

The Things That Make for Peace

Leaders Guide: 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 not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

Preparing for the Session

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 the 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 texts 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 us.
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 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 . . .” (Luke 4:18–19) 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. I do not give to you as the world gives" (John 14:27a). 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, and do not 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.

Personal Preparation

Find a quiet place to prepare and reflect. Try to carve out an uninterrupted hour where you can try some of the spiritual exercises suggested. Begin with five minutes of silence. Use this time to let go of the stresses in your body and anything that is distracting you. Treat every piece of your letting go with kindness—and enjoy the relaxation that comes with focus. Allow yourself to hear what God might have for you. Read the two passages and consider your own personal spiritual life. What is working for you? What could be better? Be open to what God will teach you.

You Will Need the Following:

- Newsprint, giant Post-it notes, or a flip chart, and multicolored markers. (White board is fine, but you will likely need more room.) You will want to keep all of the information you come up with.
- A Bible for each participant
- Multicolor sticky notes
- Downloaded materials referenced, including *Peacemaking: Nurturing Your Spiritual Life for the Long Haul* (www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/seasonofpeace/pdfs/nurturing_the_spiritual_life.pdf).

Other Preparations

Write the Luke 5:12–16 and John 14:27 passages on the newsprint, giant Post-it notes, flip chart, or white board, leaving room for comments below each. (Giant Post-it notes are especially handy as you can move them around as needed.)

Leading the Session

Gathering

Begin by recapping the content of the previous session, and end with some questions. Here are a few possibilities:

- We closed with a Franciscan prayer. Did you find yourself “blessed” this week? How?
- Last week we talked about some pretty heavy stuff, including economic exploitation and political oppression, and asked questions about what peace means to us. What stayed with you from last week?
- Did you take the opportunity to read the news through the eyes of peace? Did you discover anything interesting or challenging?

Provide an overview of today’s lesson: “Today we will be looking at two passages where Jesus talks about peace and asks some questions. Then we will explore some ways to deepen our spiritual practice to help us thrive as we follow Jesus the peacemaker.”

Exploring the Word

Open with this Celtic prayer or a prayer of your choosing.

You are the peace of all things calm
You are the place to hide from harm
You are the light that shines in dark
You are the heart’s eternal spark
You are the door that’s open wide
You are the guest who waits inside
You are the stranger at the door
You are the calling of the poor
You are my Lord and with me still
You are my love, keep me from ill
You are the light, the truth, the way
You are my Savior this very day.²

Choose one of the following options:

Option 1

1. Split into groups of four or five. Assign Luke 5:12–16 to each group. Encourage people to look at the headings before and after this passage to find out what Jesus was up to. Have participants answer two questions: “What does this text tell you about Jesus’ spiritual life?” and “Why do you imagine Jesus would withdraw to deserted places and pray?” (If you prefer, read the background info for the Luke passage to set the context.)

Invite a representative from each group to write responses to the questions on paper or board with the Luke passage written at the top. Alternate colors for emphasis.

Follow the same process with John 14:27, assigning different people the roles of reading the primary passage, skimming the three chapters previous, and skimming the subsequent three chapters. Have participants write their responses to the following questions on paper or board with the words of John 14:27 written at the top: “What is the ‘different peace’ that Jesus leaves the disciples with? Why did Jesus leave his disciples with peace?” (If you prefer, read the background info for the Luke passage to set the context.)

Option 2

Assign one person to read Luke 5:12–16 out loud, one person to skim 3:23–5:11, and one person to skim 5:17–6:17. After reading the primary passage, ask the group, “What does this text tell you about Jesus’ spiritual life?” and “Why do you imagine Jesus would withdraw to deserted places and pray?”

Draw a timeline of Jesus’ ministry, beginning with Luke 3:21 and concluding around Luke 6:17; have the individuals who read the passage call out what is happening and a different person write these events on the timeline.

