

SESSION FOUR

The Story of Pax

*A Six-Week Study on
Peace and Justice*



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

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The Call of Pax




Establishment

Disruption

Call

Climax

Consummation



**This week is about working toward peace and justice.
This week is about God's call to fight for what is right.
It is about the Call of Pax in our lives.**

In the previous sessions we learned about the establishment of pax and the disruption of pax. We learned how the disruption of pax leads to sin, death, and a brokenness that affects so many parts of our world. In Session Four, we will talk about the call of pax. Through the darkness of a broken world, a prophetic witness begins to emerge in Israel. God begins calling the prophets, the teachers, and the people to restore pax in the world. What will this restoration look like? What does restoration mean? Who is restoration for? This week, we will journey in the third stage of the Story of Pax to discover how we might reimagine a better world.



Pulse Check

*Share with your group if you practiced the Examen throughout the week.
If so, which step was the hardest for you?*



Preparation

To prepare for Session Four, 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

Father,
I come with balled fists,
Clenched in frustration, anger, pain.
I need your shalom.

Father,
I come with a tight grip,
Grasping things that I want to keep.
Give me your shalom.

Father,
I come with curled fingers,
Tense with worry and fear.
Remind me of your shalom.

Father,
See my clasped hands.
I don't even want to be here.
The last thing I want to do is pray.
But I remember:
You have covered me with your shalom.

Transform my broken hands into
Open
Surrendered
Lifted
Praising hands
That live in your shalom.

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

Manifesto

The prophets call the people of God to practice peace and justice.

Read Amos 5:21-24 and Jeremiah 22:15-16.

Throughout Israel's difficult history, the prophets make it clear that the people of God are supposed to engage in the godly work of restoring justice in our broken world. Isaiah says justice and righteousness are the only "fruit" God wants from his people, whom he likens to a vineyard (Isa. 5:7). Similarly, Amos says God is not pleased with empty displays of religion but only desires his people to "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24).

The prophet Jeremiah declares that anyone who claims to have a personal relationship with God will "do justice and righteousness" and plead "the cause of the poor and needy" (Jer. 22:15-16). "Is not this to know me?" says the Lord" (Jer. 22:16). Through Jeremiah God also says to "let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight" (Jer. 9:24).

Though injustice is everywhere, the prophets are confident there will come a time when justice and pax will be restored (Isa. 2:2-4; Mic. 4:1-3). Isaiah says this will come through a special anointed person, a new David, who will restore everything to the peaceful harmony of all creatures that was present in the beginning (Isa. 11:1-9; 65:25). Micah says this person from the Davidic tribe of Judah and city of Bethlehem "will be our peace" (Mic. 5:5) and Isaiah calls him "the prince of peace" (Isa. 9:6). In the meantime, the people of God are to be about the work of restorative justice, enacting glimpses of the fullness of pax as they bear the fruit of justice and righteousness.



Video

(This is a 6-8 minute video experience.

For now, please read the video script below).

Video Script

by Pastor Drew Jackson

Last week was a heavy one as we talked about the disruption of pax in the world. When we human beings, image-bearers of God, began to act in ways contrary to what we were created for, things began to fall apart. We became estranged from God. We turned against each other, and all kinds of injustice began to find its way into God's good world.

God's response to this disruption was to call a man by the name of Abraham, and through him to form a people, the people of Israel, who were meant to follow in the ways of God and demonstrate to the rest of the world what it looked like to be human beings walking in step with God. God's desire and expectation for Israel was that they would bear the fruit of righteousness and justice. As it says in Isaiah 5:7, "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!"

God expected Israel to bear the fruit of justice, but the people bore a far different kind of fruit. Time and time again the people of Israel decided to do their own thing, and it resulted in all sorts of oppression done toward the poor, widows, orphans, and migrants. And because the people kept doing their own thing and going their own way, God raised up prophets whose main role was to call the people back to God.

The prophets weren't--how should I say this?--well-liked individuals. I mean, we tend not to be the fondest of people who we feel like are always calling us out. When I think about the prophets, I think about when my mom used to tell me things that I didn't want to hear. But she would always say, "I'm telling you this because I love you." And although I didn't like it at the moment, I believed her. I believed that she wanted good things for me. She called me out and corrected me because she loved me. The prophets loved God and they had a fierce love for the people, so much so that they were willing to point out where the people were off track even if it meant they were rejected. And believe me, they were rejected--even killed.

Myth

If you speak out against injustice, then you are standing in the way of the unity that God desires.

