

# The Things That Make for Peace

## Leader Guide: Bible Study Session 1



**Title:** Recognizing the Things That Make for Peace

**Texts:** *Luke 19:37–44, Ephesians 1:18*

**Goal for the Session:** Participants will compare and contrast cultural, political, and biblical definitions of peace.

As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God. (*Luke 19:37–44*)

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints. (*Ephesians 1:17–18*)

### Preparing for the Session

#### What is important to know?

Jerusalem was the center of a culture marked by political oppression, military occupation, social domination, economic exploitation, and religious accommodation.

As Jesus entered the city, the disciples exclaimed, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" But the disciples, the crowds, and the religious leaders all had different

expectations and understandings of what it meant. For some, it was the fulfillment of prophecy, as in Zechariah 9:9, when a new king would arrive on a donkey. Some expected forceful overthrow of the Romans. Others saw it as a threat to their way of life.

But Jesus was the visitation from God, who in his life and ministry demonstrated and taught "I do not give [peace] to you as the world gives" (John 14:27). The peace and, indeed, the kingdom Jesus proclaimed were not like any other kind of peace that the world had known—or knows today.

Jesus challenged all of the political, military, economic, social, and religious forces of the world by his acceptance of outcasts, compassion and healing for those tormented by physical and mental illness, and his teachings, particularly the Beatitudes. He offered an alternative view of the world in all of these spheres, finally lamenting, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." Jesus did not come as one who would overpower or overthrow the dominant powers of the culture by force. Instead, Jesus taught a different kind of peace than the world taught. It included loving our enemies, forgiveness, welcoming outcasts, healing disease and illnesses, feeding the hungry, and the power of love to transform our lives and our culture. These are some of the things that make for peace.

#### The Cultural Situation of the Time

*Political oppression*—The Roman empire installed kings (Herod) and governors (Pilate) who ruled Israel as puppet governments of the empire.

*Military occupation*—Legions of the Roman army occupied the land and were empowered to seize property, enlist soldiers, and imprison and execute traitors to the empire.

*Social domination*—This was a society and culture dominated by the few. Those with power and wealth were able to keep their positions by paying tribute and allegiance to the empire. It was a culture where illness and disease, poverty, and natural disasters were blamed on those who suffered from them. Women were considered property of their husbands, and slavery was common.

*Economic exploitation*—Much of the income from agriculture was taken by the elite through taxes, debt, land laws, and indenture. Common people sometimes found food only by gleaning the leftovers from fields. The king, the tax collectors, and money-changers were free to profit personally and exorbitantly from their collaboration with the Romans.

*Religious accommodation*—In every land occupied by the Romans, people were allowed to practice their religion as long as they did not question the social, cultural, economic, and political values of the Roman empire. The call of the Pharisees for Jesus to silence the disciples confirms their fear of losing the privileges that they had been given by the Romans.

### **What does this mean for our lives?**

The same forces that dominated the world of Jesus' time are still present in various degrees. We still often seek to overcome these forces with enmity and force. The closing prayer for this session is a benediction attributed to St. Francis. To pray to be blessed with discomfort, anger, tears, and foolishness may not at first seem like a blessing, much less a prayer for peacemakers. But recognizing the conditions and situations we are in and the alternative path to peace that Jesus teaches are the first steps to welcoming the transforming peace of Christ.

### **What are we called to do?**

Jesus lamented, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." Jesus calls us to open our eyes, minds, and hearts to a different vision of peace and to be peacemakers within our own lives, churches, communities, and world. This five-week series will explore the various ways we are called to be peacemakers.

### **Personal Preparation**

Find a quiet place to prepare and reflect. Consider your feelings about peacemaking, especially any inner conflicts you have with the theme. Then read Luke 19: 37–44. Underline the phrases that are most challenging to you. Read Ephesians 1:17–18 as a prayer of preparation.

### **You Will Need the Following:**

- Newsprint or flip chart and markers
- Bibles. Make sure each participant has a Bible. If participants have different versions, it will be helpful to provide a printed copy of Luke 19:37–44 to each participant so that the text is the same for one of the activities.

## **Leading the Session**

### **Gathering**

Write the word peace on newsprint. Invite the group to write words that come to mind and draw picture or

symbols that represent peace for them.

### **Exploring the Word**

Choose one or more of the following activities:

1. Invite the group to read aloud "What is important to know" from the Participant Resource. Read the descriptions of each of the cultural situations aloud to the group. Ask the group to suggest biblical examples of each. Invite participants to read aloud Luke 19:37–44, taking turns, reading each verse.
2. Ask for volunteers to read the lines for each role:
  - Narrator (one)
  - Pharisees (one or more)
  - Multitude (everyone)
  - Jesus (one)

Ask the group to read Luke 19:37–44 aloud, with each person reading their assigned lines. You will all need to be reading from the same translation.

Then ask members to name the feelings of each of the following groups:

- Disciples
- Crowd
- Pharisees
- Romans
- Roman collaborators (tax collectors, money-changers)

3. Form up to five groups, depending upon the number of participants, and assign each group one of the following selections from the Scripture reading. Ask the groups to read the verse(s) and then make a poster on newsprint using their assigned phrase, and to draw pictures or symbols of what that meant to the people of the time.
  - A. "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"
  - B. "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"
  - C. "Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.'"
  - D. "As (Jesus) came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.'
  - E. "The days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another."

## Reflecting on the Word

Form up to five groups, depending upon the number of participants. Assign each group one of the following categories. If you have not already done so, read the description of each cultural situation aloud to the group. Invite each group to discuss the questions and make a list of examples of situations that exist today for their category.

### Political oppression

- What forces seek to dominate the political decisions of our time?
- Who is excluded from participating in important decisions in our country? Our world?

### Military occupation

- What priorities have been pushed aside in the name of military strength and protection?
- How does excessive military spending take away from the things that make for peace?

### Social domination

- Who in our time still faces oppression, inequality, or domination by others?
- What is the impact to the majority when a minority is excluded from basic rights?

### Economic exploitation

- How do our personal investments change our perspectives about world conflicts?
- How do your investments reflect your values? World values? Jesus' values?

### Religious accommodation

- What "things of peace" does the church give up to go along with our culture?
- How does the culture reward the church for not getting involved in politics, economics, and social issues?

After each group has made a list, invite each to share their list with all.

## Responding to the Word

Invite the group to read aloud the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–11)

Ask the group to reflect on these questions, listed on the Participant Resource:

- How do our peace tactics and values differ from those Jesus taught?
- How would the values Jesus taught change our responses to political, military, economic, social, and religious conflicts?
- What prevents us from seeing the things that make for peace?

In what ways can the "eyes of my heart" be opened to the peace values of Jesus?

## Closing the Session

1. Invite participants to pray in unison the benediction of St. Francis, printed on the Participant Resource:

### Benediction of St. Francis

May God bless you with discomfort  
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial  
relationships,  
So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger  
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,  
So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears  
To shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection,  
hunger, and war,  
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort  
them and  
To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness  
To believe that you can make a difference in the world,  
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done  
To bring justice and kindness to all our children and  
the poor.  
Amen

2. Sing one of the following hymns from *The Presbyterian Hymnal*, or a song or hymn or your choice:

"Open My Eyes That I May See"

(#324, *The Presbyterian Hymnal*)

"Song of Peace" (#432, *The Presbyterian Hymnal*)

## Going Deeper

Choose a current political, military, economic, social, or religious issue about which there is conflict. Commit to researching the issue and unconventional options to address it. Commit to a letter-writing campaign on that issue, to people in positions of power.

Read one phrase of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–11) each day this week, and keep a journal of your reflections on how to more fully live the values taught by Jesus.

## Preparing for Session 2:

Finding Peace "so that you may live deep within your heart"

Read Philippians 4:4–7 and Romans 5:15.

Ask the participants to reflect on these questions:

- How do we find peace in our hearts?
- How do we deepen our personal spiritual practice as a peacemaker?

# The Things That Make for Peace

## Participant Resource: Bible Study Session 1



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### What are we called to do?

Jesus lamented “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.” Jesus calls us to open our eyes, minds, and hearts to a different vision of peace and to be peacemakers within our own lives, churches, communities, and world. This five week series will explore the various ways we are called to be peacemakers.

### Small group quotes

- A. “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”
- B. “Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”
- C. “Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, order your disciples to stop.’”
- D. “As (Jesus) came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, ‘If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.’”
- E. “The days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another.”

### Small Group Questions

#### Political oppression

- What forces seek to dominate the political decisions of our time?
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- What priorities have been pushed aside in the name of military strength and protection?

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- What "things of peace" does the church give up to go along with our culture?
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#### Personal reflections

- How do our peace tactics and value differ from those Jesus taught?
- How would the values Jesus taught change our responses to political, military, economic, social, and religious conflicts?
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### Benediction of St. Francis

May God bless you with discomfort  
 At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,  
 So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger  
 At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,  
 So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears  
 To shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war,  
 So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and  
 To turn their pain into joy.  
 And may God bless you with enough foolishness  
 To believe that you can make a difference in the world,  
 So that you can do what others claim cannot be done  
 To bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.  
 Amen

# The Things That Make for Peace

## Leaders Guide: Bible Study Session 2



**Title:** Finding Peace—*“So that you may live deep within your heart”*

**Texts:** Luke 5:12–16 and John 14:27

How do we nurture a peace-full life? How do we deepen our personal spiritual practice as peacemakers? Using Luke 5:12–16 and John 14:27, this session explores how Jesus sustained his journey and ways we can ground ourselves in the practice of peace.

