



YOUTH STUDY

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LEADER'S GUIDE
Session 1

Peace, Justice, Joy, and Salvation: A Youth Advent Study

Isaiah's Vision of Peace

God's Gift of Peace

Introduction to the Study

Based on an Advent sermon series by preacher and scholar Cynthia Campbell, this Advent study focuses on some of the greatest passages from the prophet Isaiah. There are many entry points into these texts, but this study will explore in particular the way in which these passages lift up promises that are, in fact, gifts. Embedded in Isaiah's ancient words are the gifts that God offers us: peace, justice, joy, and salvation. They are, of course, on offer all the time. But at Christmas, when we are concerned (and occasionally obsessed) with gift giving, this study aims to help youth pause and reflect on God, who is the greatest giver of all, and what God wants us to receive. As you use this study with young people, your church may also want to offer the companion adult study, "Peace, Justice, Joy, and Salvation: An Adult Advent Study," authored by Campbell herself and available at <https://www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/>. Parallel studies on the same texts invite intergenerational discussion and an opportunity for your church to build relationships across ages and experiences.

Session at a Glance

ARRIVING

- What brings you peace?

GATHERING

- Sharing our peace

OPENING

- Prayer

EXPLORING

- Peace in Scripture
- Finding peace
- Becoming peacemakers

RESPONDING

- Peace be with you

CLOSING

- Sharing God's gift of peace
- Prayer

Introduction to the Session: The Gift of Peace

What is it that you think of when you hear the word *peace*? Often it is suggested that the peace we seek is tranquility amid the busyness of everyday life; a place of calm in the face of the pressures that come at us from multiple directions; an oasis where we can rest and regroup. Those are all good meanings for peace. But surely there is more. You may also think of peace as the opposite of violence or the cessation of warfare. Peace is when people are not killing one another. While we don't often see violence like this in person, we know that it is happening in our towns and cities and around the world. And yet, isn't there more to peace even than that?

In this session, we reflect on Isaiah's vision of peace: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isa. 2:4). People will learn how not to kill each other. We will no longer need to use violence to settle our disputes. That is the vision God gave Isaiah and that Isaiah in turn gives to us.

Like all prophetic texts, these beautiful words have a context. In the eighth century, the kingdom of Judah, headquartered in Jerusalem, is caught in a power struggle between the Assyrian empire and the Egyptians. The king is tempted to join an alliance against the Assyrians. Isaiah argues it is foolish for the king to trust in military options rather than trusting in God. That said, Isaiah also sees that things in Jerusalem are deeply wrong and that God's protection of the nation depends (at least in part) on reform. Here is some of what's wrong: "Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the orphan, and the widow's cause does not come before them" (1:23). And again: "Their land is filled with silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is filled with horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands" (2:7–8).

In this session, participants will explore how peace is far more than the absence of conflict. It is deeper even than inner calm. Peace is fundamentally about harmony between people. It is human life lived in community when people get along with one another and where life flourishes as a result. Living at peace

with one another and with nature is how we were created and are intended to live. Blessed are the peacemakers, Jesus said, for they indeed will be called the children of God.

Goal for the Session

Youth will reflect on how they might receive and live out God's gift of peace in their lives.

Preparing for the Session

- Read through this Leader's Guide and determine how to best lead the session given the needs of your group. See the "Teaching Alternatives" section at the end for additional ideas.
- Pray for all the group members. As much as possible, pray for each person by name. Ask for the Spirit to move among the group and foster a lively, creative discussion.

Materials Needed

- Newsprint or whiteboard
- Markers
- Bibles
- Pens and paper for each participant
- Copies of the Participant Handout
- Crayons or markers
- Equipment to play calming music

Teaching Tip

Be mindful of the fact that for various reasons (personal or communal), there may be members of your group who are experiencing a disruption of peace in their lives. Whether it is a situation within their family (divorce, illness, etc.) or general angst over the state of the world, encourage participants to share as they are comfortable about ways in which it can be difficult to find peace in the midst of brokenness.

Arriving (5 minutes)

1. What Brings You Peace?

As youth arrive in your space, give each a sheet of paper and pen and ask them to write or draw about something that brings them peace. If they are having trouble getting started, encourage them to consider a particular place or a person in their lives who they would describe as peaceful.

Gathering (5 minutes)

2. Sharing Our Peace

Once the group has arrived and participants have all had time to complete the Arriving activity, ask volunteers to share a bit about what brings them peace. Ask the group to compare and contrast their responses:

- Are there any recurring themes among the drawings/written responses?
- Does peace involve silence or noise?
- Does peace look like solitude or community?
- Are the pictures portraying scenes that are inside or outside?

As the group discusses, record their responses on a whiteboard or newsprint so that they can be referenced throughout the session.

