

INTRODUCTION

# The Story of Pax

*A Six-Week Study on  
Peace and Justice*



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We are Pax, a faith-based organization with the vision to transform the 21st century through the peace of Jesus. Our mission is to inspire and equip the next generation through slow, beautiful, Jesus-centered-content by people of color.

Through our content, artistry, we collaborate to create a better world. For more information about our discipleship materials or partnership opportunities, please visit us at [madeforpax.org](http://madeforpax.org).

This guide is a beta resource that we are still refining. If you find any errors, issues, or have any insights into how we can improve this guide, please reach out to us at [eli@madeforpax.org](mailto:eli@madeforpax.org). We want this resource to last and we really appreciate your feedback.

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

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**A resource by and for  
people of color.**

**PAX  
MADE  
FOR  
E**

**With  
Pax —**

Do you believe the world can be changed?

Your relationships mended?

Your past addressed?

Your future improved?

Our churches active?

Our land healed?

Our bodies protected?

Our politics reformed?

*With Pax, this is possible.*

With the Pax of Jesus--

All things are being made new.

With Pax, a better world is nearing.



# Welcome

*Welcome to this six-week study on peace and justice called the Story of Pax!*

This course invites you into the story of God in order to see how just living and peacemaking are central to Christian discipleship. By the time you complete all six sessions, you will 1) gain a biblical foundation for peace, justice, and the gospel; 2) understand how the story of Pax impacts your whole life as a follower of Jesus; and 3) know how to bring the peacemaking and justice of Jesus into your neighborhood, your workplace, your activism, your family, and to your friendships.

Most importantly, this study offers hope. In the midst of a world torn apart by racial injustice, trauma and pain, God is offering you a better way. This study is an invitation into the peace of Jesus, which transforms the world with all the very good things God has for creation

# The Story of Pax Course Design

*Here is a bird's-eye view of the our six-week study.*

<b><i>Session One</i></b>	<b>The Story of Pax</b>	We are brought into the story of God to help bring about peace and justice for all.
<b><i>Week Two</i></b>	<b>Establishment of Pax</b>	God established a world flowing with peace and justice.
<b><i>Week Three</i></b>	<b>Disruption of Pax</b>	Humanity disrupts the peace and justice God established.
<b><i>Week Four</i></b>	<b>Call of Pax</b>	The prophets call the people of God to practice peace and justice.
<b><i>Week Five</i></b>	<b>Climax of Pax</b>	Shalom is restored through the person and work of Jesus Christ.
<b><i>Week Six</i></b>	<b>Consummation of Pax</b>	King Jesus returns to renew all things once and for all.

## EACH SESSION

- 01** Session Topic
- 02** Preparation
- 03** Manifesto - Scripture Reading
- 04** Myth & Material - 7-12 minute Video (*or reading*)
- 05** Small Group Discussion
- 06** Motion - Embodied Action

<sup>01</sup> Begins with a focused topic

<sup>02</sup> Encourages the participant to prepare themselves through prayer and reflection questions

<sup>03</sup> Includes a Scripture reading that aligns with the topic. That Scripture reading serves as the Manifesto statement (declaration) for the session;

<sup>04</sup> Offers a 7-12 minute video that covers the Myth (lies we believe) & Material (central truths) for the session. The entire script from the video is written out in each booklet in the event you don't have the capacity to play a video or you would rather forgo the video. You always have the option of simply reading or having your small group read the printed transcript;

<sup>05</sup> Prompts three to four small group discussion questions. The discussion is the central part of this journey where we encourage you to allow the Spirit of God to move you in the direction you should go.

<sup>06</sup> Concludes with a Motion section for you to practice throughout the following week to lead you toward more concrete embodied action.





# Introduction

What if I told you that the way things are, are not the way they have to be? What if the massive gap between rich and poor didn't have to be the status quo? What if I told you that our prisons don't have to be overpopulated, and our environment doesn't have to be overtaxed? What if we didn't have to convince the world that Black lives matter? What if women didn't have to say "me too" anymore? What if that one friendship that you thought would never recover could find new life? What if you could live knowing that you do belong and that you are loved?

If you're doubtful, I'd understand. We live in a world where believing that a different way is possible just seems to get more and more difficult every morning we open our eyes. I mean, I'm writing this to you in the middle of a global pandemic, sitting in self-quarantine in my New York City apartment. I don't know about you, but a year ago I could not have imagined that we would be living in a world where it's unsafe to be within six feet of another person. It seems like our world keeps inventing new ways to be out of sorts; but, even as I say these words, I'm also telling myself that there is something within me--within us--that knows that things were not meant to be this way.

I've been reading articles about the increased risks that those in NYC public housing and jails are facing due to the COVID-19 crisis. This seems to always be the story--that the threat of death pounds more loudly at the doors of our friends and neighbors relegated to the margins of society. It should not be this way! It should not be that, as a father of two beautiful Black girls, I have to constantly remind them that the hair on their heads is a crown fit for royalty, and not odd or weird, because the messages they receive through movies and TV shows is that whiteness is the standard for beauty. A deep longing for something new rises within me when I think about the times I have been stopped by police officers and am immediately met with the question, "Whose car is this?" as if a young Black man could only be driving a nice car if it were stolen. Your experiences may not be the same as mine, but each of us, I'm sure, could share our own stories that have moved us to desperately desire a different world.