**Goal for the Session:** Participants will explore ways to deepen their spiritual lives to help sustain them for the long haul of peacemaking

*Once, when he was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.” Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, “I do choose. Be made clean.” Immediately the leprosy left him. And he ordered him to tell no one. “Go,” he said, “and show yourself to the priest, and, as Moses commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, for a testimony to them.” But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray. (Luke 5:12–16)*  
*“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)*

### Preparing for the Session

#### What is important to know?

The work of peace and justice is both an inner and outer journey. Many gifted, passionate Christians devote themselves to work for peace and justice. They advocate for nonviolent solutions to world problems, care and sustainability for the earth, the rights of women and children, and many more important issues. They are committed to pursuing peaceful means to accomplish this work, which means they must employ more creativity than many justice-seekers. What we have discovered over the years is that without a commitment to regularly nurturing their own spiritual lives, they can become exhausted, disillusioned, and anxious, and ultimately must step back from this important journey in order

to preserve themselves for the long haul. We know the demands of living and working are sufficient enough to empty us at the end of the day if we are not intentional about pursuing our own spiritual well-being.

This study delves into what we know of Jesus’ spiritual practice and several ways to deepen the participant’s inner journey as a peacemaker. Picking several biblical passages and tying them to a theme is, at best, an incomplete way to explore texts. The two texts above are offered as a framework for each participant to explore her or his own spiritual life. Luke 5 reveals a pattern found in the synoptic Gospels—namely, that Jesus would often withdraw to recover and refuel for his ministry. John 14:27 is taken from Jesus’ final words to his disciples, in which he gives them a “different” peace. We will conclude with exploring Philippians 4:4–7 as a model for a peace-full life.

A few assumptions:

1. Peacemaking is both an inner and outer journey. When we neglect the inner journey, we can become fragile, weary, and less effective in the work we do. If we neglect our outer journey, we can become myopic and out of touch with the realities of the work we do.
2. No two spiritual lives are identical. The Scriptures can offer us insight, encouragement, and the example of Jesus, but each of us must ultimately turn to Jesus, in pursuit of a spiritual practice that will sustain us.
3. Every peacemaker needs an active spiritual life to stay healthy and effective.

### Biblical Context

#### Luke

When we look at the Gospel of Luke, we see a busy, compassionate, healing Christ. Just one chapter before the passage we are using we see Jesus opening the scrolls and proclaiming, “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor . . .” (Luke 4:18–19) The self-identification of Jesus as a prophet is quickly validated as Jesus heals Simon’s mother-in-law and a man with an unclean spirit, calls his disciples, and then returns again to his healing ministry. All four Gospels record Jesus slipping away to pray at certain times in his ministry (Mark 1:35, 6:46; Matthew 14:23; Luke 9:18; John 6:18). These seem to come

between critical moments of his ministries of healing and casting out of demons. Such prayer was a pattern for Jesus, and we can guess that it was also an important part of his pattern of renewal.

### **John**

The Gospel of John was compiled and canonized during the late first century. (See Bible Study #1 for discussion of military occupation, social domination, and economic exploitation.) There we find a higher Christology, with a focus on Christ's divine nature. The words of Jesus in John 13–16 were his departing words to his disciples before his betrayal and arrest. These are words of comfort and preparation.

We do not know exactly what Jesus meant when he said, "My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives" (John 14:27a). In John's Gospel, though, the placement of this passage suggests Jesus is in some way preparing his followers for what is to come. Several verses earlier he says, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live" (John 14:18–19). Jesus speaks confusing and comforting words to his followers, reminding them that they will not be left alone.

Jesus says to them, "I will not leave you orphaned." Later he says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid" (John 14:27b). Jesus is concerned about them, perhaps knowing the difficulties that lie ahead. So he reminds them that he will still be with them. No doubt the disciples were both confused and comforted.

### **The Biblical Concept of Peace, or Shalom**

The word *peace* is used in English Bibles to translate the Hebrew word *shalom*. In the Hebrew context, *shalom* implies more than an absence of war. It means wholeness, well-being, peacefulness, and completeness. "Peace be with you" is the most common greeting in the Middle East and is still spoken today in Israel and Palestine by Muslims, Christians, and Jews. It is a blessing and a wish for happiness and good health.

God's peace, then, is also more than an external condition. It implies an internal sense of all being well with our souls. When we pass the peace of Christ to someone in worship, we are praying a blessing on that person, asking that all parts of his or her life be in right order. The pursuit of peace reminds us that following Jesus into a life of peace involves our relationships with God, each other, and the earth, our physical health and mental well-being. This is shalom.<sup>1</sup>

### **What does this mean for our lives?**

Jesus regularly "went away" to pray. We can imagine that he prayed something like the Lord's Prayer, but we do not know for certain. We do know that he seemed to leave to pray at critical points in his ministry; after healings and the casting out of demons, and when overwhelmed by the crowds. For the peacemaker, who is certainly about the work of healing, this is a reminder to make time to allow God to renew our spirits for the calling we have been given.

In John, we find Jesus leaving his peace with his disciples, as a lifeline for the difficult times to come. He reminds them that his peace is not a superficial peace that comes and goes but a deeper sense of well-being and wholeness in life (God's shalom). Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," and reminds them that God's peace is there for them. These are words that remind us to be patient, to keep working for God's peace and justice not only for ourselves but for our world.

### **What are we called to do?**

Christ calls us to a relationship with God, ourselves, and the world that pursues the well-being of all people. We are invited to cultivate a spiritual life that can sustain us through our years of following Christ, so we may be beneficiaries and agents of peace.

### **Personal Preparation**

Find a quiet place to prepare and reflect. Try to carve out an uninterrupted hour where you can try some of the spiritual exercises suggested. Begin with five minutes of silence. Use this time to let go of the stresses in your body and anything that is distracting you. Treat every piece of your letting go with kindness—and enjoy the relaxation that comes with focus. Allow yourself to hear what God might have for you. Read the two passages and consider your own personal spiritual life. What is working for you? What could be better? Be open to what God will teach you.

### **You Will Need the Following:**

- Newsprint, giant Post-it notes, or a flip chart, and multicolored markers. (White board is fine, but you will likely need more room.) You will want to keep all of the information you come up with.
- A Bible for each participant
- Multicolor sticky notes
- Downloaded materials referenced, including *Peacemaking: Nurturing Your Spiritual Life for the Long Haul* ([www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/seasonofpeace/pdfs/nurturing\\_the\\_spiritual\\_life.pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/seasonofpeace/pdfs/nurturing_the_spiritual_life.pdf)).

## Other Preparations

Write the Luke 5:12–16 and John 14:27 passages on the newsprint, giant Post-it notes, flip chart, or white board, leaving room for comments below each. (Giant Post-it notes are especially handy as you can move them around as needed.)

## Leading the Session

### Gathering

Begin by recapping the content of the previous session, and end with some questions. Here are a few possibilities:

- We closed with a Franciscan prayer. Did you find yourself “blessed” this week? How?
- Last week we talked about some pretty heavy stuff, including economic exploitation and political oppression, and asked questions about what peace means to us. What stayed with you from last week?
- Did you take the opportunity to read the news through the eyes of peace? Did you discover anything interesting or challenging?

Provide an overview of today’s lesson: “Today we will be looking at two passages where Jesus talks about peace and asks some questions. Then we will explore some ways to deepen our spiritual practice to help us thrive as we follow Jesus the peacemaker.”

### Exploring the Word

Open with this Celtic prayer or a prayer of your choosing.

You are the peace of all things calm  
You are the place to hide from harm  
You are the light that shines in dark  
You are the heart’s eternal spark  
You are the door that’s open wide  
You are the guest who waits inside  
You are the stranger at the door  
You are the calling of the poor  
You are my Lord and with me still  
You are my love, keep me from ill  
You are the light, the truth, the way  
You are my Savior this very day.<sup>2</sup>

Choose one of the following options:

#### Option 1

1. Split into groups of four or five. Assign Luke 5:12–16 to each group. Encourage people to look at the headings before and after this passage to find out what Jesus was up to. Have participants answer two questions: “What does this text tell you about Jesus’ spiritual life?” and “Why do you imagine Jesus would withdraw to deserted places and pray?” (If you prefer, read the background info for the Luke passage to set the context.)

Invite a representative from each group to write responses to the questions on paper or board with the Luke passage written at the top. Alternate colors for emphasis.

Follow the same process with John 14:27, assigning different people the roles of reading the primary passage, skimming the three chapters previous, and skimming the subsequent three chapters. Have participants write their responses to the following questions on paper or board with the words of John 14:27 written at the top: “What is the ‘different peace’ that Jesus leaves the disciples with? Why did Jesus leave his disciples with peace?” (If you prefer, read the background info for the Luke passage to set the context.)

#### Option 2

Assign one person to read Luke 5:12–16 out loud, one person to skim 3:23–5:11, and one person to skim 5:17–6:17. After reading the primary passage, ask the group, “What does this text tell you about Jesus’ spiritual life?” and “Why do you imagine Jesus would withdraw to deserted places and pray?”

Draw a timeline of Jesus’ ministry, beginning with Luke 3:21 and concluding around Luke 6:17; have the individuals who read the passage call out what is happening and a different person write these events on the timeline.

