioral change.

See: *How Just One Word Can Help Calm an Anxious Mind: The power of cue-controlled relaxation*. Psychology Today (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/letters-from-your-therapist/202105/how-just-one-word-can-help-calm-an-anxious-mind>)

4. ESV = English Standard Version (Bible)
5. NIV = New International Version (Bible)