

SESSION TWO

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).

Pax

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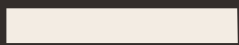
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**A resource by and for
people of color.**

**PAX
MADE
FOR
E**

The Est ment o



Establishment

Disruption

Call

Climax

Consummation

Establish- of Pax

**This week is about beginnings.
It is about how the world was made.
It is about the Establishment of Pax.**

Last week set the stage for God's vision of pax in the world. In Session Two, we will learn why and how God established pax. We hope you are able to see the world God created and help envision a world where God's flourishing, peace, justice, and love are possible for the entire created order.



Pulse Check

Last week you learned about God's dream for shalom and meditated on Howard Thurman's reflection "How Good It Is To Center Down." Spend some time sharing how you felt about practicing silence and stillness. Was it difficult? Easy? Much needed? Meditation is difficult, especially in this busy world. Celebrate with each other the times you were able to commit to stillness and silence this past week.

Share your answers to one of the questions that Thurman poses in "How Good It Is To Center Down" with your group:

- 01** What are we doing with our lives? What are the motives that order our days?
- 02** What is the end of our doings?
- 03** Where are we trying to go?
- 04** Where do we put the emphasis and where are our values focused?
- 05** For what end do we make sacrifices?
- 06** Where is my treasure and what do I love most in life?



Preparation

To prepare for Session Two, 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

Prayer

God of all power --
Whose presence is not bound,
Whose words are not weak,
Whose identity cannot be owned.
I am Your child but I am unlike you --
My presence feels invisible,
My words feel empty,
My identity is both owned and disowned.

I need Your peace to tell me the truth
About how You can heal a girl with many parts.
Part angry,
Part anxious,
Part antagonistic,
Part Anglo,
Part Asian,
Part 破.¹
What can You do with the parts of me that feel at war
with the world?

1. Broken or damaged.

This prayer was written by Maggie Johnson and originally appeared in Pax's digital prayer book, *Tethered: 21 Prayers of Pax for and by Gen Zers of Color*.

Manifesto

God established a world flowing with peace and justice.

Read Genesis 1:1-5, 26-28.

At the beginning of human history, God looks out over creation and says that it is very good (Gen. 1:31). There is a perfect relationship between God and humans. There is a perfect relationship between humans and their surroundings. There is no pain, death, suffering, injustice, or hunger. This fullness of peace and harmony is what justice looks like.

Justice can mean the state of things being right; it can also refer to the process by which things are being straightened out, being set right. In the beginning there was justice because all things were right. All things were in harmony (right relationships) and, in this way, there was shalom (pax). This picture of wholeness and harmony is what the Bible has in view when it speaks about justice. Because justice is all about things being rightly related to each other in fair and equitable ways, justice is required in order for shalom (pax) to be a reality.

The first humans are made in God's Image. They are called to reflect God's love, justice, and pax in the world. Adam and Eve experience the completeness and the perfect interconnectedness of all of creation. This is the way things are meant to be.



Video

(This is a 6-8 minute video experience.

For now, please read the video script below).

Video Script

by Pastor Drew Jackson

As a kid growing up, there were a lot of words that could've been used to describe me: I was tall, athletic, pretty shy, definitely a momma's boy. But the word that I would zero in on is the word *curious*. I wanted to know things. I wanted to know how and why things in history happened. Who did what? Why did they do that? How is this event connected to that event?

I would think about these things, not just from a world history standpoint, but also from the standpoint of my own family. See, growing up as a young Black American kid I always wanted to know more about where I came from. The farthest I could go back in my own family history was South Carolina. My last name, Jackson, is a name that is connected to some southern plantation somewhere. That's all I knew. But, see, my desire to know more about my own history and about where I came from wasn't driven by a desire to simply accumulate more knowledge. It was a desire that was connected to much bigger, cosmic questions about purpose. Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I headed? And not just me as an individual, but why are we here? Why is this world here? What does it mean for us to be human?

It's probably a safe bet to say that you've spent some time thinking about those same sorts of questions. And you're not alone. All throughout history human beings have been asking these questions, because we know that if we can start to put our finger on our purpose we can have a much better sense of how to live right now, and how to best walk into an unknown future.

Myth

Our purpose in this world is to achieve our own comfort, security, and happiness.

You have already read about the beautiful truth that we find in Genesis 1, that God, out of an abundance of love, created the universe. And this world that we call home is a place that was overflowing with goodness, beauty, right relationships, justice, and shalom, or what we call *pax*. This world was made for *pax* because that's who God is, a God who exists in relationship: Father, Son, and Spirit all existing for the mutual benefit of the other. This is the beautiful reality of the triune God of the Bible.

As human beings created in the image of this relational God, you and I were made for right relationships and our purpose is grounded in this reality. We were created for right relationships with God, with other image bearers of God, and with the whole of creation that God has made. We were made to be people of peace in the world and part of God's greater story of peace. All of our searching for purpose, and our longing to make right that which is broken in the world, is a longing for the purpose that God intended in the first place. It's a longing for shalom.