Follow the same process with John 14:27. Assign one person to read John 14:27 out loud, one person to skim 12:1—14:26 and one person to skim John 14:28–15:27. After reading the primary passage, ask the group the questions “What is the ‘different peace’ that Jesus leaves the disciples with?” and “Why did Jesus leave them with peace?”

### Reflecting on the Word

Be sure you have a clean, large writing space on which people may place sticky notes. On that space, write “living deeply in my heart” from the Franciscan prayer.

Ask the question: “In light of these passages, how can you sustain your life as a peacemaker?”  
Give each participant several sticky notes to share some of their practice. Have them draw a symbol of their responses on each note and place it on the paper/board. Share together.

Invite someone to read Philippians 4:4–7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

### Ask the question

- What does this passage suggest as a way to find peace?
- Is the peace Christ gives a “go to your happy place” peace? Or is it a peace rooted in the everyday realities we face?
- Do you see any connections between gratitude and peace/shalom?
- How is gratitude a spiritual practice?

Read the following statements about gratitude:

“Be thankful for what you have; you’ll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don’t have, you will never, ever have enough.”—Oprah Winfrey

“If the only prayer you ever said in your life was ‘thank you,’ that would suffice.”—Meister Eckhart

“Two kinds of gratitude: The sudden kind we feel for what we take; the larger kind we feel for what we give.”—Edwin Arlington Robinson

Invite people to share gratitude sayings they know and what they mean to them.

### Responding to the Word

Pass out the resource page *Peacemaking: Nurturing Your Spiritual Life for the Long Haul* to each participant.

For this part of our conversation, we will explore a few options for spiritual renewal. Using the suggestions from the previous conversation, consider which of these practices may be a better option for your group. Based on the Ignatian process, the exercises below are the culmination of months of spiritual work for some, but they can also be an entry point into living in gratitude. These exercises are to be used daily.

The leader’s role in this process is to gently transition people into quiet reflection.

### Option 1:

Use the following four sentences:

1. Reflect on God’s gifts to us (life, family, friends, faith, church, eternal life).
2. Reflect on God’s self-giving in Jesus.
3. Reflect on God’s continuing work in the world.
4. Reflect on the limitless quality of God’s love. As a contemporary paraphrase has it, “God’s love shines down upon me like the light rays from the sun,” “God’s love is poured forth lavishly like a fountain spilling forth its waters into an unending stream.”

This prayer is often said in closing:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will—all that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me.

### Option 2:

Using the Examen—Ignatian prayer, the leader guides participants through the following steps:

1. Become aware of God’s presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.<sup>3</sup>

Sing: “Take My Life” (#391, *The Presbyterian Hymnal*) or a song of your choosing

### Closing the Session

Find one other person in the room and exchange emails or phone numbers. Make a commitment to touch base midweek to see how this study has been sitting with you. Be prepared to talk about it next week when we explore what Jesus meant when he said to “turn the other cheek.”

1. Invite participants to pray in unison the Benediction of St. Francis, printed on the Participant Resource

## Benediction of St. Francis

May God bless you with discomfort  
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,  
So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger  
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,  
So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears  
To shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger,  
and war.  
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them  
and  
To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness  
To believe that you can make a difference in the world,  
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done

To bring justice and kindness to all our children and  
the poor.  
Amen.

2. Sing one of the following hymns from *The Presbyterian Hymnal* or a song or hymn of your choice:  
#334, "When Israel Was in Egypt's Land"  
#374, "Lord, Make Us Servants of Your Peace"

## Going Deeper

Consider what types of music are important in nurturing your sense of well-being. Schedule a time one month from now to share about these. Use it as a follow-up to this study.

Write a five-line poem that expresses what you want your inner and outer practice of peace to look like.

## Preparing for Session 3

Practicing Peace—"So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace."

Read Matthew 5:38–46.

Consider these questions:

- What is the difference between being a doormat for Jesus and choosing a nonviolent response?
- What are ways in which you "turn the other cheek"?

## Endnotes

1. The above section adapted from material provided by Timothy Beal, Florence Harkness Professor of Religion, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio.
- 2 at: [www.faithandworship.com/Celtic\\_Blessings\\_and\\_Prayers.htm#ixzz1uQAxXdoW](http://www.faithandworship.com/Celtic_Blessings_and_Prayers.htm#ixzz1uQAxXdoW)  
Under Creative Commons License: Attribution
3. Both exercises and the prayer are from <http://ignatianspirituality.com>.

# The Things That Make for Peace

## Participant Resource: Bible Study Session 2



**Title:** Finding Peace—*“So that you may live deep within your heart”*

**Texts:** Luke 5:12–16 and John 14:27

How do we nurture a peace-full life? How do we deepen our personal spiritual practice as peacemakers? Using Luke 5: 12–16 and John 14:27, this session explores how Jesus sustained his journey and ways we can ground ourselves in the practice of peace.

*Goal for the Session:* Participants will explore ways to deepen their spiritual lives to help sustain them for the long haul of peacemaking

*Once, when he was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.” Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, “I do choose. Be made clean.” Immediately the leprosy left him. And he ordered him to tell no one. “Go,” he said, “and show yourself to the priest, and, as Moses commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, for a testimony to them.”* But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray. (Luke 5:12–16)

*“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid.”* (John 14:27)

### What is important to know?

The work of peace and justice is both an inner and outer journey. Many gifted, passionate Christians devote themselves to work for peace and justice. They advocate for nonviolent solutions to world problems, care and sustainability for the earth, the rights of women and children, and many more important issues. They are committed to pursuing peaceful means to accomplish this work, which means they must employ more creativity than many justice-seekers. What we have discovered over the years is that without a commitment to regularly nurturing their own spiritual lives, they can become exhausted, disillusioned, and anxious, and ultimately must step back from this important journey in order to preserve themselves for the long haul. We know the demands of living and working are sufficient enough to

empty us at the end of the day if we are not intentional about pursuing our own spiritual well-being.

This study delves into what we know of Jesus’ spiritual practice and several ways to deepen participant’s inner journey as a peacemaker. Picking several biblical passages and tying them to a theme is, at best, an incomplete way to explore texts. The two text above are offered as a framework for each participant to explore her or his own spiritual life. Luke 5 reveals a pattern found in the synoptic gospels—namely, that Jesus would often withdraw to recover and refuel for his ministry. John 14:27 is taken from Jesus’ final words to his disciples, in which he gives them a “different” peace. We will conclude with exploring Philippians 4:4–7 as a model for a peace-full life.

A few assumptions:

1. Peacemaking is both an inner and outer journey. When we neglect the inner journey, we can become fragile, weary, and less effective in the work we do. If we neglect our outer journey, we can become myopic and out of touch with the realities of the work we do
2. No two spiritual lives are identical. The Scriptures can offer us insight, encouragement, and the example of Jesus, but each of us must ultimately turn to Jesus, in pursuit of a spiritual practice that will sustain them.
3. Every peacemaker needs an active spiritual life to stay healthy and effective.

### Biblical context

#### Luke

When we look at the Gospel of Luke, we see a busy, compassionate, healing Christ. Just one chapter before the passage we are using (Luke 4:18–19) we see Jesus opening the scrolls and proclaiming, “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor . . .” The self-identification of Jesus as a prophet is quickly validated as Jesus heals Simon’s mother-in-law and a man with an unclean spirit, calls his disciples, and then returns again to his healing ministry.

All four Gospels record Jesus slipping away to pray at certain times in his ministry (Mark 1:35, 6:46; Matthew 14:23; Luke 9:18; John 6:18). These seem to come

between critical moments of his ministries of healing and casting out of demons. Such prayer was a pattern for Jesus, and we can guess that it was also an important part of his pattern of renewal.

### John

The Gospel of John was compiled and canonized during the late first century. (See Bible Study #1 for discussion of military occupation, social domination, and economic exploitation.) There we find a higher Christology, with a focus on Christ's divine nature. The words of Jesus in John 13–16 were his departing words to his disciples before his betrayal and arrest. These are words of comfort and preparation.

We do not know exactly what Jesus meant when he said, "My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27). In John's Gospel, though, the placement of this passage suggests Jesus is in some way preparing his followers for what is to come. Several verses earlier he says, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live" (John 14:18–19). Jesus speaks confusing and comforting words to his followers, reminding them that they will not be left alone.

Jesus says to them, "I will not leave you orphaned." Later he says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27b). Jesus is concerned about them, perhaps knowing the difficulties that lie ahead. So he reminds them that he will still be with them. No doubt the disciples were both confused and comforted.

### The Biblical concept of Peace or Shalom

The word *peace* is used in English Bibles to translate the Hebrew word *shalom*. In the Hebrew context, *shalom* implies more than an absence of war. It means wholeness, well-being, peacefulness and completeness. "Peace be with you" is the most common greeting in the Middle East and is still spoken today in Israel and Palestine by Muslims, Christians, and Jews. It is a blessing and a wish for happiness and good health.

