

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.¹

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