

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?

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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.’”
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Small Group Questions

Political oppression

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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

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- How would the values Jesus taught change our responses to political, military, economic, social, and religious conflicts?
- In what ways can the "eyes of my heart" be opened to the peace values of Jesus?

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 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