God's peace, then, is also more than an external condition. It implies an internal sense of all being well with our souls. When we pass the peace of Christ to someone in worship, we are praying a blessing on that person, asking that all parts of his or her life be in right order. The pursuit of peace reminds us that following Jesus into a life of peace involves our relationships with God, each other, and the earth, our physical health and mental well-being. This is shalom.<sup>1</sup>

### What does this mean for our lives?

Jesus regularly "went away" to pray. We can imagine that he prayed something like the Lord's Prayer, but we do not

know for certain. We do know that he seemed to leave to pray at critical points in his ministry, after healings and the casting out of demons, and when overwhelmed by the crowds. For the peacemaker, who is certainly about the work of healing, this is a reminder to make time to allow God to renew our spirits for the calling we have been given.

In John, we find Jesus leaving his peace with his disciples, as a lifeline for the difficult times to come. He reminds them that his peace is not a superficial peace that comes and goes but a deeper sense of well-being and wholeness in life (God's shalom). Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled" and reminds them that God's peace is there for them. These are words that remind us to be patient, to keep working for God's peace and justice not only for ourselves but for our world.

### What are we called to do?

Christ calls us to a relationship with God, ourselves, and the world that pursues the well-being of all people. We are invited to cultivate a spiritual life that can sustain us through our years of following Christ, so we may be beneficiaries and agents of peace.

### Benediction of St. Francis

May God bless you with discomfort  
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,  
So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger  
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,  
So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears  
To shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger,  
and war.  
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them  
and  
To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness  
To believe that you can make a difference in the world,  
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done

To bring justice and kindness to all our children and  
the poor.  
Amen.

### Endnotes)

1. Timothy Beal, Florence Harkness Professor of Religion, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland OH

# The Things That Make for Peace

## Leaders Guide: Bible Study Session 3



**Title:** Practicing Peace—“So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.”

**Text:** Matthew 5:38–42

**Goal for the Session:** Participants will explore Matthew 5:38–42 as a basis for active nonviolence and consider their response to it.

What does it mean to “turn the other cheek?” What is the difference between being a doormat and choosing nonviolence? Based on the scholarship of Walter Wink, this study will explore Matthew 5:38–42 as a foundation for active nonviolence.

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ **But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.**”*

### Preparing for the Session

#### What is important to know?

We will be looking at Matthew 5:38–42 through the scholarship of the late Walter Wink, who taught biblical interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City for more than 30 years. Among his many publications is the book *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium*, published in 1998. His scholarship is still contributing to theological discussion about peace and war. In a world where the myth of redemptive violence is perpetuated at every turn, it is important for Christians to consider more than the traditional pacifist and just war theories. Through the example of Jesus, we are invited into the words of Jesus in a potentially life-changing third way, that of active nonviolent resistance.

Most Christians agree that Jesus was not a warrior. Nor was he a doormat. Although he took humility to a heartbreaking level—willingly submitting to crucifixion—we also observe him challenging the political and religious powers through his gracious and empowering treatment of women, prostitutes, tax collectors, the poor, and lepers, to name just a few. He also aligned himself with the prophet Isaiah, proclaiming:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the  
poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim  
release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the  
blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the  
Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18–19)*

This is hardly a call to “give in to evil.” So the question persists: What did Jesus mean when he said, “Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other also”? Is it a call to be passive in the face of injustice, abuse, and marginalization?

This study looks at these words within the context of the first century to see if there is another approach to the passage. Enter into it with an open mind, and see if you encounter Jesus a little differently.

#### Cultural Context First-Century Palestine

- The Roman Empire, which spread all the way into Africa, controlled Palestine in the first century. The government allowed Jewish life and governance to continue—under Rome’s watchful eye—as long as revenues were collected and the people remained compliant with their Roman occupiers.
- Palestinians were heavily taxed, creating a situation where poverty was a severe problem. The Roman court system was flooded with people taking advantage of every economic class. According to some sources, the wealthy were taxed 25 percent and more to fund wars, and many households were driven into debt while trying to retain the rights to their land.<sup>1</sup> The poor were often left with little more than the clothing on their backs.

“Turn the other [the left cheek] also.” (v. 39)

- In Jewish culture, the left hand was only used for “unclean” tasks. In the Qumran community (at the time of Jesus), gesturing with the left hand meant exclusion from the community for 100 days.

- It was shameful to “backhand” someone unless the person was of a lower class than the perpetrator. It was used to humiliate or insult.

“Give your cloak as well.” (v. 40)

- Deuteronomy 24:10–13 allowed a creditor to take a person’s outer robe as collateral for repayment of a loan.
- Clothing was simple for common people. Peasants wore an outer coat and an under cloak (their undergarments).
- Middle Eastern culture of the day was shame-based. Nakedness was particularly shameful, more so for the one observing the nakedness than for the one without clothing.

“Go the second mile.” (v. 41)

Roman officers regularly enlisted people to carry their packs so they did not have to. At any time, people could be recruited to do work for the Romans. Some officers had mules to carry their packs, but many defaulted to people.

- It was a common practice for a soldier to recruit someone for one mile before allowing them to return and continue with their day.

### Biblical Context

- This passage comes in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, the most extensive teaching of Jesus found in the Bible. Through much of it, he offers an alternative reading of living as a faithful Jew. He looks at the law and reorients his listeners to the heart and intent behind the law.
- The Greek word translated “resist” in 5:39 is *antistenai*, literally “to stand against.” It was also used in the Hebrew Scriptures as a word for warfare. In Ephesians 6:13, which discusses the “whole armor of God,” the same word is used, there translated, “to withstand evil.”

### What does this mean for our lives?

When we read Scripture, it is important that we ask questions when something doesn’t seem consistent with other portions of Scripture. It is also important that when we accept a particular interpretation, we remain open to other interpretations of the same texts. Scripture itself rarely gives us the cultural context, so referring to scholars is important for a full knowledge of scriptural interpretation.

### What are we called to do?

We are called to be peacemakers by pursuing active nonviolence in the way of Christ. As peacemakers, we are neither conflict avoiders nor called to “force” justice. Jesus gives the ultimate model for nonviolent resistance, loving change, and self-giving humility. We are called to follow this Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

### Personal Preparation

Find a quiet place to pray for the study, and invite the Holy Spirit to open your eyes and the eyes of all participants to find God’s grace and peace with this study. Read the entire passage twice.

Sometime before the study, be sure you practice the “turning the left cheek” role-play portion of the study. It is critical that you be clear how it is not possible to strike the right cheek without backhanding someone.

### You Will Need the Following:

- The full passage either written at a size all in the room can read or projected to sufficient size
- Three to five readers
- Write the three phrases of cultural information on separate pieces of paper and give the information to three people ahead of time
- (If you choose the second option for the gathering) Write on different sheets of 8” x 10” colored paper the following words: *doormat*, *gullible*, *forgiving*, *generous*, *intentional*, and *spineless*. Tape them at different places around the room at eye level.

### Leading the Session

#### Gathering

Last week we considered how to “live deeper in our hearts” as peacemakers. Did you try anything new this week? Have you gained inspiration to try something new in your pursuit of spiritual well-being? Did you have opportunity to connect with your partner? How did that go?

*Brainstorm:* Today we will look at a very familiar passage in a little different light. When you hear “turn the other cheek,” what words come to mind? Write these words up on one side of the room. It is probable that words like *doormat*, *gullible*, *unhealthy*, *spineless*, and *sucker* will arise, as will more positive words like *generous*, *principled*, and *forgiving*.

-or-

With the words *doormat*, *gullible*, *forgiving*, *generous*, *intentional*, and *spineless* taped at different places around the room at eye level, read the passage:

*"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also."*

Using the following question and guidance, invite participants to respond: "When you hear this passage, which of these words best describes your predominant response to it? Go to the word that best fits." Invite one from each group to respond. After responses are made, invite participants to return to their seats.

### Exploring the Word

Read the passage in its entirety by sharing in reading it phrase by phrase.

*"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you."*

If taken as it has sometimes been interpreted, this passage implies that Jesus was advising his followers to give in to evil. This interpretation suggests that Jesus didn't take evil very seriously. On the contrary, his very message was about a way to defeat evil.

*Provide participants with the cultural context.*

### Cultural Context of First-Century Palestine (from above)

- The Roman Empire, which spread all the way into Africa, controlled Palestine in the first century. The government allowed Jewish life and governance to continue—under Rome's watchful eye—as long as revenues were collected and the people remained compliant with their Roman occupiers.
- Palestinians were heavily taxed, creating a situation where poverty was a severe problem. The Roman court system was flooded with people taking advantage of every economic class. The wealthy were taxed 25 percent to 250 percent to fund wars, and many households were driven into debt while trying to retain the rights to their land.<sup>2</sup> The poor were often left with little more than the clothing on their backs.

*"But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also."*

The Greek word translated "resist" in 5:39 is *antistenai*, literally "to stand against." It was also used in the Hebrew Scriptures as a word for warfare. In Ephesians 6:13, which discusses the "whole armor of God," the same word is used,

there translated, "to withstand evil."

Have the first reader read the cultural context on "turn the other [the left cheek] also" (v. 39).

- In Jewish culture, the left hand was only used for "unclean" tasks. In the Qumran community (at the time of Jesus), gesturing with the left hand meant exclusion from the community for 100 days.
- It was shameful to "backhand" someone unless the person was of a lower class than the perpetrator. It was used to humiliate or insult.

Role Play: Invite two people to participate in a role play to enact this scene. Person one is a Roman soldier. Person two is a Jewish man or woman. Read the passage slowly, asking the two to play their parts (without actually hitting). The soldier is the perpetrator.