But, you know, in our world today, just like in the world of ancient Israel, people who stand up for justice and speak against the injustice and oppression in society are often said to be divisive. Even in the church, it's often said that justice is, at best, secondary to the gospel, and, at worst, opposed to the gospel. And if you speak out against injustice, then you are standing in the way of the unity that God desires.

This is a story that comes at us from so many different sides. You may have experienced this with family, folks that you've called friends, members in your church. You may have heard it from some news outlet or seen it on your social media feed. It's not an easy thing to be told that you are the cause of division, but if someone has told you this in your attempts to stand up for justice, you're not alone. And, in fact, you're in good company.

People like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., heard this all the time. He was called a rabble-rouser, an agitator, and someone who was against the cause of pax. I mean, even Jesus was said to be a troublemaker and in league with Satan. But as the late John Lewis famously said, and as the prophets throughout history have modeled for us, there is a kind of trouble that is good and necessary for us to get in.

Material

God requires all of humanity to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

In Micah 6:8, the prophet Micah says very plainly that God's desire for all of humanity is that we "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God." Justice has never been and will never be a side issue for God. Justice sits at the very heart of who God is, and thus it sits at the heart of who we were created to be as image-bearers of this God of justice.

Jesus once told the religious leaders of his day, and you can find this conversation in Matthew 23, that in all their efforts to observe their religious rituals and ceremonies, they should have first and foremost been concerned about justice. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 23:23-24: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!" Even the religious leaders who were supposed to be experts in the Law of God had somehow been convinced that doing justice was optional.

Throughout history, God has always spoken through prophets to call us back to doing justice in the world, to working for pax. And even though we have been largely unresponsive to this call and have dropped the ball time and time again, God has always had a plan. God promised through the prophets that a day was coming when the world would, once again, overflow with justice, righteousness, and pax. This is what prophets like Isaiah called new creation. And when Jesus came into the world, he picked up on this prophetic tradition as he began announcing the kingdom of God, advocating for those on the margins, and challenging the systems that stood against human flourishing.

One of the biblical stories that highlights this so well is in John 2 when Jesus cleanses the temple. In John 2:13-16, it says, "The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!'"

The key to understanding what's going on here is to notice that in this passage Jesus directly addresses those who are selling doves. See, in religious life in Israel doves were considered to be the acceptable sacrifice of poor people. If you weren't wealthy enough to have sheep or cattle to sacrifice, it was written into the law that pigeons and doves were acceptable sacrifices because they were cheap. What's happening here is that the moneychangers were jacking up the prices of doves, and by doing so they were building barriers for those who were poor from engaging in the communal life of worship. This was unjust. And when Jesus saw it, he made a whip, flipped tables, and drove them out of the temple. Part of Jesus' mission in the world is to flip the tables of injustice wherever they have been set up so that no one is locked out and disenfranchised from fullness of life.

But how is Jesus going to do this? How is God going to bring this work to completion? How will this kingdom overflowing with justice and this new creation characterized by pax finally be realized? We'll be talking about that in the coming weeks but--spoiler alert--it has something to do with Jesus and you have a crucial part to play as well.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

01 What would it look like to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God in your own life?

02 What are some ways that you have seen yourself draw back from the call to do justice?

03 How can you center the practice of justice within your faith? Write down a few practical ideas.

Benediction

May God fill your bones, like the prophet Jeremiah, with the holy fire of justice.

May the Spirit that overtook Amos overtake you and move you to raise your voice until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

May you be blessed with vision, like Isaiah, that is able to see God's new world and bear witness to that which is to come.

And may you know, with the clarity of Micah, that you have been called to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Amen.

Go in Peace. Go in Pax.

Motion

Seek the Shalom of Your City

— a guide by spiritual director
Osheta Moore

Oftentimes when we think of ending injustice, we look at the major problems of the world and feel overwhelmed. We feel like anything we offer is inadequate.

God has a word for us when we feel this way.

Meditate on Jeremiah 29:7: But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

God is speaking to his people who have been in captivity in Babylon. Imagine how they must have felt: overwhelmed, under-resourced, insecure, bitter, and anxious to leave. God asks them to stay. Put down roots. Care deeply about the context in which they are placed. To seek its flourishing.

Now reflect on this extended passage from Jeremiah 29:4-7:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

There are four major ways God is asking his peacemakers to show up for their cities:

1. *Care for the land;*
2. *Care for the people and build healthy relationships;*
3. *Care about the politics; and*
4. *Pray.*

This week, do some research and journal about how you can engage in these four spaces in your community. For instance, can you join a park cleanup? Can you email a homeless shelter and see what practical things they need to continue serving their guests? Could you email a school counselor and ask if she needs some resources to serve her students better? Who are the public servants in your city and where do they stand on issues? Then pray for them.

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