

A



PEACE

LIFE ON THE VINE

PREPARE

Read all the Scriptures assigned for the week. Think about the connections between God's righteousness, Jesus' work of reconciliation, and peace. Consider how the word *peace* is used today and compare that usage to how you found it used in the Bible.

Read Chapter 4 in Kenneson's *Life On the Vine*. Become familiar with how he describes the fragmentation of contemporary culture in contrast to a life of peace.



Invite a group member to supply the fruit to share during the meeting time. This week's suggestion is apple slices.

*Set up the room: Have the items ready for the welcome table as well as Bibles and copies of the learner guide for group members.*

*To close the class time, you'll need pieces of an old puzzle (ideally a child's puzzle with fairly large pieces), enough for each person in the group to have a piece.*

PRAY

As part of your discipline of preparation, pray Psalm 119:162-168. If you have an opportunity, drop a stone in a pool of water and watch the ripples. Watch until the ripples dissipate.

## GATHERING AT THE TABLE OF PEACE

### *In Advance*

Prepare the welcome table by arranging the bowl(s) or tray(s) of fruit brought in to share. Open the Bible to Galatians 5 and place the white pillar candle or taper nearby. Be sure to have matches or a lighter handy for the person designated to light the candle.

### *As People Arrive*

Greet everyone. Introduce newcomers and visitors to other class members. Keep in mind that bearing the fruit of the Spirit begins the moment the first person walks in the door.

### *To Open*

Just prior to getting started, pass around the fruit so those who've arrived can enjoy it. Reserve a portion of the fruit as a display on the worship table. Once it's time to start, call attention to the worship table. Invite everyone to focus on the fruit on the table as you read aloud Galatians 5:22-23. Light (or have someone else light) the Christ candle on the worship table.

Conclude the gathering time with prayer. Consider using Psalm 85:4-9 as the starting point.

## EXPLORING THE ROOTS OF PEACE

Begin the class by considering contemporary understandings of the word *peace*.

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

Have someone 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. Talk about how Scripture means for us to understand the “way of peace” (see Isa. 59:8)?

## EXAMINING THE CHALLENGES OF PEACE

### *Character of the Fruit*

To fully understand the way of peace, we must understand the way of Christ. Hear John 20:19-29 read aloud. Call attention what Jesus says to his disciples—three times—“Peace be with you.” Talk about what you think Jesus is trying to convey to his disciples.

Hear someone read Matthew 5: 1-13, 38-42, in case some have not read it prior to the group discussion. Then say 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? In what way might the image of the vine Jesus talks about in John 15 illuminate this paradox?

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?
- ◆ 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. Print the following list of statements on a sheet of paper for the group to see:

*“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, at the ball field, at the mall is not necessarily related to what happens at church.”*

Form several smaller groups and assign each group one of the above conviction statements. Ask each group to use the following questions to guide discussion of the statement:

- ◆ 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?

## BEARING THE FRUIT OF PEACE IN THE WORLD

### *Cultivating the Fruit*

Kenneson 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

Discuss these four starting points or mindsets.

- ◆ To what extent to any of them reflect the character of your congregation?

Then return to the image of the body of Christ. Use this question to stimulate discussion: Who are we when we gather as the body of Christ? Are we simply individuals expecting to have our individual needs met, or are we really something more than that?

Close the class time together by handing each person a puzzle piece. Invite them to 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?

### *Offer these action/reflection ideas for the coming week:*

- ◆ 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 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?

Pray Hebrews 13:20.