"If anyone strikes you on your right cheek"—What does this require of the one striking in order to hit the other's right cheek? (That the person uses his or her left hand.) But we read earlier that the left hand is not used, as it is to be used only for personal purposes.

The only way to strike someone's right cheek is in the situation of a superior hitting a person of inferior status (a backhand). If Jesus had been referring to equals, he would have said that the left cheek was the first to be slapped.

### What have we discovered?

1. Jesus was speaking to a Jewish people under Roman occupation.
2. In speaking of being slapped on the right cheek, Jesus was referring to a higher status person slapping someone of lower status.

Question: Why did Jesus teach them to turn the other cheek?

(Ask your actors to enact the second part of the scene—namely, the person turning the other cheek.)

By telling the people to turn the other cheek, Jesus was telling the victim to call out the reality of the unjustness and unfairness of the system. It would likely surprise the person who had struck the left cheek to be told, "Go ahead, slap the other one." So, Jesus was not advising his followers to submit themselves in a masochistic fashion. Nor were they being encouraged to turn the other cheek so they could be abused even more. He was more likely saying, "Stand up with your dignity and expose evil. And do it with restraint."

*"If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well."*

Invite the second reader to read the cultural context of "Give your cloak as well" (v. 40).

- Deuteronomy 24:10–13 allowed a creditor to take a person's outer robe as collateral for repayment of a loan.
- Clothing was simple for common people. Peasants wore an outer coat and an under cloak (their undergarments).
- Middle Eastern culture of the day was shame-based. Nakedness was particularly shameful, more so for the one observing the nakedness than for the one without clothing.

Read the statement "If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well."

In light of this information, consider the following questions for discussion.

Break into four groups to consider these questions.

-or-

Share together in discussing a few of these questions, as much as time allows.

1. Was Jesus speaking to wealthy people? (Unlikely, if the creditor accepted the debtor's coat as collateral for payment of the loan.)
2. What do you imagine would happen in a courthouse if the judge ruled that the debtor must leave his coat and the debtor responds by offering his undergarments as well? (Laughter? Worry that the debtor would shed his clothes?) How would the judge see this? (As making a mockery of the system?) How would the creditor see this? (As a public embarrassment?)
3. What would the debtor accomplish? (She or he would expose the failure of the Roman taxation system and the greed of the creditor).
4. Do you think this reflects a "doormat" theology? Why or why not? What is Jesus possibly proposing here? (That using humor and the threat of shame can empower the oppressed).

Read the statement "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile."

Ask the third reader to share the relevant cultural background information: Roman officers regularly

enlisted people to carry their packs for them. It was one way they asserted their power over local inhabitants. At any time, they could be recruited to do work for the Romans. (Remember Simon of Cyrene, who was pulled from the crowd to carry the cross of Jesus.)

### Questions to consider:

1. In light of the other two reflections, what do you think Jesus might have been suggesting? (To be willing to give extra to prove their love? To be willing to walk the second mile to show the soldier that they shouldn't have to carry their load at all?)
2. What good would it do for the one forced to carry a pack one mile to volunteer to carry it another? How might the Roman soldier feel?
3. In what way might Jesus be encouraging his followers to active nonviolent resistance?
4. Why would someone being forced to walk a mile out of their way carrying a soldier's bag ask to carry it another mile?

### Reflecting on the Word

Gather participants into groups of four or five. Ask each group to rewrite the passage in their own words, taking into consideration the lesson. There will likely be lingering questions, and this is a good place to continue discussion.

### Responding to the Word

Give the group five minutes of silence to write about their personal experiences going through the passage. What new thing are they considering that they hadn't before? Encourage each to think of other leaders who have used nonviolent resistance to accomplish their purposes while staying true to their faith.

-or-

If you used the introduction where participants were invited to choose which word most described "turn the other cheek," have participants choose again and explain why their opinion was the same or changed. Add other words as people find them.

### Closing the Session

Sing the song "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace" (#2171, *Sing the Faith*) or one of your choosing.

Invite participants to pray in unison the Benediction of St. Francis, printed on the Participant Resource.

## Benediction of St. Francis

May God bless you with discomfort  
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,  
So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger  
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,  
So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears  
To shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger,  
and war.  
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them  
and  
To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness  
To believe that you can make a difference in the world,  
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done

To bring justice and kindness to all our children and  
the poor.  
Amen.

## Going Deeper

Begin a book group studying *The Powers That Be*, by Walter Wink.

Borrow *A Force More Powerful*, a documentary with five 30–40 minute sections on successful nonviolent movements in history, from the library or your local Fellowship of Reconciliation chapter. For more information, visit [www.aforcemorepowerful.org](http://www.aforcemorepowerful.org).

## Preparing for Session 4:

Extending Peace—“*So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them*”

Read Hebrews 13:1–3 and Romans 12:13–21.

Consider these questions:

1. How is hospitality related to peacemaking?
2. How quick am I to be available to people who aren't in my immediate circle?

## Endnotes

1. Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Doubleday, 1998) p.98-111
2. Ibid.

# The Things That Make for Peace

## Participant Resource: Bible Study Session 3



**Title:** Practicing Peace—“So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.”

**Texts:** Matthew 5:38–42

**Goal for the Session:** Participants will explore Matthew 5:38–42 as a basis for active nonviolence and consider their response to it

What does it mean to “turn the other cheek?” What is the difference between being a doormat and choosing nonviolence? Based on the scholarship of Walter Wink, this study will explore Matthew 5:38–46 as a foundation for active nonviolence.

*“So that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.”*

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ **But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.**”*

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We will be looking at Matthew 5:38–42 through the scholarship of the late Walter Wink, who taught biblical interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City for more than 30 years. Among his many publications is the book *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium*, published in 1998. His scholarship is still contributing to theological discussion about peace and war. In a world where the myth of redemptive violence is perpetuated at every turn, it is important for Christians to consider more than the traditional pacifist and just war theories. Through the example of Jesus, we are invited into the words of Jesus in a potentially life-changing third way, that of active nonviolent resistance.

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to bring good news to the  
poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim  
release to the captives  
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blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
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This is hardly a call to “give in to evil.” So the question persists: What did Jesus mean when he said, “Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other also”? Is it a call to be passive in the face of injustice, abuse, and marginalization?

This study looks at these words within the context of the first century to see if there is another approach to the passage. Enter into it with an open mind, and see if you encounter Jesus a little differently.

### Cultural Context First Century Palestine

- The Roman Empire, which spread all the way into Africa, controlled Palestine in the first century. The government allowed Jewish life and governance to continue—under Rome’s watchful eye—as long as revenues were collected and the people remained compliant with their Roman occupiers.
- Palestinians were heavily taxed, creating a situation where poverty was a severe problem. The Roman court system was flooded with people taking advantage of every economic class. According to some sources, the wealthy were taxed 25 percent and more to fund wars, and many households were driven into debt while trying to retain the rights to their land.<sup>1</sup> The poor were often left with little more than the clothing on their backs.

*“Turn the other [the left cheek] also.” (v. 39)*

- In Jewish culture, the left hand was only used for “unclean tasks”. In the Qumran In Jewish culture, the left hand was only used for “unclean” tasks. In the Qumran community (at the time of Jesus), gesturing with the left hand meant exclusion from the

community for 100 days.

- It was shameful to “backhand” someone unless the person was of a lower class than the perpetrator. It was used to humiliate or insult.

“Give your cloak as well.” (v. 40)

- Deuteronomy 24:10–13 allowed a creditor to take a person’s outer robe as collateral for repayment of a loan.
- Clothing was simple for common people. Peasants wore an outer coat and an under cloak (their undergarments).
- Middle Eastern culture of the day was shame-based. Nakedness was particularly shameful, more so for the one observing the nakedness than for the one without clothing.

“Go the second mile.” (v. 41)

Roman officers regularly enlisted people to carry their packs so they did not have to. At any time, people could be recruited to do work for the Romans. Some officers had mules to carry their packs, but many defaulted to people.

- It was a common practice for a soldier to recruit someone for one mile before allowing them to return and continue with their day.

### **Biblical context**

- This passage comes in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, the most extensive teaching of Jesus found in the Bible. Through much of it, he offers an alternative reading of living as a faithful Jew. He looks at the law and reorients his listeners to the heart and intent behind the law.
- The Greek word translated “resist” in 5:39 is *antistenai*, literally “to stand against.” It was also used in the Hebrew Scriptures as a word for warfare. In Ephesians 6:13, which discusses the “whole armor of God,” the same word is used, there translated, “to withstand evil.”

### **What does this mean for our lives?**

When we read Scripture, it is important that we ask questions when something doesn’t seem consistent with other portions of Scripture. It is also important that when we accept a particular interpretation, we remain open to other interpretations of the same texts. Scripture itself rarely gives us the cultural context, so referring to scholars is important for a full knowledge of scriptural interpretation.

### **What are we called to do?**

We are called to be peacemakers by pursuing active nonviolence in the way of Christ. As peacemakers, we are neither conflict avoiders nor called to “force” justice. Jesus gives the ultimate model for nonviolent resistance, loving change, and self-giving humility. We are called to follow this Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

### **Personal Reflection**

#### **Benediction of St. Francis**

May God bless you with discomfort  
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,  
So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger  
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,  
So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears  
To shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger,  
and war.  
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them  
and  
To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness  
To believe that you can make a difference in the world,  
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done

To bring justice and kindness to all our children and  
the poor.  
Amen.

