

Building Peace, Building Right Relationships

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE BIBLE STUDY



Building Peace, Building Right Relationships

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Yet, who is a peacemaker? What does peace mean and how do we know when we have achieved it?

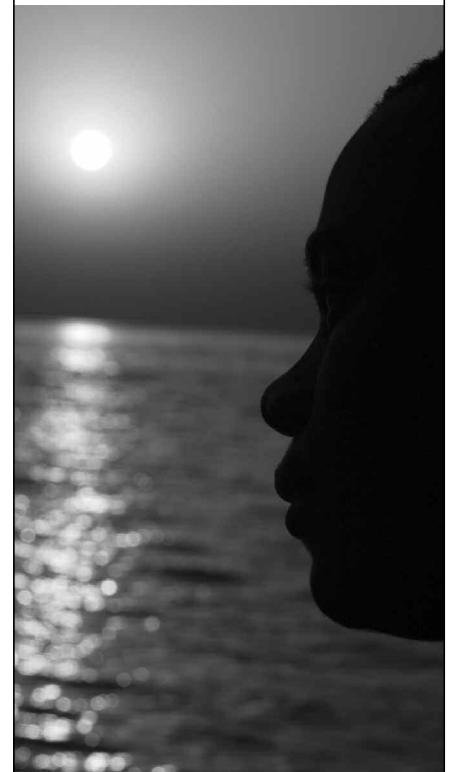
An understanding of the Biblical conceptions of peace and justice offer an ideal against which to measure our own behaviour and relationships. Such an understanding can transform our behaviour in everyday situations of conflict, in how we work with those affected by crime, and in advocating for a just and effective justice system. Therefore, this study will explore what it means to be a peacemaker, particularly in the context of crime and injustice. Lesson topics include:

1. Understanding peace in the Bible
2. Being a peacemaker when you have wronged someone
3. Being a peacemaker when someone has wronged you
4. Being a peacemaker when others are in conflict
5. Being a peacemaker in an unjust society

Suggestions for Using this Study Guide

Each lesson in this guide begins with a scripture passage, is followed by a brief meditation, and concludes with reflection questions. These can be usefully included in your observance of Restorative Justice Week, either individually or as part of a group. Here are a few ways that the study guide might be used:

1. daily devotional
2. training with staff, volunteers, or board members
3. Bible study in prison
4. study/information session with local churches, student groups, or Christian professionals
5. study/information sessions for Christian prison personnel and justice officials



Lesson 1: Understanding Peace in the Bible

Numbers 6:22-27

²² The LORD said to Moses, ²³ “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ²⁴ ’ ” “The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

Hebrews 12:14

¹⁴Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Sometimes we think of peace as the absence of conflict and violence. For example, we may say that a peace agreement is now in place. But, this ‘cease fire’ definition is only one of several. When we speak of

- peace with God
- a person at peace with herself
- a peaceful community
- a peaceful home

and so forth, we mean something far more positive than merely the absence of conflict. This kind of peace connotes wholeness, health, and well-being of people in community, even when from time to time they hurt one another. This is a highly relational understanding of peace.

That understanding is found in scripture. Bible scholars tell us that the word for peace used in Old Testament Hebrew is *shalom*, and that *eirene* is its New Testament Greek translation. Those words refer to an ideal in which

- material and physical needs are satisfied (see Lev. 26:3-13 and Psalm 38:3)
- relationships are reconciled (1 Samuel 16:4-6; 2 Cor. 13: 11)
- behaviours are righteous (Deut. 10:12-22)

The biblical concept of peace, therefore, offers a vision for relating to others in families, churches, communities and nations.

The purpose of biblical justice is to build peace where it has been broken. This understanding of justice does not concentrate solely on upholding laws and regulations, as important as those may be. Instead, its focus is on transforming people, relationships and structures so that they build peace.

