

SESSION ONE

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 twenty-first 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.

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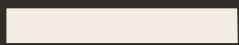
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**A resource by and for
people of color.**

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The Story of Pax



Establishment

Disruption

Call

Climax

Consummation

Story

**This week is about a story.
It is about the story of all stories.
In this story, you will find your place.**

We begin Session One with an exploration of the concepts of peace and justice within the story of God. Whether you're passionate about justice, are eager to learn how to become a peacemaker, or are unsure about how justice and the gospel coincide, we're glad you're here. We recognize that some of you have been journeying as peacemakers and justice seekers for quite some time, while others might be exploring these concepts for the first time. That's okay. Wherever you're at right now, take a moment to prepare your body and heart for engagement with today's session. If you're doing this as a group study, come with a posture of humility and listening to hear other people's perspectives.



Pulse Check

*Share with each other some of your answers
from the introduction's 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*?



Preparation

To prepare for Session One, follow the grounding practice and read the accompanying prayer. Be present with those you are with and be attentive to what God might impress upon you during this time.

Start with a grounding practice because the world we live in is always on the go. We're often expected to show up, produce, and execute. This is a time for us to come together and consider shalom—God's dream for us to be whole, flourishing, and at peace. In truth, shalom is God's dream for us to be fully human. This grounding practice reminds you to slow down, breathe, and invite the God of Peace to settle you before you begin with the group study.

GROUNDING PRACTICE

Light a Candle

Take three Deep Breaths

Inhale: God of Peace

Exhale: I am Here

Inhale: God of Peace

Exhale: I am Yours

Inhale: God of Peace

Exhale: I am Ready

Poem

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It starts with a Word. A very good Word spoken by Creator. Goodness within and goodness between, binding us together, all things tethered by Love.

Shalom.

But then there's a breaking, a fracture within this cosmic bond, knocking protons and electrons out of orbit. No longer moving in unity, but now existing with great autonomy.

Shattered.

We've been lost. Unbound from our identity, searching for our vocation, working to locate ourselves within this great wide world.

Seeking.

But then comes the in-breaking. The very good Word made flesh and bone, sought us out and made this shattered world home, all to bring us back to the beginning---back to shalom.

Slaughtered.

Because we resist with tight fists, holding onto our way. But Life cannot be held within tombs and in graves. Once again, fresh breath was blown into this clay.

Sent.

To rebind and restore. With new vision for this mission we were created for. Fully reflecting this imprinted Image, as we work to bring pax back to existence.

Peace.

This poem was written by Drew Jackson and originally appeared in Pax's StoryArc Issue 01. Cosmic Peace

Manifesto

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.

Read Colossians 1:15-20.

God is the author of pax, and pax is essential to life. Pax is inherently relational as peace and justice cannot be known in isolation, and God has invited us to co-labor with him in this pursuit. As God restores our dignity and sets right the relationship between us and God, we in turn reflect the image of God in the world by restoring pax within ourselves and our communities, between us and the systems and structures that govern, and between us and all of creation.



Video

(This is a 6-8 minute video experience. For now, please read the video script below).

Video Script

by Pastor Drew Jackson

What's going on, fellow peacemakers? My name is Drew Jackson, and I serve as the president of Pax. We are an organization that is committed to promoting the peace of Jesus in the twenty-first century, and I am so excited that each one of you has said yes to coming on this journey of discovering what it will look like for you, and for us together, to become makers of pax in our everyday lives. Before we go any further, I want to ask you: Why have you shown up for this journey? What has made you want to discover more about this thing we call pax? We all have different answers to that question because we all have different life experiences, but despite our different experiences we all share this in common: that something within each of us longs to know and experience peace more deeply.

Myth

Peace is achieved through oppression and suppression.

Now, you may have already noticed that I've been using the words *pax* and *peace* interchangeably. That's because *pax* simply means *peace* in Latin; but the word *pax* in ancient times, just like the word *peace* today, was a word that was co-opted by the empires of this world and used toward oppressive and unjust ends.

The most famous example of this is the Pax Romana, or *the peace of Rome*, which was the promise of the Roman Empire to bring peace to the world. As the name suggests, the Pax Romana was a long period of peace and minimal military expansion from 27 BC to about 180 AD that was inaugurated by Caesar Augustus, and so sometimes it's referred to as the Pax Augustus.

The main importance was that all of the land surrounding the Mediterranean was at peace because everyone was under Roman law. Everyone was at peace. That sounds good, right? I mean, we all want peace for our violent and tumultuous world. The problem was that the peace that Rome had in mind came at the tip of the sword and came at the expense of anyone who did not fit into Rome's image of the ideal citizen. As Rome was attempting to take over the whole world, you could experience Roman peace if you let them have your land, if you came under their rule without a fight, if you laid down your own culture to take up Roman culture. Basically, Rome would oppress, suppress, and overpower its way to its version of peace, but for those on the bottom and on the edges of the Roman Empire this was no peace at all. And this same story has played itself out time and time again throughout history, and it continues to do so today.

I think about our immigrant neighbors who have experienced hate speech and violence toward their bodies because they don't speak the language or because they have an accent. They don't fit into the image of what some say is the ideal American and they have suffered because of it. I think of so many of our Black and Brown neighbors who have been incarcerated at unjustly astronomical rates, have served their time, and yet come out forever having to carry the label *ex-con*. Because of this they are relegated to the status of second-class citizens, being barred from certain jobs and unable to fully engage in the democratic process. So, even in the United States, the Pax Americana--the peace of America--is only for those who have the right accent, move through the world with the right kind of body, and have had the right kind of life experience. And I could go on, but for those who fall outside of the acceptable categories this is no real peace at all.