# It Comes Down To Relationships

From our deep interior questions about identity to the large systemic concerns about injustice, our world has layers of broken relationships. The first chapter of the book of Genesis contains the biblical story about the origins of the universe, and it's here that we learn that God created the world and everything within it and then declared that all of creation was very good. The goodness of creation was not primarily about natural things being good in and of themselves. Rather, it's important to understand that the ancient Hebrew concept of goodness was located in the relationships between things. In other words, the very essence of God's creation consisted of very good, beautiful, and strong relationships between God and humanity, between humans themselves, between humanity and the whole of the created order, and between humanity and the systems and structures that govern us. Goodness even existed in our relationship with our own selves. This picture of beautiful bonds of love existing within creation is what the Hebrew writers would later come to refer to as *shalom*, or, as we now say, *peace*.

Here at PAX (which means *peace* in Latin), we say that *shalom* is the perfection of God's creation, a state in which all parties are able to flourish in relationship to one another in the fullness of who and what God has made them to be. *Shalom* is cosmic and multidimensional, meaning that it moves in many different directions. Cosmic *shalom* means peace with God, peace with ourselves, and peace with others. We must look up, look in, and look out for peace. As Lisa Sharon Harper says in her book *The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right*, "Shalom is . . . when everyone has enough. It's when families are healed. It's when shame is renounced and inner freedom is laid hold of. It's when human dignity, bestowed by the image of God in all humanity, is cultivated, protected, and served in families, faith communities, and schools through public policy. Shalom is when the capacity to lead is recognized in every human being and when nations join together to protect the environment."

# God Will Make Things Right

Shalom is what our souls long for. But shalom as longing and shalom as reality seem like worlds apart. And even though this talk of shalom might seem at times like a fantasy dreamworld that will always remain outside of our grasp, there is good news. The story that the Bible tells is that we have a God who responds to our deepest longings for things to be made right.

When the Hebrew people were enslaved for centuries in Egypt, God said to Moses in Exodus 3:7-8, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them.” This same God, who hears our cries and knows our sufferings, has come down once and for all, in the person of Jesus Christ, in order to deliver us by bridging the gap between our soul’s longing for shalom and the reality of shalom. Jesus said of himself in Luke 4:18-19: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” This is the work of shalom in plain terms, and this is why Jesus came.

In the first chapter of his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul says that, through Christ, “God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” To reconcile something means to restore what has been broken, to mend what has fallen apart. We know that, in Genesis, God’s creation was all about very good relationships. Everything in the universe exists in relationship with everything else—from protons, neutrons, and electrons, all the way out to stars, planets, and galaxies. If one small thing were to get knocked out of orbit, it would have an effect on the whole cosmos. The biblical story is that we, as human beings, have been knocked out of orbit. Through our own disobedience and our failure to live out our true vocation as image-bearers of God, we have stepped out of right relationship with God. And this set in motion the disintegration of all the very good relationships that God initially set in place at creation. In putting on flesh in the person of Jesus and stepping into our world that has been knocked out of orbit, God’s sole mission was reconciliation. The good news of the gospel is that, in Jesus, God is at work putting back together that which has fallen apart. And the first relationship that God set out to restore is the relationship between God and humanity.

# It Starts With Us

The first word that the Bible speaks about humanity is that we are created in the image of God. What that means, in part, is that we were created to reflect the wise rule and council of God into the rest of creation. As image bearers of God, we were given the responsibility of making sure that all of the very good relationships in God's creation remain very good. We were never meant to exercise authority according to our own wisdom; we were meant to reflect God's wisdom. This is where we went off track. When we dropped the ball, Jesus stepped in to pick it back up again for all of humanity. Through his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus, who the Bible says is the wisdom of God, showed us how to be fully human and paved the way for us to be restored back to right relationship with God.

Now, if humanity can be reconciled to God, find peace with God and begin, once again, to fully reflect God's wise rule and council, then the whole of creation will breathe a sigh of relief. This is what the Apostle Paul means in Romans 8:19 when he says, "the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." In other words, the whole creation is longing for you and I to be our truest selves, awakened to our true humanity, living out our true vocation; and the good news is that Jesus has made this possible! Jesus has both opened up access for us back into the life of God, and has shown us what it looks like to be fully human. As the church father St. Irenaeus famously said, "The glory of God is a human being fully alive." When we say yes to following Jesus, we are saying yes to the call to be fully human. We are saying yes to living out of our deepest identity as children of God; and, as Jesus says in Matthew 5:9, children of God do the work of making shalom. We have the beautiful privilege of joining Jesus in the work of pax--the work of co-laboring with Jesus to make all things new.

So, when I say that things don't have to be this way, I mean that there is another way to be human. There is a way of being human that seeks to empower those in poverty, instead of ignoring and continuing to silence their voices. There is a way of being human that labors to see restorative justice instead of retributive justice in our systems of incarceration. There is a way of being human that maintains the dignity of black and brown lives, honors the voices and bodies of women, and cares for our environment. There is a way of being human that puts into practice the cross-shaped art of forgiveness in our relationships. There is a way of being human where we can feel that we belong and where we can know that we are loved. The first step in this journey of discovering peace within ourselves and laboring for peace with others is to find peace with God in whose image we are created. This is the way of shalom. This is the way of pax. This is the way of Jesus.

I want to invite you to come and journey with us. Let's walk this way together. Let's dream and imagine together about what this other way could look like. Let's be conspirators of shalom for the sake of one another and for the sake of our world.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

**01** Why have you shown up for this journey?

**02** What makes you want to learn more about peace and justice?

**03** How do you define *peace*? How do you define *justice*?

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