While God is the source of this ideal peace, we are responsible for striving to achieve it in our relationships with God and others. For example, God’s people are commanded to:

- Care for the poor (Deuteronomy 15:1-11; Leviticus 19:9-10)
- Love their enemies (Luke 6: 27-36)
- Make restitution to those they have wronged (Numbers 5: 5-10)

So biblical peace is visionary, relational and calls us to action. This active, relational understanding of justice and peace has many similarities to the modern concept of restorative justice. Restorative justice is “a systematic response to wrongdoing that emphasizes healing the wounds of victims, offenders, and communities caused by crime. Practices and programmes reflecting restorative purposes will respond to crime by: (1) identifying and taking steps to repair harm, (2) involving all stakeholders, and (3) transforming the traditional relationship between communities and their governments in responding to crime.”

Reflection Questions:



1. Write definitions for peace and justice.

2. How are these two concepts related?

3. How is this understanding of peace and justice different from that found in the criminal justice system?

Lesson 2: Being a Peacemaker When You Have Harmed Someone

Matthew 5:23-26

²³“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

²⁵“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Working for peace after you have committed an injustice starts with repairing harm you have caused. Offences – both criminal and non-criminal – create harms to both victim and offender.

This passage and others in scripture offer a process for making things right.

1. Take active responsibility for behaviour that has harmed others
2. Admit the offence and acknowledge the harm done
3. Resolve to change your behaviour
4. Make amends
5. Forgive the other parties for what they may have done
6. Work toward reconciliation

The passage from Matthew suggests two practical benefits for wrongdoers who make things right. One is that it helps restore their relationships with God (they may once again bring offerings). The second is that it reduces the risk that the conflict will escalate, leading the participants to seek more and more extreme sanctions, such as imprisonment until the debt is paid.

The importance of making things right is underscored by the Old Testament law's insistence that wrongdoers repay the victim. Examples of such provisions include:

1. Make restitution for theft (Exodus 22:2-4)
2. Return what is stolen or taken by extortion or fraud (Leviticus 6: 4-6)
3. Pay restitution for any wrong against another (Numbers 5: 5-6)

The restorative justice movement also emphasizes that offenders should make things right. Restorative processes allow for interaction between victim and offender. Through this interaction, the parties in conflict discuss the offence, the harm done, and ways to repair the harm.

Reflection Questions:



1. What are some consequences of broken relationships?

2. Have you wronged someone and failed to make things right? What does this lesson mean for you?

Lesson 3: Being a Peacemaker When Someone Has Wronged You

Matthew 18: 15-20

¹⁵“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

¹⁸“I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

¹⁹“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

How we respond when we have been wronged can either make peace more likely or further rupture relationships and make peace less possible. Matthew 18 outlines an approach to responding to being wrong.

When we have been victimized, our negative emotions and reactions can work against our ability to productively confront the wrongdoer (see Ephesians 4: 26-32).

Truth challenges wrong behaviour and offers a path for change. Yet, truth without love can cause more harm. Without love, the truth becomes condemnation and can be brushed aside by the wrongdoer. However, grace without truth can create comfort and good feeling but not challenge the negative behaviour. That challenge, made in love and respect, can build right relationships (see Ephesians 4: 14-16).

Each person – the victim and offender – is in need of grace and mercy. The following steps give practical guidance for doing this.

1. express a desire to maintain the relationship
2. take responsibility for any fault in the conflict
3. challenge the wrong behaviour and not the person
4. explain the impact of the behaviour
 - a. personal
 - b. relational
 - c. communal
5. express your desire for change and the willingness to seek solutions
6. listen to the offending brother or sister

Matthew 18 is refreshingly realistic as it acknowledges that the peacemaking process may have several set-backs. The inclusion of trusted community members may be useful to emphasize the harm caused by the offending behaviour and to ensure that the encounter takes place in a positive manner. Punitive sanctions are a last resort (v. 17) and their purpose is restoration and not retribution (2 Cor. 1:5-11).

