

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).

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.

The Jewish Day of Atonement falls within A Season of Peace and offers a model of the spirit of cleansing and of healing from the pain we have inflicted on others and the pain we hold within ourselves (Leviticus 16:30).

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 set the environment 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.

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.

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?