

PEACE



THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE,
PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GENEROSITY, FAITHFULNESS,
GENTLENESS, AND SELF-CONTROL . . .

IF WE LIVE BY THE SPIRIT,
LET US ALSO BE GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT
GALATIANS 5: 22-25

God's gift of forgiveness in Jesus Christ . . .
is the very large rock dropped in the middle of a pond.
The resulting ripples are not in themselves
the rock, but they are an inextricable part of it.
In the same way God calls us to extend his forgiveness
demonstrated on the cross into all areas of our lives.

P H I L I P K E N N E S O N



When I am most angry, I know best my need for peace.

J O A N C H I T T I S T E R

A LIFE ON THE VINE THAT NO ONE



PEACE

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.”
James 3:17-18

The Theme

As a result of a rapidly changing, ever-expanding world, people no longer share most life experiences with a small group of people. Instead, people have contact with countless numbers of people, many of them anonymous, in countless settings. The result is often a sense of fragmentation. How can Christians bear the fruit of peace in a world that cultivates fragmentation?

The Word

- ◆ **DAY 1: Read Matthew 5:1-11, 38-42 (*blessed are the peacemakers*)**
Look for the connections between God’s righteousness, Jesus’ work of reconciliation, and peace.
- ◆ **DAY 2: Read John 20:19-29 (*Jesus bestows peace*)**
For what purpose does Jesus bestow peace?
- ◆ **DAY 3: Read Isaiah 54:1-10 (*God’s covenant of peace*)**
To what end does God promise peace?
- ◆ **DAY 4: Read Ephesians 2:13-22 (*Christ is our peace*)**
What connection is Paul making between the way of Jesus and believers’ experience of the way of peace?
- ◆ **DAY 5: Read Chapter 4 in *Life On the Vine*** Pay attention to how Kenneson describes the fragmentation that he sees characterizing modern culture. After reading the chapter, work through the study guide on the following pages.

The Book

Scripture speaks of peace in more encompassing and far richer ways than our common understandings of peace. We tend to define peace primarily in negative terms: as the cessation or absence of conflict. But the concept of peace that pervades Scripture has more positive resonances. Indeed, we would be less likely to mute those resonances if we were to substitute for the word peace, the word wholeness or even salvation.

The Hebrew concept of peace, or shalom, informs both the Old and New Testaments. Shalom (or *eirene* in the New Testament) refers to the state of well-being, wholeness and harmony that infuses all of one's relationships. Such a view of peace is inherently social; to be at peace only with oneself is not to experience shalom in all its fullness. Perhaps this is why Scripture rarely speaks of peace as a purely mental state, as serenity or "peace of mind." Peace is not something confined within one's psyche; instead, peace is a way of life.

(Kenneson, p. 59)

The STUDY GUIDE

Exploring the Roots of Peace

Consider contemporary understandings of the word *peace*.

- ◆ What situations do you hear the word *peace* spoken today? What familiar sayings or slogans about peace come to mind?
- ◆ Do you hear the term *peace* described more often in positive terms (i.e., like a river) or negative terms (i.e., the absence of war)?

Now consider the term *shalom*.

- ◆ In what contexts or situation do you hear the word *shalom* is spoken today? In what ways is the word *shalom* defined differently from the word *peace* today?

Read aloud Isaiah 9:2-7; 26:1-13; 32:16-18; 54:1-10. Listen for how the word *peace* is used in terms of what God envisions for his people. Then read Kenneson's definition of *shalom*: "*Shalom . . . refers to the state of well-being, wholeness and harmony that infuses all one's relationships.*"

- ◆ What kind of well-being and wholeness do the Isaiah passages imagine?
- ◆ In what ways are such contemporary notions of peace as "peace of mind" or as "absence of conflict" unlike the biblical concept of *shalom*?

Kenneson notes that Scripture proclaims peace or *shalom* as something only God establishes and sustains—meaning, on our own, we are incapable of maintaining wholeness in all our relationships. How then does Scripture mean for us to understand the "way of peace" (see Isaiah 59:8)?

Examining the Fruit of Peace

Character of the Fruit

In John 20:19-29 Jesus says to his disciples—three times—"Peace be with you." Think about what Jesus is trying to convey to his disciples.

Consider this statement: "*Although peace is first of all a gift from God, it is also something to be pursued*" (Kenneson, p. 86). How do you understand this seeming paradox in light of what Jesus says in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-13, 38-42)?

To make sense of the way of peace in terms of the good news that God has reconciled the world in Christ, consider Ephesians 2:13-22 and Romans 12:14-19:

- ◆ According to Paul, how does being reconciled to God through Christ bring wholeness not only to our relationship with God but also with others?
- ◆ In Ephesians 2, Paul uses three verbal phrases describing Jesus' relation to peace—"he is our peace," "making peace," and "proclaimed peace." What connection is Paul making between the way of Jesus and believers' experience of the way of peace?
- ◆ Consider Paul's echo of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Romans 12:14-19. What would it look like to "live peaceably with all" in your congregation?

Obstacles to Bearing the Fruit

How we order our daily lives—or how our daily lives order us—contributes to our capacity to bear the fruit of peace as Christians. Kenneson argues that many of our cultural convictions make possible the practices and stories that fragment and compartmentalize our living. Read the following list of conviction statements:

“Nothing is more fundamental to American life than an individual’s inalienable rights and pursuit of happiness.”

“Looking out for one’s own interests will secure everyone’s interests.”

“The practice of religion is a purely private matter.”

“One set of opinions or preferences is just as good as another.”

“Justice means people getting just what they deserve.”

“What happens at home, at work, at school, or on the ball field is not necessarily related to what happens at church.”

Consider each of the above conviction statements one at a time, in light of these questions:

- ◆ What are the consequences of each of these statements for the life of the Christian? for the life of the church?
- ◆ When have you experienced the tension of holding one of these convictions while trying to live out your faith as a Christian?
- ◆ What evidence do you see that the cultural distinction between “public” and “private” affects your church’s understanding of itself and of its mission?

Bear Fruit in the World

Cultivating the Fruit

Knesson identifies four starting points for cultivating a life of peace, all related to a proper understanding of the body of Christ (see pp. 98–100):

- viewing baptism as a proclamation of our interdependence as members of one body
- viewing our faith not as a private possession but as an opportunity to build up the body of Christ
- determining to offer and receive admonition as vital to our participation in the body of Christ
- demonstrating gratitude at God’s forgiveness of us by extending that forgiveness to others

Think about these four starting points or mindsets and the extent to which any of them reflect the character of your congregation. Then consider these additional suggestions for discussion and reflection:

- ◆ Think about the different groups of people with whom you regularly associate. In what ways do these groups pull your attention and loyalties in different directions? How do you (or can you) cultivate friendships that cut across the boundaries that compartmentalize your life? How might God use you as an instrument of peace in your relationships?
- ◆ Consider those people from whom you have withheld forgiveness. How can you take steps toward reconciliation with them and both bring peace and receive peace?



Imagine you hold in your hand a puzzle piece. Reflect for a moment on some aspect of their life that seems particularly fragmented or disconnected, and in need of the peace of Christ. How will you pursue peace?

Think about someone you know who may be experiencing the stress of a life characterized by fragmentation, a lack of peace. What can you do to help them receive the peace of Christ?