But, you see, in all of our searching for purpose we've been told a different story about who we are and why we're here. The story that we've been told is not about right relationships with God, each other, and creation, not about ensuring that there's justice between us, not about the fact that our well-being is tied to each other. But we've been told that our purpose is first and foremost about us. You do you. You make sure you get money. You secure your own rights. You pursue your own happiness. And if someone is getting in the way of your happiness, well, tough for them, because, at the end of the day, life is all about me and mine. I may never say that out loud to myself, but that's one of the main storylines of our culture, and it ends up having an impact on how we live and move through the world.

This myth, that our purpose in the world is to do all that we can to acquire what we need for our own comfort, our own security, our own happiness, has affected our society on so many levels. This ethic of individualism and self-centeredness has shown up in the ways we've depleted our environment without much thought for future generations. It shows up in the constant pushes that come at us everyday to consume more--more products, more social media--without taking time to consider how our consumption of more affects our personal relationships and our global neighbors who are laboring for next to nothing to produce the products that we consume. It shows up in our conversations around race, when we end up being more concerned about protecting our own feelings than we are about engaging the stories and realities that people of color in our society experience everyday. But it's not just in these big, societal realities that this myth shows up. But I've seen it show up even in my own personal life, when I find myself so concerned about my own work and my own plans for the day, that I end up not giving my own children the love and care that they need and deserve. At the end of the day, all of the things that I just talked about are all rooted in the same story that we've bought into--that the purpose of my life and how I relate to this world is ultimately about me.

Material

Jesus calls us to practice self-giving love.

But when Jesus showed up, he came on the scene both telling and living into a different story about this world, a different story about who we are and what our purpose is. Colossians 1:15 says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. From the apostle

Paul's words here we learn that Jesus not only shows us what God is like, but he also shows us what it means to bear the image of God. In other words, Jesus shows us what being human is all about. One of the chief characteristics of being image-bearers of God is that you and I have been given a particular vocation. A vocation is different from a job that we do. Vocation is about purpose, calling, mission. It sits at the core of who we are. You already read earlier in the Manifesto piece for this week that when God created the world it was full of very good relationships between everything, full of justice. Things were right.

This is what we call *shalom*, or *pax*. And in Genesis 1, right after God declares that human beings are created in the image of God, God says that we have been given dominion over creation. Listen to what it says in Genesis 1:27-28: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'" Now that word *dominion* has been misunderstood and abused because it has been interpreted as domination, and that has led to all sorts of evil in the world in the name of God. But that's not at all what it means. The word *dominion* here means wise rule, tender care, ensuring the flourishing of creation.

If I were to tell you that a gardener has dominion over her garden, it means that she has responsibility for ensuring that the garden can flourish, for making sure the plants have the proper nutrients and proper conditions to grow, that no pesticides or parasites can damage the plants, and to ensure that the garden remains beautiful and hospitable for all life. This is the vocation we've been given by God: tend to and steward the very good relationships in God's good world, ensure that everything has the ability to flourish in the fullness of who and what God created them to be, and do this all out of a relationship with the God who created it all.

This work of tending to the good relationships that God created is what the Bible calls *the work of love*. So, what is our purpose in this world? What is our vocation as human beings who bear the image of God? Jesus puts it simply: it's love. Love God and love others. And this is why justice is part of our vocation, because, as Cornel West famously said, "Justice is what love looks like in public." If you've lived any amount of time you know that love is hard work. It's messy work. It's costly work. It's the kind of work that will lead you to a cross, but this is what we were made for. And it's as we live out of who we were created to be--image-bearers of God made for self-giving love--that we build toward *pax* in this world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 01** Think about the question *Why am I here?* What images, thoughts, and emotions come to mind?

- 02** In what ways are you tempted to believe that your life should be about your own comfort, security, and happiness?

- 03** What is our purpose in this world according to Jesus?

- 04** What might it look like for you to practice self-giving love within your sphere of influence this week?

Benediction

*May the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ
go with you wherever he may send you.*

*May the Spirit ground you in the truth
that you were created with divine purpose.*

*May you take up your God-given vocation
to be a peacemaker with courage and tenacity.*

*And may you be overwhelmed with the love
of our triune God in whose image you are made.*

Amen.

Go in Peace. Go in Pax.

Motion

Journal to Find Shalom

_ a guide by spiritual director
Osheta Moore

Educator and author Parker Palmer said, “Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am.” In this week’s motion practice, you will begin discerning your unique spiritual gifts that will allow you to create shalom.

In your journal, *write a story of when you felt you were firing on all cylinders; you felt like you were not only doing what you are good at but what you love.* Then consider what will help you know how God is inviting you to be a peacemaker in your context. For example, if money were not an issue and you had all the time in the world, what one brokenness would you address and how would you do it?

For me, I want to own a large farm with lots of animals with many rooms, where teen girls of color who find themselves in unexpected pregnancies could come. They could be cared for during their pregnancy, and use their time on the farm to heal and receive vision for their futures with their children.

From this dream I’ve invested in nonprofits that offer holistic care to pregnant teens; I’ve mentored pregnant teens; and I was on the board of a transition home for teens. This is one area God has called me to create shalom in small, intentional ways.

What is your big dream that makes you come alive? Share your journal entry with a trusted spiritual mentor or friend this week.

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