Follow the same process with John 14:27. Assign one person to read John 14:27 out loud, one person to skim 12:1—14:26 and one person to skim John 14:28–15:27. After reading the primary passage, ask the group the questions “What is the ‘different peace’ that Jesus leaves the disciples with?” and “Why did Jesus leave them with peace?”

Reflecting on the Word

Be sure you have a clean, large writing space on which people may place sticky notes. On that space, write “living deeply in my heart” from the Franciscan prayer.

Ask the question: “In light of these passages, how can you sustain your life as a peacemaker?”
Give each participant several sticky notes to share some of their practice. Have them draw a symbol of their responses on each note and place it on the paper/board. Share together.

Invite someone to read Philippians 4:4–7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Ask the question

- What does this passage suggest as a way to find peace?
- Is the peace Christ gives a “go to your happy place” peace? Or is it a peace rooted in the everyday realities we face?
- Do you see any connections between gratitude and peace/shalom?
- How is gratitude a spiritual practice?

Read the following statements about gratitude:

“Be thankful for what you have; you’ll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don’t have, you will never, ever have enough.”—Oprah Winfrey

“If the only prayer you ever said in your life was ‘thank you,’ that would suffice.”—Meister Eckhart

“Two kinds of gratitude: The sudden kind we feel for what we take; the larger kind we feel for what we give.”—Edwin Arlington Robinson

Invite people to share gratitude sayings they know and what they mean to them.

Responding to the Word

Pass out the resource page *Peacemaking: Nurturing Your Spiritual Life for the Long Haul* to each participant.

For this part of our conversation, we will explore a few options for spiritual renewal. Using the suggestions from the previous conversation, consider which of these practices may be a better option for your group. Based on the Ignatian process, the exercises below are the culmination of months of spiritual work for some, but they can also be an entry point into living in gratitude. These exercises are to be used daily.

The leader’s role in this process is to gently transition people into quiet reflection.

Option 1:

Use the following four sentences:

1. Reflect on God’s gifts to us (life, family, friends, faith, church, eternal life).
2. Reflect on God’s self-giving in Jesus.
3. Reflect on God’s continuing work in the world.
4. Reflect on the limitless quality of God’s love. As a contemporary paraphrase has it, “God’s love shines down upon me like the light rays from the sun,” “God’s love is poured forth lavishly like a fountain spilling forth its waters into an unending stream.”

This prayer is often said in closing:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will—all that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me.

Option 2:

Using the Examen—Ignatian prayer, the leader guides participants through the following steps:

1. Become aware of God’s presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.³

Sing: “Take My Life” (#391, *The Presbyterian Hymnal*) or a song of your choosing

Closing the Session

Find one other person in the room and exchange emails or phone numbers. Make a commitment to touch base midweek to see how this study has been sitting with you. Be prepared to talk about it next week when we explore what Jesus meant when he said to “turn the other cheek.”

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 of your choice:
#334, "When Israel Was in Egypt's Land"
#374, "Lord, Make Us Servants of Your Peace"

Going Deeper

Consider what types of music are important in nurturing your sense of well-being. Schedule a time one month from now to share about these. Use it as a follow-up to this study.

Write a five-line poem that expresses what you want your inner and outer practice of peace to look like.

Preparing for Session 3

Practicing Peace—"So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace."

Read Matthew 5:38–46.

Consider these questions:

- What is the difference between being a doormat for Jesus and choosing a nonviolent response?
- What are ways in which you "turn the other cheek"?

Endnotes

1. The above section adapted from material provided by Timothy Beal, Florence Harkness Professor of Religion, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio.
- 2 at: www.faithandworship.com/Celtic_Blessings_and_Prayers.htm#ixzz1uQAxXdoW
Under Creative Commons License: Attribution
3. Both exercises and the prayer are from <http://ignatianspirituality.com>.

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A few assumptions:

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Biblical context

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To turn their pain into joy.

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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
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Amen.

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