

To the church in Marlow

From Paul, currently unable to join you, to the church of Jesus Christ in Marlow.

May you know God's peace, His joy and an unshakeable confidence in Him, a confidence that comes from God who chooses to dwell in you all as you choose to focus on **who** you will follow rather than **how** you will follow. Be bold in this confidence, knowing that our God has plans for Marlow and you are a vital part of those plans, not necessarily agreeing on every tiny detail, but committed to discerning the Father's heart and pursuing unity with one another for the sake of the town.

Even when things seem hard and the Good News meets stony resistance or indifference, find your joy in Jesus, closing your eyes to what is visible, stilling your spirit and concentrating on the invisible Spirit who leads you deeper and deeper into Himself. While all around you see people striving to find their peace and confidence in material things, know that your confidence in Jesus is an unshakeable thing and it will not fail you.

Even in the hard times you need to be caught up in worship, resting in the everlasting arms, singing endless Hallelujahs, with heart and soul joining with creation in worship of the creator.

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We are all called to be like Jesus and to serve one another in humility. Let's not be tempted into complaining and criticising each other, rather showing love and acceptance to everyone we meet. If we really want to bring the Kingdom to Marlow we can only do it in humility and service. The town is looking for a community of people who honour one another, not envious, grumbling or argumentative, always striving to get to the top of the ladder but rather coming down the ladder to help others up it.

In our serving we will change the town and find that we ourselves have been changed as well. We need to encourage one another daily, even hourly as we explore new ways to serve our community; to become more caring, kind, accepting of everyone and hospitable. No more striving for position and status, Let's out-do each other in our sacrificial love.

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You see, it is the joy of the Lord that is going to make a difference in your life and change the lives of those you meet. So bring Him your daily money worries, your concerns about your family or friends who are sick. Bring them all to God and leave them there, just taking from Him a deep, deep peace. God is mysterious – so don't try to work Him out! Rest in His peace and fill yourselves with His joy.

So many things clamour for our attention. Let's cut through the noise and concentrate on what really matters. Just changing a few bits of our life is not what God is asking for. Being transformed by the Spirit changes everything in us, and we become more like Jesus.

We can't dwell in the past – that's gone; nor can we obsess about the future – that may never come. Let's just press on into Jesus, building on the good we have already experienced but not resting on our laurels. Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit daily – don't look for rules to run your life by. There is so much more to come! God does not promise an easy ride (look at me in my Chinese prison!) but He does promise to take us by the hand and lead us there. In fact, even here in prison I find a hunger for the truth and so many opportunities for the good news. I would never have chosen this route, but God has brought me here and He is faithful. Let Him lead you beyond your comfort zones.

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You may live in Marlow, but be careful not to be shaped by the town. Watch out for a deceptive reliance on wealth and be over-generous to others to avoid falling into this trap. Watch out for pride and vain ambition; they live on every corner. Humility will keep you safe from these enemies and your lives will be characterized by peace in all its forms.

When all around seems like bad news, and difficulties are everywhere, fill your heart with the inner peace of God that transforms everything into God's perfect perspective. Jesus is the Prince of Peace and we need to come under His covering. Choose wisely how you fill your minds and especially what you watch and listen to. And know this for certain: a community of people full of peace speaks volumes to a world full of turmoil.

Work hard at being at peace with each other. Humility will break down barriers and love will make our differences trivial. If you take your eyes off yourselves and trust your church community to care for you as you care for them, you will enter a place of peace beyond our understanding.

Don't wait until you're perfect before you start giving away the peace, love and joy that you have. Here is a mystery. The more of these things you give away, the more you will find them growing in your own life.