

This document serves as the collection of community group study guides for the series, “On Earth, Peace”. Study guides were made to cover each sermon preached in the series. Each guide is comprised of different sections to give background/introductory information with associated questions for group discussion. A prayer focus concludes each study to summarize what was discussed during the guides.

This collection is in order by the sermons preached throughout the series. Most guides are two pages in length. Therefore, some pages are left intentionally blank in order to aid in two-sided printing (see next page).

Hope Church Charlotte is a young and growing church in the Mallard Creek community that meets every Sunday at 10am, located in Mallard Creek High School.

Community groups are intimate groups of people who meet to worship and follow Jesus while encouraging others to do the same. Once a week the group gathers at a member’s house to partake in fellowship, break bread, study scripture, and encourage one-another in prayer. Community groups are designed in such a way to be welcoming to followers, doubters, and seekers alike. We believe this is the best way to get to know other members of the Hope Church family and impact the greater Charlotte area

For more information on Hope Church, email Hope@HopeCharlotte.com
For more information on community groups at Hope Church or any questions concerning these guides, please email Community@HopeCharlotte.com

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How do we achieve true peace on this earth? The truth is, it's pretty hard - if not impossible. Jesus Himself even stated, "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division." (Luke 12:51). There will always be conflict, problems, wars, struggles, and hardships during our time on this earth. The more accurate reality concerning peace is found in John 16:33 – "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

How is it, then, that Luke 2:14 can state, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."? Another translation reads, "On earth, peace to those who have his goodwill." In other words, this world is going to be a mess and we'll be living in it, but there is peace on this earth in the middle of life's chaos to those who walk in God's favor.

So the question is not how we achieve true peace, but how we can walk in God's favor. As John 14:27 states, "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So do not be troubled or afraid."

Receive God's Pardon

When we live with sin that has not been given to God, we live in guilt that robs us of our peace. We try to find a way to pardon ourselves but we can't. It's only when we receive God's pardon that peace flows to us. When we begin to understand this concept, the world can be falling apart around us, but we will experience true peace through our Lord and Savior. Romans 8:1 states, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus". However, this peace can only be found when we place our sin and brokenness at the feet of Jesus. Many believe religion and working harder is the only way to achieve peace with God. The truth is, as Paul claims, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1) We don't need religion; we need the pardon that comes through the death and resurrection of our Messiah.

1. Do you have trouble dealing with guilt? What worries you? Do you experience this guilt and anxiety at work, in your marriage, your family, or your relationships with others?
2. Do you ever condemn or beat yourself up for what you think you've done wrong or what you need to be doing more of? What act of religion (feeling like you must act or earn something) are you committing?
3. How do Romans 5:1 and Romans 8:1 speak to your heart? What do you need to place at the feet of Jesus? What can you repent and give to Him today to receive His redeeming grace and pardon?

Respect God's Principles

Many people today miss out on the peace offered by God because they do not honor His principles. Understanding and learning God's will and desire for His people cannot be accomplished solely through a worship experience on Sunday or a once-a-week Bible study. Only through the consistent daily reading of His Word can we learn about God and the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it's very tempting in today's society to apply the Bible to our lives instead of the other way around. When we do this, we perform the sin of idolatry, as we pick and choose aspects of the Bible and God to study, worship, and follow. Instead, we must apply our lives to God's Word, in turn serving Him in His completeness and leaving our sinful ways behind as we transform into the likeness of Christ.

1. How often do you read God's Word? How much of your exposure is through corporate or community gatherings? How often do you intimately study the Bible through personal devotion?
2. If you do read God's Word daily, why? If you do not read the Bible, what are you failing to realize about its life-giving and life-changing truth? Have you tried? Why did you stop?
3. Do you apply the Bible to your life or your life to the Bible? What's the difference between the two? What does the answer to this question demonstrate about our view of God's Word compared to our view of ourselves?

Run to God's Presence and Rely on His Provision

One of the best ways to experience peace through God's favor is to come to His presence. It sounds so simple yet it's so hard – to bring all of our problems to God, even the ones we think we can handle. We must discipline ourselves to spend time with God through consistent prayer, worship, fellowship, and reading of His Word. As the prophet Isaiah wrote, "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you." (Isaiah 26:3) Paul continues this thought as he teaches, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

1. When stress and anxiety surround you, what do you turn to? What's your release or escape from the pressure? In the same way, who's the first person you turn to for provision during hardships? Is it a coworker, friend, family member, spouse, or yourself?
2. Do these idols or individuals ever provide true peace; peace that lasts and fulfills? If not, why do you keep turning to them? What does this initial reaction demonstrate about your view of this idol compared to our Father?
3. Do you hesitate to run to God in these situations? What's your fear? What are you failing to understand about the redeeming grace and provision of Jesus?
4. How does God's provision influence your prayer life? Do you ask for it? In turn, do you praise and worship Him for His provision?
5. Consider your needs, desires, anxieties, longings, and fears. How many of these could be fulfilled through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? What life could you experience today if you're willing to trade your brokenness for the provision and beauty of Jesus?