Opening (5 minutes)

3. Prayer

Ask for a volunteer to pray, or open with the following prayer:

God of peace,
we thank you for gathering us here today.
We pray that your Spirit will bring
peace to our hearts,
peace in our actions,
and peace on this earth.
In the name of your son, Jesus,
the Prince of Peace, we pray.
Amen.

Exploring (30 minutes)

4. Peace in Scripture

Form partners or small groups of no more than three or four participants and assign each group one of the following texts. If you have more groups than texts, some groups may be assigned the same text.

- Isaiah 2:4: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks."
- Luke 2:14: "on earth peace among those whom he favors!"
- John 20:19: "Peace be with you."
- 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2: "Grace to you and

peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Ask partners/small groups to read their texts aloud and respond to the following questions, noting that they may have to search a little outside the specific verses to find responses to these questions.

- Who is the messenger of God's peace in this text?
- Who is receiving the message?
- How might the original hearers of these words have felt before and after receiving God's message of peace?
- How might these same words have meaning for us in our world today?

5. Finding Peace

Invite participants to spread out in your space and find a comfortable spot. Hand out copies of the Participant Handout as well as pens or pencils. You may also want to play some calming music in the background during this activity.

Ask participants to close their eyes and recall a time when they experienced God's peace. After a few moments of reflection, have them journal about this in their Participant Handout, being specific in their details: Who were the characters in this situation? What actions took place? What emotions were experienced by you and others?

When participants have had ample time to record their experiences, gather the group back together and ask for volunteers to share what they have written. Then ask the group to reflect together on what it is like to receive the gift of God's peace from another individual. What were some common themes in their experiences?

6. Becoming Peacemakers

In partners or small groups, ask participants to create a list of individuals who they consider to be peacemakers and record their list on a piece of paper. Encourage them to think of historical as well as contemporary figures, individuals well known in society as well as people in their personal lives, who fit this description. Once each small group has had some time to brainstorm, have them share their lists as you create a master list for the group. Looking at your list, reflect on the following:

- What characteristics do these peacemakers share?
- How are their lives a reflection of Christ, the Prince of Peace?
- How might their efforts to be peacemakers inspire our own efforts toward peace?

Responding (10 minutes)

7. Peace Be with You

Back in small groups, challenge each group to come up with one way they might act as peacemakers in the week ahead. Encourage them to write down their specific intention on their Participant Handout to take with them when they leave.

Closing (5 minutes)

8. Sharing God's Gift of Peace

Before closing in prayer, ask each person to share how they plan to share God's gift of peace with others in the week ahead. Ask the group to pray for one another throughout the week as they all seek to find and offer peace.

9. Prayer

Close with the following prayer:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
when there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand,

to be loved as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying [to ourselves]
that we are born to eternal life.

Peace Prayer of St. Francis

Teaching Alternatives

It is likely that at the time of this session, there may be specific events going on in the world that you wish to engage in your conversation. You may wish to print or digitally display a story from the media illustrating the absence of peace in a part of your community, nation, or world. Share this story during the "Becoming Peacemakers" activity, and ask participants to brainstorm specific ideas as to how they might respond to this situation through acts of peace on behalf of others.

Key Scripture

Isaiah 2:1–4

For More Information

For a general introduction to the season of Advent that can be easily woven into your first session, look for the Thoughtful Christian's youth study "What Is Advent?"

For more information about the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, visit <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/> or search for a similar program in your denomination.

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PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

Session 1

Peace, Justice, Joy, and Salvation: A Youth Advent Study

Isaiah's Vision of Peace

Scripture

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

Isaiah 2:3b-4

Prayer

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
when there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
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for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying [to ourselves]
that we are born to eternal life.

Peace Prayer of St. Francis¹

God's Gift of Peace

What is it that you think of when you hear the word *peace*? Often it is suggested that the peace we seek is tranquility amid the busyness of everyday life; a place of calm in the face of the pressures that often come at us from multiple directions; an oasis where we can rest and regroup. Those are all good meanings for peace. But surely there is more.

Today, we reflect on Isaiah's vision of peace: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." People will learn how not to kill each other. We will no longer need to use violence to settle our disputes. That is the vision God gave Isaiah and that Isaiah in turn gives to us.

Questions for Reflection

Finding Peace

Recall a time when you experienced God's peace. Who were the characters in this situation? What actions took place? What emotions were experienced by you and others?

Sharing God's Gift of Peace

What is one way you might be a peacemaker in the week ahead?

For More Information

Learn more about the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program by visiting <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/peacemaking/>.

Note

1. "Peace Prayer of Saint Francis," Loyola Press, <https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/prayer/traditional-catholic-prayers/saints-prayers/peace-prayer-of-saint-francis/>.