Reflection Questions:



1. What are some common responses to offences?

2. Which of these responses worsens the problem?

3. Which creates opportunities for growth?

4. How can you apply these principles in your work and life?

Lesson 4: Being a Peacemaker When Others Are in Conflict

Philemon 1

¹Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, ²To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home:

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. ⁶I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. ⁷Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

⁸Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, ⁹yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul – an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus – ¹⁰I appeal to you for my son Onesimus,* who became my son while I was in chains. ¹¹Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

¹²I am sending him – who is my very heart – back to you. ¹³I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. ¹⁴But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. ¹⁵Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good – ¹⁶no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

¹⁷So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back – not to mention that you owe me your very self. ²⁰I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

*¹⁰ Onesimus means useful.

Note: Philemon was a wealthy man and a leader of the Church. Onesimus, his slave, is thought to have stolen something, fled and was captured. He then met Paul in Prison. As a friend of both men, Paul wrote this letter to help them resolve their conflict and to repair the harm done by Onesimus.

The anger and insecurity created by conflict can hinder the ability of the affected parties to take the appropriate steps towards resolution. When this happens, a third party can foster a safe environment in which the process can begin. Paul's letter to Philemon offers an example of how we can work to encourage reconciliation between a victim and offender.

Paul starts with his relationship to both Philemon and Onesimus. His affirming descriptions of each offer a glimpse of them as more than their roles in the conflict. This alternative view provides a basis for rebuilding relationship. At the same time, Paul recognizes that the needs of each will need to be addressed for their relationship to be transformed. In this, Paul is willing to make personal sacrifices to foster reconciliation.

- Sending Onesimus back to Philemon (v.12-14)
- Offering to pay the restitution owed to Philemon (v.18)

Through these efforts, Paul prepares Philemon and Onesimus to resolve their own conflict.

Reflection Questions:



1. Think of a time when you have witnessed others in conflict

a. What actions made the situation worse?

b. What actions made the situation better?

2. How does Paul's example differ from the way you usually approach conflict between others?

Lesson 5: Being a Peacemaker in an Unjust Society

2 Samuel 12:1-7

¹The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, ³but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

⁴“Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

⁵David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! ⁶He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

⁷Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. ⁹Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

Note: David had an affair with another man’s wife and then attempted to cover-up his actions. When this attempt failed, David arranged to have the man killed.

Injustices in society can silence the voices of victims (or offenders) in a way that prevents justice from being accomplished. To work for peace, we must recognize and challenge the injustices that will prevent transformation from taking place. In the passage above, a conspiracy of silence and an oppressive environment had hardened David’s heart. A direct challenge to David would probably have resulted in his continued denial. Instead, Nathan chose to appeal to the sense of justice that remained in David. He did this by telling a story that would draw David into an emotional commitment to see justice done. At that point, Nathan could issue the challenge that revealed the truth.

Peacemakers must always be aware of power imbalances between people that can frustrate building true peace. These imbalances are usually the result of differences between people – differences of gender, class, religion, ethnicity, race, and so forth. As these differences are combined with larger, structural injustices in society, they become impediments to peace.

Addressing these will require creativity on the part of the peacemaker. It is not enough to demand that the societal injustice be replaced with justice because this will take so long that the people facing those injustices will have no real recourse. But it is not wise to ignore the injustice and deal with the particular dispute alone. Instead, the peacemaker tries to find a balance between acknowledging the larger injustices while helping the particular parties find resolution to their particular conflict.

Reflection Questions:



1. What types of injustice do you see in your work?

2. What are ways you can creatively challenge these injustices?

This may mean:

- Supporting an abused woman as she faces her abusive partner by ensuring that people experienced with domestic violence are present, that both parties understand the dynamics of domestic violence; and that justifications or manipulative (or inappropriately submissive) behaviours are recognized and challenged.
- Making it possible for a poor offender to make the amends she and her victim are negotiating.
- Recognizing and working to repair harm caused by societal injustices – such as unequal access to education or jobs – while challenging an offender’s justifications based on those societal injustices



Notes:

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RESTORATIVE JUSTICE EXCHANGE

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