Prayer Focus

- That we would understand the beauty of God's pardon and lack of condemnation through the gift of Jesus Christ
- That we would begin to learn and respect God's principles through the studying and application of our lives to His Word
- That we would turn to God and rely on His provision during all seasons of our lives

How do we achieve true peace on this earth? The truth is, it's pretty hard - if not impossible. Jesus Himself even stated, "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division." (Luke 12:51). There will always be conflict, problems, wars, struggles, and hardships during our time on this earth. The more accurate reality concerning peace is found in John 16:33 – "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

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So the question is not how we achieve true peace, but how we can walk in God's favor. As John 14:27 states, "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So do not be troubled or afraid."

To Find Peace, You Must Make Peace

It's impossible to have peace and not have the ability to make peace with those around us. We cannot simply try to "outwork" the other person in a conflict and "act better" or try to "say the right things". As James wrote, "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness." (James 3:18) Matthew continues this thought in his gospel, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9) The result of this peace-making is true peace inside of us, no matter what we may encounter! This inner peace aids in the process of sanctification (becoming image bearers of Jesus) and leads to righteousness through the Messiah. In the same way, putting God's righteousness standard into the middle of our lives results in true peace and provision found only through the Father. The daily choice to make peace through Christ in everything around us is also making the choice to deny others the possibility to rob us of the peace that God has gifted us with.

1. What does it look like to actively seek peace in the world around us? Can this be accomplished on our own or do we need God's help? What specifically do you need Him to provide?
2. What aspects of your life typically rob you of your peace? Why does this happen?
3. How actively do you seek to make peace in all avenues in your life? Typically there are three types of people: the bystanders who are neutral, the instigators that love conflict, and the peace makers. Which are you? Why?
4. Do you put God's righteous standard into the middle of your life? What does this look like? How can we know what His standards are?
5. What in your life is in the greatest need of peace today? What's the first step?

Peace Comes Through Reconciliation

Another way to think about reconciliation is to "bring the balance to zero". Many people get reconciliation and resolution confused, yet they're two different approaches for solving conflicts. Resolution implies that two parties each agree to change or "compromise" to find a solution, while reconciliation is the act of one party "settling" the other's debt; no strings attached. 1st Corinthians 13:5 states that "it (love) keeps no record of wrongs". We witness this to its fullest extent through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as He died for the sins of the world. He didn't teach us to do better so that we could earn heaven – He taught that the only way for salvation came through belief in Him, as God sent His only Son as the perfect sacrifice to bring our "balance" of sin to zero. Paul sums this up perfectly in 1st Corinthians 5:20-21: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Once we realize the truth and beauty of what Jesus has done for us, part of our response to Him now entails providing others with the same "zero balance" approach that He gave us.

1. What are your expectations of others when working to resolve a conflict?
2. What are the terms of your forgiveness? Do you require an apology or a promise to do better? Do you ever wait to reconcile someone until after they've proved themselves after time?
3. How does this approach compare with how God dealt with you through Jesus? Why do you require more from others that God requires from you? What about your forgiveness is better than the atonement from sins that Jesus has performed?
4. What does a life of peace through reconciliation practically look like? How can we begin to become image bearers of Jesus in this aspect?

You Can't Reconcile Until You've Been Reconciled

The only way to give reconciliation to others is to first be reconciled yourself. While many of us may seek the reconciliation and approval of others, reconciliation from God the Father is the only avenue to true peace in the spirit. Only by declaring Jesus Christ as Lord and Messiah can we experience the reconciliation that completely wipes away the sin and brokenness that once enslaved us. Release from this baggage allows us to experience a peace that comforts us no matter what this life has to throw at us. You can have enemies that want to destroy you, but in Christ, and only in Christ, can you walk in peace – just read through the Book of Psalms. (Psalm 23:5) God has offered you a zero balance by giving your life to Christ. Surrender your life to Him and ask Jesus to be Lord of all.

1. Have you experienced reconciliation from God? What chains in your life has God broken which have resulted in true peace and restoration? How has your life changed before and after?
2. Is receiving reconciliation from God a one-time event or an on-going process?
3. What does receiving God's reconciliation look like in your personal life? How do you approach Him during these times?
4. If you haven't been reconciled by the gift of Jesus, what's holding you back? Have you attempted to approach God and put faith in our Lord and Savior?
5. How does your reconciliation through God affect the way you reconcile others? How does the condition of your heart with the Lord affect the way you live your life and experience true peace?