### **Endnotes**

1. Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Doubleday, 1998) p.98-111

# The Things That Make for Peace

## Leaders Guide: Bible Study Session 4



**Title:** Extending Peace—“So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them”

**Texts:** Hebrews 13:1–3, Romans 12:13–21

**Goal for the Session:** Participants will study the biblical understanding of hospitality and its place in peacemaking. They will consider how we are to welcome and live with neighbors who are different.

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. (Hebrews 13:1–3)

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” Not “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:13–21)

### Preparing for the Session

#### What is important to know?

Hospitality plays an important role in the biblical concept of shalom. Hospitality means more than making family and guests welcome in our homes; it is about providing for the needs of any person we encounter, particularly the stranger. In biblical times, this was often widows, orphans, the poor, and sojourners from other lands—people who lacked status in a family or the community. Hospitality meant graciously welcoming such people in one’s land, home, or community and providing directly for their needs of food, water, shelter, clothing, and respect. Hospitality and justice are inseparable, for if any person lacks these necessities, justice is not fully present

in society, and peace cannot happen without justice.

Although the word hospitality is not found in the Hebrew Scriptures, God reminds the people that because they have been loved and cared for as strangers, they are to act in the same way toward the strangers who come among them: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry” (Exodus 22:21–23; see also Deuteronomy 26:1–11, and Leviticus 19:9–10, 22–34).

In addition to commands to practice hospitality, the Hebrew Scriptures also include examples of hospitality. Abraham greeted three strangers and then shared water, rest, and food with them (Genesis 18:2–8). Abraham didn’t extend hospitality in order to gain the favor of the strangers, and yet they were the messengers who shared God’s plans for Sarah. Ruth, an ancestor of Jesus, provided hospitality to Naomi and received hospitality from Boaz (Ruth 2:1–17). These two acts of hospitality not only met basic human needs but formed new relationships across national, ethnic, and religious lines. Job, in confessing the sins of his past, included a petition for forgiveness for any times he had not practiced hospitality (Job 31:16–32).

In the New Testament, the Greek word for “hospitality” is *philoxenia*, which literally means “love of strangers.” Jesus both taught hospitality and modeled it in his actions of welcoming strangers, eating with tax collectors and sinners, meeting a foreign gentile woman at the well, and healing without regard to nationality or religion. Jesus appeared as a stranger when he joined two followers on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:28–35). Only when they invited the resurrected Jesus to share the table and bread were their eyes opened to his presence. When we welcome others to our tables and homes, strangers who are guests can become divine hosts.

Many of Jesus’ parables addressed hospitality. In response to the question “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus told the parable of the Samaritan who was the only one who extended hospitality to a traveler in need (Luke 10:25–37). The story affirms the meaninglessness of human borders, boundaries, and qualifications of worthiness in choosing loving and just actions.

Jesus addressed the attitudes and actions of the religious in the parable of the two sons (Luke 15:11–32). The father shows hospitality to his sons, both of whom have become as strangers: one by running away and wasting his inheritance on riotous living, the other by becoming absorbed with anger and resentment.

Finally, Jesus contrasted God's values and the world's values in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31–46). Our call to do what is loving and just is based neither on the worthiness of the recipient nor on the reward we might receive.

The writer of Hebrews connects the ethical teachings of Jesus on hospitality with the ancient story of Abraham and Sarah, saying, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2).

### **What does this mean for our lives?**

God expects us both individually and as a faith community to treat people (even strangers and enemies) without partiality. Scripture teaches that hospitality is a moral obligation and an expression of our gratitude for God's love. Furthermore, we must be open to the ways that God may reveal divine purpose or calling through strangers or others we might not expect. Practicing hospitality is how we are to live as God's people.

The strangers in need in our time are not just widows, orphans, and sojourners. People looking for worth and work have lost homes and lost hope and been abandoned by friends and family. The stranger among us may be someone we have known all our lives but come to find whom we don't know at all. The stranger may also be someone we will never meet but whose life intersects with ours in hidden and mysterious ways. How are we to hear God's word to us if we turn aside from the very people who may be the messengers of that word?

Practicing hospitality doesn't have to mean that our homes or church buildings become lodging or dining establishments or health care clinics or social service agencies. We can practice hospitality in many places and settings and with other groups. But practicing hospitality cannot be done by simply supporting those other organizations without meeting, being engaged with, and relating to the stranger.

### **What are we called to do?**

Hospitality begins with hearts, minds, and lives that are open to God's transforming presence. Just as in times of old, God may come among us in surprising ways through surprising people. When we place conditions on the worthiness or merit of those we will welcome, we limit our own openness to the Spirit's power and presence—our focus is more on rules and rituals than on

relationships and righteousness.

When we move from hostility toward hospitality, our actions bring healing and peace both to those we touch and to our own community. We are called to be open to the needs that present themselves to us and to seek out those needs that are not made apparent.

In many cases, the stranger may be close at hand but hidden from sight out of fear or shame. Undocumented workers and people escaping abusive situations are two such groups that may need the ministry of welcome but are not easily seen. The ministry of hospitality may require us to move out of the comfort zones of our church buildings and homes and into places where we will encounter and relate with the strangers of our time and culture.

### **Personal Preparation**

Find a quiet place to prepare and reflect. Think about a time in your life when a stranger helped you in some way. Think also about a time when you helped a stranger. Then read Hebrews 13:1–3.

Consider how God has spoken to you through strangers.

### **You will need the following:**

- Bibles for each participant
- Table place mats (11" x 17" paper)
- Markers
- Colored adhesive dots
- Newsprint
- Sticky-note pads
- A street map of your city or community

## **Leading the Session**

### **Gathering**

As participants arrive, give them each a blank piece of white 11" x 17" paper. Instruct them to make a place mat, using markers or crayons to write words or draw pictures of the following on the paper:

- their name
- a favorite food
- a living person they would like to eat with
- the farthest they have ever been away from home
- and a time they felt left out from a meal or group.

After most have arrived and had time to work on this project, invite participants to show and describe their place mats to the entire group.

### **Exploring the Word**

1. Form four groups of two or more people. Give each group one of the following passages:
  - Genesis 18:2–8
  - Deuteronomy 26:1–11

- Ruth 2:1–17
- Job 31:16–32

Instruct the groups to read their assigned scripture and respond to these questions:

- How would you define hospitality from this verse?
- What are some of the examples of hospitality?
- Who is welcomed?

Allow each group time to complete this assignment, and then have them report a summary of the passage and their responses to the whole group.

2. Then, form four different groups of two or more people. Give each group one of the following passages:

- Luke 10:25–37
- Luke 10:38–42
- Luke 19:1–10
- Matthew 25: 31–46

Instruct the groups to read their assigned scripture and respond to these questions:

- How would you define hospitality from this verse?
- What are some of the examples of hospitality?
- Who is welcomed?

Allow each group time to complete this assignment and then have them report a summary of the passage and their responses to the whole group.

### Reflecting on the Word

#### Option 1

**Choose one or more of the following activities:**

Mad Libs hospitality

This activity is designed to generate discussion about how the group or your congregation might respond to an opportunity to practice hospitality. Without telling the group what the purpose of these responses is, ask the group to provide a response for each of the following:

- Name a time of day or night \_\_\_\_\_
- Name a day of the week other than Sunday \_\_\_\_\_
- Name an ethnic or racial group not common in your community \_\_\_\_\_
- Name a number between 0 and 10 \_\_\_\_\_
- Name another country \_\_\_\_\_
- Name a necessity for living \_\_\_\_\_

Insert the responses into the corresponding blank lines and read this situation aloud to the group:

You are the deacon/elder on call for your congregation. You receive a call at  A  on  B . You have some difficulty understanding the person, but you hear him/her say that they are a  C  family with  D  children who have just arrived from  E . They have no family or friends, and they are out of

F .

Ask the group what they might say to the caller or do for the family.

#### Option 2

Who is like \_\_\_\_\_?

Jesus extended hospitality to many kinds of people. Using the list below to fill in the blank, ask the group to reflect on and respond to the following question:

“Who are people in your community or the world today who are like \_\_\_\_\_?”

- the Samaritan woman
- the Roman centurion
- Ruth
- tax collectors
- Pharisees
- the good Samaritan

#### Option 3

Who is the stranger?

Ask the group to respond to these questions or prompts:

- Name situations in the world and your community where people are facing pain, rejection, starvation, or war.
- How can support of agencies and organizations that minister directly with people actually become a barrier to hospitality?
- Are we loving the stranger if we never see them, hear them, converse with them, live and walk side by side with them?
- How does hospitality turn their pain into joy?

### Responding to the Word

#### Option 1

**Choose one or more of the following activities:**

Hospitality chart

Prepare a chart on newsprint. List the following groups of people in the left column:

- Economically challenged
- Singles / single-parent families
- People of other faiths
- People of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds
- GLBT / same-gender couples
- People living with HIV/AIDS
- People living with addictions
- Undocumented aliens
- Developmentally challenged

Add several of your own.

To the right of the other column, make four columns with these headings in bold:

- Discomfort (Some or all of our congregation would be uncomfortable with these people)
- Welcome (We would welcome these people if they came)
- Inviting (We are actively seeking out and inviting these people)
- Focus (I would like to take the initiative to welcome these people)

Give each participant a sheet of colored dot stickers. Invite them to place stickers in the columns adjacent to each grouping according to their own attitude or the perception of that of the congregation.

