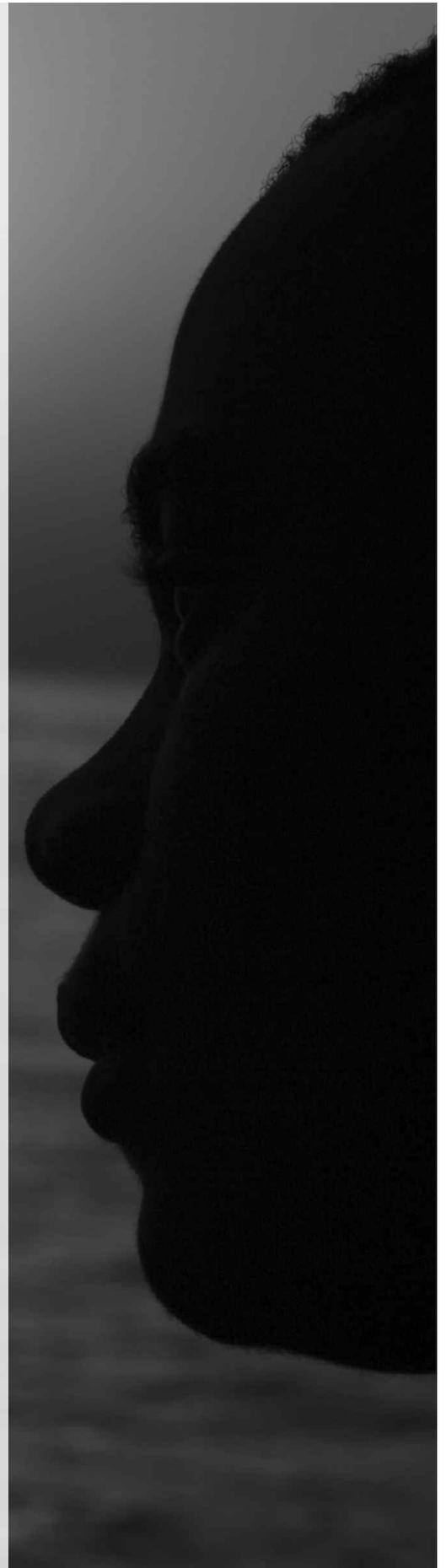


Building Peace, Building Right Relationships

**Restorative Justice Week
14-21 November 2004**



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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?

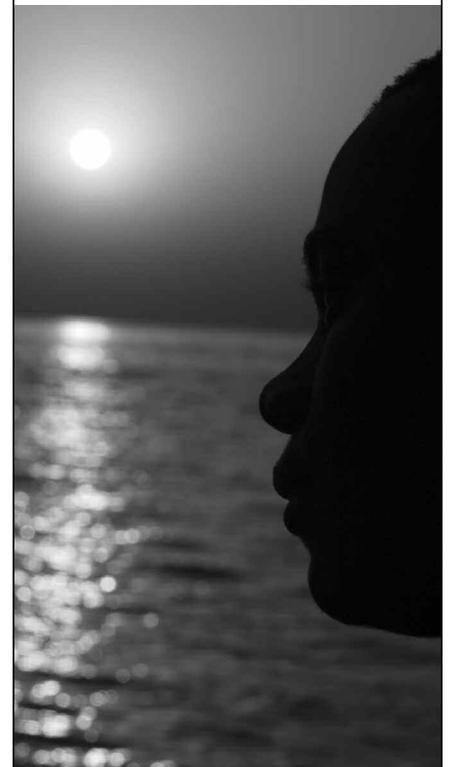
An understanding of the Biblical conceptions of peace and justice offer an ideal against which to measure our own behaviour and relationships. Such an understanding can transform our behaviour in everyday situations of conflict, in how we work with those affected by crime, and in advocating for a just 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 peaceful community
- a person at peace with herself
- 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 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?