Prayer Focus

- That we would actively seek to make peace in the world around us by submitting to the righteous standard of God the Father
- That we would humbly offer reconciliation to all we encounter, simply mimicking that which Jesus has done for us
- That we would come to receive true reconciliation and forgiveness that is made available only through the death and resurrection of the risen Messiah

How do we achieve true peace on this earth? The truth is, it's pretty hard - if not impossible. Jesus Himself even stated, "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division." (Luke 12:51). There will always be conflict, problems, wars, struggles, and hardships during our time on this earth. The more accurate reality concerning peace is found in John 16:33 – "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

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Luckily, we serve the Prince of Peace, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6)

Get Under the Lordship of Jesus

Most people struggle with serving Jesus as Lord of their lives. In fact, a lot of people call Him Lord, but don't really act as if He is. The phrase lordship involves a covering - where all aspects of your life are committed to the one you serve. In the case of Jesus, when you life is under His covering, hardship may occur, but it loses its ability to rob of you of peace because peace is not the "absence of conflict", but the presence of the Prince of Peace. Most believers miss out on the amazing gift of peace because they have not made Jesus Lord of all. We like the concept of a savior that forgives and renews us, but we struggle with serving anyone but ourselves - enter sin. Sin is when we turn from God - when we make ourselves lords of our lives. By agreeing that Jesus is the Prince of Peace, we should, in turn, acknowledge that anything outside His Lordship cannot bring us everlasting peace.

1. Have you confessed Jesus as Lord of your life? How and when? Do you live under His Lordship? What's the difference between saying it and living it?
2. What, besides Jesus, do you turn to for peace in your life? Does this idol provide you with the long-lasting peace that you desire, or is it temporary? Do you stick with this idol, or hop around to the next thing that temporary satisfies your desires and/or solves your problems?
3. What does it look like to get "under" the lordship of Jesus? What action does this take on our part? What's one step that you can take today to serve Him with all aspects of your life?

Bring Jesus into Every Situation

A popular trend in today's culture is to compartmentalize the different aspect of our lives. For most, that means our spiritual lives occur on Sunday, and the rest of the week is filled up with something else. Jesus get's our attention one day out of the week, typically for two hours. When you think about it, that's 1.2% of our time. Cultural Christianity will not bring you peace because you can't live a divided life of spirituality and worldliness. Instead of trying to make Jesus another priority in our lives, what if we made Him the center of everything? What if we trusted the Prince of Peace's influence in everything we encounter - everywhere, all the time? What if we actually opened our lives to let the "Lord of all" have "lordship over all"? The answer is simple - peace. True peace can only be experienced when Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is present in everything we encounter.

1. Is Jesus Lord of all or Lord of daily devotionals? Maybe just Sunday? Maybe just Sunday worship? Anything? What does this say about your view of Jesus?
2. How often does Jesus play a role in the different aspects of your life? Are you more prone to “include” Him in some aspects (spiritual life, family, etc) than others (work, financial, etc)?
3. Would you characterize Jesus involvement in your life as a “high priority” or the “central hub” of everything? What are the differences between the two?
4. How can you begin to open all avenues of your life to the peace that Jesus brings? What small steps can you start to take? How can your community group walk through this with you?

Keep Your Mind on Jesus

There are 31,103 verses in the Bible that God wrote, but the absolute center of the Word is found in Isaiah 26:3 (oddly enough, in the center verse of the Bible): “You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!” This ties into the concept above as we cannot always keep our mind on Jesus if He is simply another priority in our life. Sing about Him, pray, worship, cry out...all to Him! Trust in the assurance that Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and that true peace can only be accomplished at His feet. Submit every area of your life to Him. Salvation is not signing a card, raising your hand, or joining a church. Christianity is when you move control from your grasp to up under the Lordship of Jesus. Keeping our minds on Jesus is the only way to experience the true peace that we have so desperately been longing for ever since we were banished from the Garden.

1. Do you believe that Jesus, and Jesus alone, provides true peace? How does this fundamental belief affect the way you approach, encounter, and walk through your life?
2. What thoughts do you give to Jesus? Is He called upon when you need something, or do you share everything with Him as though He’s literally part of you?
3. Would someone close to you say that you live differently than the society around you or the way culture portrays happiness? In other words, would an outsider looking in notice the true and everlasting peace that you experience due to your faith in and submission to Jesus? Where is this true peace evident?

Prayer Focus

- That we would allow Jesus, Lord of all, to be Lord of everything in our lives - all aspects, all the time.
- That we would bring Jesus into everything, allowing Him to be the center of our hearts to influence all avenues that we encounter.
- That our mind would be focused on the Prince of Peace, understanding that only through Him can we experience the true peace that we so desperately desire