**Ask:**

- To which groups are you most comfortable extending hospitality?
- To which groups are you least comfortable extending hospitality?
- To which groups do you want to initiate more acts of hospitality?
- Who are the strangers in our community?
- Who are people given the message overtly or subtly by the congregation that they are not welcome?
- What are three specific ways our congregation could show hospitality to strangers?
- How might we be removing ourselves from divine visitations by our policies and practices?

*Option 2*

Hospitality in your community

Spread out the map of your city on a table, or post it on the wall. Using colored markers, plot the location of your church and each participant's home. Draw a circle with a one-mile radius around your church's location.

**Ask:**

- How many of the participants' homes are within that circle?
- What percentage of your church membership would you guess lives within the circle?
- What would people who live within the circle say about your congregation?

- In what ways does your congregation practice hospitality (love of stranger) within your immediate community? Within your whole city? In the world?

**Closing**

For the closing prayer, use this section as a bidding prayer by inviting participants to name people or places in need of the ministry of hospitality after each phrase.

Leader: May God bless you with tears, to shed for those who suffer from pain,

(Invite participants to name people or situations aloud.)

Leader: May God bless you with tears, to shed for those who suffer from rejection,

(Invite participants to name people or situations aloud.)

Leader: May God bless you with tears, to shed for those who suffer from hunger,

(Invite participants to name people or situations aloud.)

Leader: May God bless you with tears, to shed for those who suffer from war,

(Invite participants to name people or situations aloud.)

May we reach out our hands to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.

All:

May God bless you with discomfort, anger, tears, and foolishness,

So that you may live deep within your heart;

So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace;

So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them;

So that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

**Going Deeper**

Consider inviting several people to be a part of this study who are not members or participants in your church. They might be people who live in the neighborhood of the church or who come from backgrounds not represented in your group. How will their presence change the discussion?

**Preparing for Session 5:**

Living peace "so that you can do what others claim can not be done"—Read ????? 6:??-??, Matthew 5:23-24, and 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

# The Things That Make for Peace

## Participant Resource: Bible Study Session 4



**Title:** Extending Peace—“So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them”

**Texts:** Hebrews 13:1–3, Romans 12:13–21

**Goal for the Session:** Participants will study the biblical understanding of hospitality and its place in peacemaking. They will consider how we are to welcome and live with neighbors who are different.

### What is important to know?

Hospitality plays an important role in the biblical concept of shalom, the things that make for peace. Hospitality means more than making family and guests welcome in our homes; it is about providing for the needs of any person we encounter, particularly the stranger. In biblical times, this was often widows, orphans, the poor, and sojourners from other lands—people who lacked status in a family or the community. Hospitality meant graciously welcoming such people in one’s land, home, or community and providing directly for their needs of food, water, shelter, clothing, and respect. Hospitality and justice are inseparable, for if any person lacks these necessities, justice is not fully present in society, and peace cannot happen without justice.

Although the word hospitality is not found in the Hebrew Scriptures, God reminds the people that because they have been loved and cared for as strangers, they are to act in the same way toward the strangers who come among them: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry” (Exodus 22:21–23; see also Deuteronomy 26:1–11 and Leviticus 19:9–10, 22–34).

In addition to commands to practice hospitality, the Hebrew Scriptures also include examples of hospitality. Abraham greeted three strangers and then shared water, rest, and food with them (Genesis 18:2–8). Abraham didn’t extend hospitality in order to gain the favor of the strangers, and yet they were the messengers who shared God’s plans for Sarah. Ruth, an ancestor of Jesus, provided hospitality to Naomi and received hospitality from Boaz (Ruth 2:1–17). These two acts of hospitality not only met basic human needs but formed new relationships across national, ethnic, and religious lines. Job, in confessing the

sins of his past, included a petition for forgiveness for any times he had not practiced hospitality (Job 31:16–32).

In the New Testament, the Greek word for “hospitality” is *philoxenia*, which literally means “love of strangers.” Jesus both taught hospitality and modeled it in his actions of welcoming strangers, eating with tax collectors and sinners, meeting a foreign gentile woman at the well, and healing without regard to nationality or religion. Jesus appeared as a stranger when he joined two followers on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:28–35). Only when they invited the resurrected Jesus to share the table and bread were their eyes opened to his presence. When we welcome others to our tables and homes, strangers who are guests can become divine hosts.

Many of Jesus’ parables addressed hospitality. In response to the question “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus told the parable of the Samaritan who was the only one who extended hospitality to a traveler in need (Luke 10:25–37). The story affirms the meaninglessness of human borders, boundaries, and qualifications of worthiness in choosing loving and just actions.

Jesus addressed the attitudes and actions of the religious in the parable of the two sons (Luke 15:11–32). The father shows hospitality to his sons, both of whom have become as strangers: one by running away and wasting his inheritance on riotous living, the other by becoming absorbed with anger and resentment.

Finally, Jesus contrasted God’s values and the world’s values in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31–46). Our call to do what is loving and just is based neither on the worthiness of the recipient nor on the reward we might receive.

The writer of Hebrews connects the ethical teachings of Jesus on hospitality with the ancient story of Abraham and Sarah, saying, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2).

### What does this mean for our lives?

God expects us both individually and as a faith community to treat people (even strangers and enemies) without partiality. Scripture teaches that hospitality is a moral obligation and an expression of our gratitude for

God's love. Furthermore, we must be open to the ways that God may reveal divine purpose or calling through strangers or others we might not expect. Practicing hospitality is how we are to live as God's people.

The strangers in need in our time are not just widows, orphans, and sojourners. People looking for work and worth have lost homes and lost hope and been abandoned by friends and family. The stranger among us may be someone we have known all our lives but whom we come to find we don't know at all. The stranger may also be someone we will never meet but whose life intersects with ours in hidden and mysterious ways. How are we to hear God's word to us if we turn aside from the very people who may be the messengers of that word?

Practicing hospitality doesn't have to mean that our homes or church buildings become lodging or dining establishments or health care clinics or social service agencies. We can practice hospitality in many places and settings and with other groups. But practicing hospitality cannot be done by simply supporting those other organizations without meeting, being engaged with, and relating to the stranger.

### **What are we called to do?**

Hospitality begins with hearts, minds, and lives that are open to God's transforming presence. Just as in times of old, God may come among us in surprising ways through surprising people. When we place conditions on the worthiness or merit of those we will welcome, we limit our own openness to the Spirit's power and presence. When our focus is more on rules and rituals than on relationships and righteousness, we may miss a message from God. When we move from hostility toward hospitality, our actions bring healing and peace both to those we touch and to our own community as well. We are called to be open to the needs that present themselves to us and to seek out those needs that are not made apparent.

In many cases, the stranger may be close at hand but hidden from sight out of fear or shame. Undocumented workers and people escaping abusive situations are just two such groups that may need the ministry of welcome but are not easily seen. The ministry of hospitality may require us to move out of the comfort zones of our church buildings and homes and into places where we will encounter and relate with the strangers of our time and culture.

### **Closing Prayer**

May God bless you with discomfort, anger, tears, and foolishness.

So that you may live deep within your heart;

So that you may work for justice, freedom and peace;

So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them;

So that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

### **Personal Reflections**

How would a stranger react to a visit to your congregation?

How may God be speaking a word to you in the presence of a stranger or visitor?

# The Things That Make for Peace

## Leaders Guide: Bible Study Session 5



**Title:** Living Peace—“So that you can do what others claim cannot be done.”

**Texts:** 2 Chronicles 6:13–40, Matthew 5:23–24, and 2 Corinthians 5:16–21

**Goal for the Session:** Peace within, peace with God, and peace with others all require forgiveness and a life that seeks to restore broken relationships.

Solomon had made a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high, and had set it in the court; and he stood on it. Then he knelt on his knees in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven. He said, “O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant in steadfast love with your servants who walk before you with all their heart—you who have kept for your servant, my father David, what you promised to him. Indeed, you promised with your mouth and this day have fulfilled with your hand. Therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant, my father David, that which you promised him, saying, ‘There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children keep to their way, to walk in my law as you have walked before me.’ Therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant David. But will God indeed reside with mortals on earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built! Regard your servant’s prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you. May your eyes be open day and night toward this house, the place where you promised to set your name, and may you heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. And hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place; may you hear from heaven your dwelling place; hear and forgive. If someone sins against another and is required to take an oath and comes and swears before your altar in this house, may you hear from heaven, and act, and judge your servants, repaying the guilty by bringing their conduct on their own head, and vindicating those who are in the right by rewarding them in accordance with their

righteousness. When your people Israel, having sinned against you, are defeated before an enemy but turn again to you, confess your name, pray and plead with you in this house, may you hear from heaven, and forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them again to the land that you gave to them and to their ancestors. When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, and then they pray toward this place, confess your name, and turn from their sin, because you punish them, may you hear in heaven, forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, when you teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send down rain upon your land, which you have given to your people as an inheritance. If there is famine in the land, if there is plague, blight, mildew, locust, or caterpillar; if their enemies besiege them in any of the settlements of the lands; whatever suffering, whatever sickness there is; whatever prayer, whatever plea from any individual or from all your people Israel, all knowing their own suffering and their own sorrows so that they stretch out their hands toward this house; may you hear from heaven, your dwelling place, forgive, and render to all whose heart you know, according to all their ways, for only you know the human heart. Thus may they fear you and walk in your ways all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our ancestors. Likewise when foreigners, who are not of your people Israel, come from a distant land because of your great name, and your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm, when they come and pray toward this house, may you hear from heaven your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigners ask of you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built. If your people go out to battle against their enemies, by whatever way you shall send them, and they pray to you toward this city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, then hear from heaven their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause. If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to a land far or near; then if they come to their senses in the land to which they have been taken captive, and repent, and plead with you

in the land of their captivity, saying, 'We have sinned, and have done wrong; we have acted wickedly'; if they repent with all their heart and soul in the land of their captivity, to which they were taken captive, and pray toward their land, which you gave to their ancestors, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, then hear from heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their pleas, maintain their cause and forgive your people who have sinned against you. Now, O my God, let your eyes be open and your ears attentive to prayer from this place. (2 Chronicles 6:13–40)