It was into this world of Pax Romana that God chose to put on flesh and enter the world in the person of Jesus the Christ, and Jesus came into the world announcing a different kind of peace, a different sort of pax. As Richard Rohr once said, “The Pax Romana creates a false peace by sacrificing others. But the peace Jesus speaks of--Pax Christi, the peace of Christ--waits and works for true peace by sacrificing the false self of power, prestige, and possessions.”

Material

Jesus calls us to be peacemakers.

In the coming weeks, we are going to go on a journey together unpacking Jesus’ vision of pax--the Pax Christi, the peace of Christ--this pax that Jesus says is good news for the poor, brings liberation to those who are oppressed, and sets the captives free. This pax that does not separate itself from justice but understands that justice and peace must be companions that walk hand in hand.

The peace of Jesus is comprehensive, all-encompassing, far-reaching, and does not trample on people to accomplish its goal. See in the Roman Empire, and in all the empires of this world, certain lives don’t matter, people are expendable, and profit is the goal. But in the kingdom of God, where the peace of Christ reigns, love, justice, and dignity are accessible to everyone.

In a world that is crying out for something different, this sounds like the peace that we need. This is the kind of peace that is good news for the children crying out at our southern border because they don’t know where their parents are. This is the kind of peace that is good news for migrant farm workers who are crying out because they are paid next to nothing and are treated as commodities instead of human beings. This is the kind of peace that is good news for women and men who are crying out because they have been violated by the hands of those they thought they could trust.

But here’s the catch: in Jesus’ vision of bringing pax to the world, he had you in mind. Not only that you would experience this peace, but that you would also take part in working with him to make this peace in the world. In Matthew 5:9, Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” In other words, to be part of the family of God is to be about the work of pax in the world.

And this is why I'm excited, because as those who bear the image of God, as people who have God's DNA in us, we get to learn together how to be about this work of pax in the world. On this journey you will be challenged, you will be stretched, and I hope you will be encouraged as you discover your place within this grand story of pax and the role you have in paving the way for a more just and equitable world in which all peoples can flourish.

So, I want to invite you to set your heart and ready it with the expectation that God is going to meet you over these next six weeks. Expect God to show up. Expect God to help you see things that you've never seen before. Expect God to speak to you through the people that you're on this journey with. And may you experience the grace of God as we go with Jesus on this journey toward the pax of the kingdom of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

01 In what ways does our world oppress, suppress, and overpower to achieve its version of peace?

02 What is the difference between the peace of this world and the peace of Jesus?

03 What would a more just and pax-filled world look like? How might God be calling you to work with him to make peace in this world?

Benediction

May the Spirit of God bless you with insight and revelation as you take this journey toward pax.

May you be led by Jesus to glimpse a new world where love is the language we speak and shalom binds us together.

May you be filled with a holy expectation that will not rest content until you encounter the living God.

And may you awaken to the reality that you are a child of God created to make peace in the midst of a desperate world.

Amen.

Go in Peace. Go in Pax.

Motion

Centering Down Meditation

_ a guide by spiritual director
Osheta Moore

There are many pictures of peacemaking and peacemakers that we have to contend with. To some, peacemakers are gentle, kind, and passive people who resist conflict at all costs. To others, peacemakers are brave and selfless people who do things like offer themselves as human shields in war-torn countries or spend years studying diplomacy or peacemaking. When we do not have a picture of peacemakers and peacemaking that includes us--just as we are in our regular lives--then Jesus's Beatitude teaching on peacemaking feels tone-deaf and unrealistic. Shalom, however, is God's invitation to flourishing and wholeness and from that overflow we create peace in the world around us.

Throughout this upcoming week we're going to meditate on a reflection from Howard Thurman. Thurman was a major influence on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It is said Dr. King carried the Bible and a copy of Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited* constantly because Thurman's commitment to holistic activism—one that engages body, mind, soul, spirit, and nonviolence—was essential to the Civil Rights Movement.

Centering down is a contemplative practice that asks you to clear your mind of all the distractions that prevent you from sensing God's closeness and the Spirit's encouragement.

HOW TO MEDITATE WITH A PASSAGE

Read the reflection below from Howard Thurman.

Ask yourself: "What is keeping me from feeling centered?" Spend five minutes in silence.

What pictures come to your mind when you think of centering down? Read the passage below again, this time imagining yourself as centered.

This week, journal or ponder the questions Thurman asks.

How Good It Is to Center Down

Howard Thurman

How good it is to center down!
To sit quietly and see one's self pass by!
The streets of our minds seethe with endless traffic;
Our spirits resound with clashing, with noisy silences,
While something deep within hungers and thirsts for the still moment and the resting lull.
With full intensity we seek, ere thicket passes, a fresh sense of order in our living;
A direction, a strong sure purpose that will structure our confusion and bring meaning in our chaos.
We look at ourselves in this waiting moment—the kinds of people we are.
The questions persist: what are we doing with our lives?—what are the motives that order our days?
What is the end of our doings? Where are we trying to go? Where do we put the emphasis and where are our values focused? For what end do we make sacrifices?
Where is my treasure and what do I love most in life?
What do I hate most in life and to what am I true? Over and over the questions beat upon the waiting moment.
As we listen, floating up through all of the jangling echoes of our turbulence, there is a sound of another kind—
A deeper note which only the stillness of the heart makes clear.
It moves directly to the core of our being. Our questions are answered,
Our spirits refreshed, and we move back into the traffic of our daily round
With the peace of the Eternal in our step.
How good it is to center down!

¹ Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1953), 28.

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