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23–24)

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:16–21)

## Preparing for the Session

### What is important to know?

We cannot have peace without justice, and justice requires mercy, even when mercy seems hard. Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament teach that we cannot fully worship God or be in community while our hearts are harboring resentment. Exodus 22 highlights restitution as a requirement of the law. When Jesus read from and then interpreted Isaiah 61 in a sermon in Nazareth, he spoke not just of a time when violence would end but of a time of restoration and rejoicing, because peace and justice as Jesus envisions include reconciliation and restoration of right relationships.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift"

(Matthew 5:23–24).

Joseph's brothers, who sold him into slavery in Egypt, begged for forgiveness, which he granted (Genesis 50:15–21). In Matthew 18:21–35, Jesus teaches Peter that forgiving our brothers and sisters is central to restoring our relationship to our heavenly Father. Forgiveness leads us not only to peace within but also to reconciliation and peace with those who have harmed us or whom we have harmed. When we forgive, we let go of anger, bitterness, resentment, retribution, or vengeance and reach for hearts of compassion, healing, and mercy. At the end of such a pathway lies true reconciliation.

The 2 Chronicles 6:13–40 passage tells of the dedication of the temple by King Solomon. In the midst of all of the pageantry of that event, we are reminded of the main purpose of the Temple, which was the worship of God. The ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation is a central focus of the dedication address; it was indeed the central focus of the Temple itself. Solomon recalls God's steadfast love and grace in the past and calls for confession of individual and corporate sin and for forgiveness, reconciliation, and restored relationship.

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The apostle Paul summarized the central place of reconciliation in our faith and lives in 2 Corinthians 5:16–21. God reconciled us to himself and gave us a ministry of reconciliation to live out with families and friends, neighbors, and enemies.

Such reconciliation doesn't deny or forget harmful actions but always holds people accountable for them, not to punish, but for the purpose of teaching, changing behavior, and encouraging steps toward restitution or reparation for damages. These proactive attempts to set things right often induce offended parties to give up claims to retribution and let go of resentment at being wronged, the final hurdles to the full restoration of relationship.

### What does this mean for our lives?

Forgiveness and reconciliation are central to peacemaking, for such practices turn resentment into restored relationship. We can lay the foundation for forgiveness by doing good to those who offend us, by offering reconciliation to those who have offended us just as God has offered it to us. We are to do this not for our own sake alone but to model and make known the love God has for us and for all creation. We sometimes

think that the offender must repent, but forgiveness and reconciliation come when we repent of our resentment and release our claims against the offender.

### **What are we called to do?**

In many churches we begin our worship confessing the brokenness of our relationship with God and with others, hearing again the good news of forgiveness, and passing the peace with one another. This formula is not just for our worship gatherings but is the pattern for living in peace in our community and world.

As a community of faith, we cannot ignore or forget the wrongs that have been committed against us or others. Neither can we allow resentment to draw us into deeper conflict with brothers and sisters, for such separation from them separates us from God.

### **Personal Preparation**

Find a quiet place to prepare and reflect. Think about a time in your life when someone hurt you. What have you done to attempt to restore your relationship with that person? Pray for those who have hurt you, and consider how God may present opportunities to be reconciled. Read Colossians 3:13.

### **You will need the following:**

- Bibles for each participant
- Paper and pens
- Index cards
- An offering plate
- A computer with Internet access, to view video.

## **Leading the Session**

### **Gathering**

Consider gathering for a meal for this session. So many of the stories of forgiveness and reconciliation in the Bible are centered around a meal. It is difficult to remain estranged from people with whom we are eating.

Give participants index cards and invite them to write names (or initials) of people who have caused hurt, anger, suffering, or pain to the participants or to others in the world.

Invite a participant to read Matthew 5:23–24 aloud. Then ask each person to be in prayer for enemies including the people named on the cards as they place the cards in an offering plate.

### **Exploring the Word**

Make sure each participant has a Bible. Introduce the first reading by telling the group that this text is part of Solomon's address at the dedication of the Temple. Then

form smaller groups (2–4 people each). Ask each group to read 2 Chronicles 6:13–40 aloud, one sentence at a time. Ask each group to pick out three verses that speak of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Then ask each group to write a headline for the Jerusalem Daily News that gives a synopsis of Solomon's view of forgiveness.

After the groups have completed their reading and headline, ask each group to share its headline with the entire group.

Ask:

- What is the main purpose for the Temple?
- How does Solomon relate forgiveness and worship?
- Which verses did you choose that speak of forgiveness and reconciliation?

Invite a participant to read Matthew 5:23–24 again.

Ask:

- How does this teaching from Jesus compare to Solomon's teaching?
- How does unresolved resentment or anger affect our minds and hearts in worship?
- How does unresolved resentment or anger affect our minds and hearts in daily living?

### **Reflecting on the Word**

Assign one the following texts to each individual or pair of participants. Instruct them to read their assigned text. Then ask them to insert the name(s) or initials they listed on their index card at the beginning of the session into the text in place of the subjects/pronouns listed and reread the text.

- Luke 6:27–37
- Romans 12:17–21
- Ephesians 4:31–32
- Colossians 3:12–13
- 1 Peter 3:9
- Hebrews 12:15

How does the personalization of the text change your view of it?

Invite several participants to read 2 Corinthians 5:16–21 aloud from more than one translation of the Bible.

Ask:

- What differences did you notice in the various translations?
- Which version spoke most directly to you?
- What does it mean to have a "ministry of reconciliation?"

Form groups of 4–5 people and instruct each group to create a television commercial to be aired in your community using one or more phrases from 2 Corinthians 5:16–21. After each group has prepared its commercial, invite them to present it to the whole group.

### **Responding to the Word**

Give each person paper and a pen. Ask them to draw a picture or symbol to represent their responses to each of these questions:

- What areas in your life, your church, your community, and the world call for forgiveness and reconciliation?
- In what situations has lack of forgiveness and reconciliation kept conflict alive or threatened the peace among communities or individuals?
- In what situations has forgiveness and reconciliation allowed communities and individuals to move on and live in peace?

-or-

Invite several individuals in advance to research one or more of these three examples of communities that have modeled forgiveness and reconciliation. At the session, have them give a summary of the ministries to the group.

Corrymeela Community—Northern Ireland  
[www.corrymeela.org](http://www.corrymeela.org)

Truth and Reconciliation Commission—South Africa  
[www.justice.gov.za/trc](http://www.justice.gov.za/trc)

Amish Grace—See quotes/questions in video.  
[www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=gAmeJHXcw4w#!](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=gAmeJHXcw4w#!)

### **Closing**

Sing one of the following songs or hymns:

“Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive” (#347, The Presbyterian Hymnal)

“Help Us Accept Each Other” (#358, The Presbyterian Hymnal)

“When Cain Killed Abel” (#2135, Sing the Faith)

“God, How Can We Forgive” (#2169, Sing the Faith)

### **Unison Prayer**

May God bless you with discomfort, anger, tears, and foolishness,

So that you may live deep within your heart;

So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace;

So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them;

So that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

Amen

### **Going Deeper**

As a group, write letters encouraging your elected officials to consider the principles of reconciliation and restorative justice in legislation and programs of criminal and juvenile justice.

# The Things That Make for Peace

## Participant Resource: Bible Study Session 5



**Title:** Living Peace—“So that you can do what others claim cannot be done.”

**Texts:** 2 Chronicles 6:13–40, Matthew 5:23–24, and 2 Corinthians 5:16–21

**Goal for the Session:** Peace within, peace with God, and peace with others all require forgiveness and a life that seeks to restore broken relationships.

### What is important to know?

We cannot have peace without justice, and justice requires mercy, even when mercy seems hard. Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament teach that we cannot fully worship God or be in community while our hearts are harboring resentment. Exodus 22 highlights restitution as a requirement of the law. When Jesus read from and then interpreted Isaiah 61 in a sermon in Nazareth, he spoke not just of a time when violence would end but of a time of restoration and rejoicing, because peace and justice as Jesus envisions include reconciliation and restoration of right relationships.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23–24).

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focus of the dedication address; it was indeed the central focus of the Temple itself. Solomon recalls God’s steadfast love and grace in the past and calls for confession of individual and corporate sin and for forgiveness, reconciliation, and restored relationship.

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So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them;  
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done.  
Amen.

### **Personal Reflections**

Have you had a split or conflict within your family, congregation, or community? What can you do to bring people together in a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation?