

# What People Are Saying about *Threshold Bible Study*

“To know and love Jesus and to follow him, we need to know and love the sacred Scriptures. For many years now, the *Threshold Bible Study* has proven to be a vital tool for Catholics seeking to go deeper in their encounter with Christ.”

■ **ARCHBISHOP JOSÉ H. GOMEZ**, *Archbishop of Los Angeles*

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“Stephen Binz provides the church with a tremendous gift and resource in the *Threshold Bible Study*. This great series invites readers into the world of Scripture with insight, wisdom, and accessibility. This series will help you fall in love with the word of God!”

■ **DANIEL P. HORAN, OFM**, *Catholic Theological Union, Chicago*

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“*Threshold Bible Study* is by far the best series of short Bible-study books available today. I recommend them to all the leaders I help train in the Catholic Bible institutes of several dioceses. Kudos to Stephen Binz for writing books that are ideal for small-group or individual use.”

■ **FELIX JUST, SJ**, *Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles*

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“Stephen Binz’s *Threshold Bible Study* series gives adults of all ages a very accessible way to ‘open wide the Scriptures’ as *Dei Verbum* urged. Encountering the word of God together in study groups will allow participants to deepen their faith and encounter their Savior Jesus.”

■ **ARCHBISHOP JOSEPH E. KURTZ**, *Archbishop of Louisville*

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“Though the distance many feel between the word of God and their everyday lives can be overwhelming, it need not be so. *Threshold Bible Study* is a fine blend of the best of biblical scholarship and a realistic sensitivity to the spiritual journey of the believing Christian. I recommend it highly.”

■ **FRANCIS J. MOLONEY, SDB**, *Professor, Catholic University of Australia*

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“*Threshold Bible Study* is a refreshing approach to enable participants to ponder the Scriptures more deeply. This series provides a practical way for faithful people to get to know the Bible better and to enjoy the fruits of biblical prayer.”

■ **IRENE NOWELL, OSB**, *Mount St. Scholastica, Atchison, Kansas*

"*Threshold Bible Study* is appropriately named, for its commentary and study questions bring people to the threshold of the text and invite them in. The questions guide but do not dominate. Stephen Binz's work stands in the tradition of the biblical renewal movement and brings it back to life."

■ **KATHLEEN M. O'CONNOR**, *Professor Emerita, Columbia Theological Seminary*

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"*Threshold Bible Study* takes to heart the summons of the Second Vatican Council—'easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful' (*Dei Verbum*, #22)—by facilitating an encounter with the word of God that is simple, insightful, and engaging. A great resource for the New Evangelization."

■ **HOSFFMAN OSPINO**, *Professor, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry*

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"Stephen J. Binz is a consistently outstanding Catholic educator and communicator whose books on the study and application of Scripture have thoroughly enriched my Christian understanding. In our fast-moving, often confusing times, his ability to help us examine and comprehend the truth through all the noise is especially needed and valuable."

■ **ELIZABETH SCALIA**, *writer and speaker, editor at Aleteia, blogger as The anchoress*

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"*Threshold Bible Study* helpfully introduces the lay reader into the life-enhancing process of *lectio divina*, individually or in a group. This series leads the reader from Bible study to personal prayer, community involvement, and active Christian commitment in the world."

■ **SANDRA M. SCHNEIDERS**, *Professor, Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University*

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"Stephen Binz has created an essential resource for the New Evangelization rooted in the discipleship process that helps participants to unpack the treasures of the Scriptures in an engaging and accessible manner. *Threshold Bible Study* connects faith learning to faithful living, leading one to a deeper relationship with Christ and his body, the church."

■ **JULIANNE STANZ**, *Director of New Evangelization, Diocese of Green Bay*

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"*Threshold Bible Study* provides a very engaging approach and encounter with sacred Scripture, all the while encouraging the faithful to listen and discern the word of God, especially in and through Jesus Christ."

■ **ARCHBISHOP CHARLES C. THOMPSON**, *Archbishop of Indianapolis*

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"I congratulate and applaud Stephen J. Binz for his work of evangelization with *Threshold Bible Study*. Pope Francis has encouraged us all to 'consult the Bible as often as our cell phones.' I am sure that this study will help many to consult their Bible more as well as help many to better understand and apply in their lives the saving message of the Good News of Jesus—whose love, mercy, welcome, invitation, and embrace we Catholics search for and find on every page of Scripture."

■ **ARCHBISHOP JOHN C. WESTER**, *Archbishop of Santa Fe*

THRESHOLD  
BIBLE STUDY

PEACEMAKING  
*and*  
NONVIOLENCE

*Stephen J. Binz*



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# How to Use *Threshold Bible Study*

Each book in the *Threshold Bible Study* series is designed to lead you through a new doorway of biblical awareness, to accompany you across a unique threshold of understanding. The characters, places, and images that you encounter in each of these topical studies will help you explore fresh dimensions of your faith and discover richer insights for your spiritual life.

*Threshold Bible Study* covers biblical themes in depth in a short amount of time. Unlike more traditional Bible studies that treat a biblical book or series of books, *Threshold Bible Study* aims to address specific topics within the entire Bible. The goal is not for you to comprehend everything about each passage, but rather for you to understand what a variety of passages from different books of the Bible reveals about the topic of each study.

*Threshold Bible Study* offers you an opportunity to explore the entire Bible from the viewpoint of a variety of different themes. The commentary that follows each biblical passage launches your reflection about that passage and helps you begin to see its significance within the context of your contemporary experience. The questions following the commentary challenge you to understand the passage more fully and apply it to your own life. The prayer starter helps conclude your study by integrating learning into your relationship with God.

These studies are designed for maximum flexibility. Each study is presented in a workbook format, with sections for reading, reflecting, writing, discussing, and praying. Space for writing after each question is ideal for personal study and allows group members to prepare in advance for their discus-

sion. The thirty lessons in each topic may be used by an individual over the period of a month, or by a group for six sessions, with lessons to be studied each week before the next group meeting. These studies are ideal for Bible study groups, small Christian communities, adult faith formation, student groups, Sunday school, neighborhood groups, and family reading, as well as for individual learning.

The method of *Threshold Bible Study* is rooted in the classical tradition of *lectio divina*, an ancient yet contemporary means for reading the Scriptures reflectively and prayerfully. Reading and interpreting the text (*lectio*) is followed by reflective meditation on its message (*meditatio*). This reading and reflecting flows into prayer from the heart (*oratio* and *contemplatio*).

This ancient method assures us that Bible study is a matter of both the mind and the heart. It is not just an intellectual exercise to learn more and be able to discuss the Bible with others. It is, more importantly, a transforming experience. Reflecting on God's word, guided by the Holy Spirit, illumines the mind with wisdom and stirs the heart with zeal.

Following the personal Bible study, *Threshold Bible Study* offers a method for extending *lectio divina* into a weekly conversation with a small group. This communal experience will allow participants to enhance their appreciation of the message and build up a spiritual community (*collatio*). The end result will be to increase not only individual faith but also faithful witness in the context of daily life (*operatio*).

Through the spiritual disciplines of Scripture reading, study, reflection, conversation, and prayer, you will experience God's grace more abundantly as your life is rooted more deeply in Christ. The risen Jesus said: "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me" (Rev 3:20). Listen to the Word of God, open the door, and cross the threshold to an unimaginable dwelling with God!

## SUGGESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

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- Make your Bible reading a time of prayer. Ask for God's guidance as you read the Scriptures.
- Try to study daily, or as often as possible according to the circumstances of your life.
- Read the Bible passage carefully, trying to understand both its meaning and its personal application as you read. Some persons find it helpful to read the passage aloud.
- Read the passage in another Bible translation. Each version adds to your understanding of the original text.
- Allow the commentary to help you comprehend and apply the scriptural text. The commentary is only a beginning, not the last word, on the meaning of the passage.
- After reflecting on each question, write out your responses. The very act of writing will help you clarify your thoughts, bring new insights, and amplify your understanding.
- As you reflect on your answers, think about how you can live God's word in the context of your daily life.
- Conclude each daily lesson by reading the prayer and continuing with your own prayer from the heart.
- Make sure your reflections and prayers are matters of both the mind and the heart. A true encounter with God's word is always a transforming experience.
- Choose a word or a phrase from the lesson to carry with you throughout the day as a reminder of your encounter with God's life-changing word.
- Share your learning experience with at least one other person whom you trust for additional insights and affirmation. The ideal way to share learning is in a small group that meets regularly.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP STUDY

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- Meet regularly; weekly is ideal. Try to be on time and make attendance a high priority for the sake of the group. The average group meets for about an hour.
- Open each session with a prepared prayer, a song, or a reflection. Find some appropriate way to bring the group from the workaday world into a sacred time of graced sharing.
- If you have not been together before, name tags are very helpful as a group begins to become acquainted with the other group members.
- Spend the first session getting acquainted with one another, reading the Introduction aloud, and discussing the questions that follow.
- Appoint a group facilitator to provide guidance to the discussion. The role of facilitator may rotate among members each week. The facilitator simply keeps the discussion on track; each person shares responsibility for the group. There is no need for the facilitator to be a trained teacher.
- Try to study the six lessons on your own during the week. When you have done your own reflection and written your own answers, you will be better prepared to discuss the six scriptural lessons with the group. If you have not had an opportunity to study the passages during the week, meet with the group anyway to share support and insights.
- Participate in the discussion as much as you are able, offering your thoughts, insights, feelings, and decisions. You learn by sharing with others the fruits of your study.
- Be careful not to dominate the discussion. It is important that everyone in the group be offered an equal opportunity to share the results of their work. Try to link what you say to the comments of others so that the group remains on the topic.
- When discussing your own personal thoughts or feelings, use “I” language. Be as personal and honest as appropriate and be very cautious about giving advice to others.

- Listen attentively to the other members of the group so as to learn from their insights. The words of the Bible affect each person in a different way, so a group provides a wealth of understanding for each member.
- Don't fear silence. Silence in a group is as important as silence in personal study. It allows individuals time to listen to the voice of God's Spirit and the opportunity to form their thoughts before they speak.
- Solicit several responses for each question. The thoughts of different people will build on the answers of others and will lead to deeper insights for all.
- Don't fear controversy. Differences of opinions are a sign of a healthy and honest group. If you cannot resolve an issue, continue on, agreeing to disagree. There is probably some truth in each viewpoint.
- Discuss the questions that seem most important for the group. There is no need to cover all the questions in the group session.
- Realize that some questions about the Bible cannot be resolved, even by experts. Don't get stuck on some issue for which there are no clear answers.
- Whatever is said in the group is said in confidence and should be regarded as such.
- Pray as a group in whatever way feels comfortable. Pray for the members of your group throughout the week.

### **Schedule for Group Study**

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION      DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

SESSION 2: LESSONS 1–6      DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

SESSION 3: LESSONS 7–12      DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

SESSION 4: LESSONS 13–18      DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

SESSION 5: LESSONS 19–24      DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

SESSION 6: LESSONS 25–30      DATE: \_\_\_\_\_



...and if anyone force  
 you to go a mile, go also the second  
 mile. Do not refuse anyone who begs from  
 you to borrow from you.

*Love for Enemies*

43 You have heard that it was said,  
 "You shall love your neighbour and hate  
 your enemy." 44 But I say to you, Love your  
 enemies and pray for those who persecute  
 you, 45 so that you may be children of your  
 Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise  
 on the evil and on the good, and sends  
 rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.  
 46 For if you love those who love  
 you, what reward do you have? Do not love  
 the tax-collectors do not love  
 the street only



**As [Jesus] came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.”** LUKE 19:41–42

## Peacemaking and Nonviolence

**A**ctive, nonviolent, persistent, creative peacemaking is central to the Christian calling. Jesus’ way of love for enemies, the way of the cross, offers the world a way out of its addiction to violence, weapons, and war. From his astounding Sermon on the Mount to the way he refused to allow his followers to form him into a militant Messiah to the way he responded to his torturous passion, Jesus modeled a new kind of peacemaking in the face of injustice—a way that refuses to either withdraw in timidity or retaliate with violence.

Jesus does not bring his followers to a religion of personal salvation separated from the challenges of history, to a private world of prayer and devotions apart from the struggles of people. He calls his followers to the heart of the world with its burdens and tribulations. He teaches that God’s kingdom is here and now among us and that genuine peace must be founded upon truth, justice, freedom, and charity. He demonstrates how the image of God in each person enables us to acknowledge one another as sacred gifts endowed with immense dignity.

Proclaiming the peace of God’s kingdom, Jesus tells his disciples to renounce hostile retaliation, learning to love enemies and to struggle for justice with creative nonviolence. Peacemaking practices, rooted in his life and

teachings, show antagonists how to resolve situations of conflict, confront injustices without combativeness, reconcile people engaged in cycles of violence, and unleash the transformative power of love in action. By reading the prophets, the gospels, and the letters of Paul and Peter through the lens of his cross, we can become Christian peacemakers for the sake of our world today. The more that Christians embrace the Scriptures and become a community of peacemakers, the more attractive and credible the church will be as a witness of hope for all God's people.

### **Reflection and discussion**

- For what reasons are Christians called to be peacemakers in the midst of the world?
- How can becoming a peacemaking church lead to increasing credibility for the gospel today?

### **Peacemaking throughout the Scriptures**

Although many pages of the Bible speak of the reality of violence and war, visions of peace also abound. But, in Scripture, peace is more than an absence of conflict. Depending on the context, peace may refer to well-being, security, harmonious relationships, relief from oppression, and abundant life. It comes to us as a blessing from God, but it is also the goal toward which we must strive.

In its biblical context, peace is not an abstract term expressing an immaterial idea. Rather, it is dynamic and concrete. It must be sought in the international arena, within communities and families, and within one's deepest self. The antithesis of peace is the disorder and brokenness brought to the world by sin. Human selfishness and injustice, manifested by individual acts

or social structures, rupture the bonds of peace and deprive humanity of the well-being, security, and community that God desires for us.

In ancient Israel, the king was God's agent of peace through his concern for justice, his care for the poor, and his faithfulness to the order of creation. Likewise, the priests were mediators of peace by promoting true worship, and wisdom teachers facilitated peace through their instructions. These ancient institutions demonstrate that peacemaking cannot succeed without attention to just laws, economic fairness, and social responsibility. Despite the continual failure of Israel's leaders to establish peace, the prophets envisioned a time in which the instruments of war would be abolished and justice would fill the land. The reign of God's Messiah, anointed by God's own Spirit, would be an era of peace, brought about through a new temple, a new covenant, and a new creation.

Jesus of Nazareth is Israel's Prince of Peace, the Messiah in whom all of God's promises are fulfilled. He announced the peace of God's kingdom in word and deed, calling his followers to be instruments of that peace. He proclaimed on the mountain: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matt 5:9). The making of peace is a central aspect of the coming of God's reign and identifies followers of Jesus as members of God's family. Since peace is the product of the reign of God, it is not a human achievement but a divine gift. In Jesus' farewell discourse, he told his disciples that peace is his departing gift to them, a peace that the world cannot give (John 14:27). Yet disciples of Jesus must receive this gift and convey it to the world, showing others the way to experience peace in him.

Jesus himself lived in violent times. Yet he taught that the true battlefield, where violence and peace meet, is the human heart: for "it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come" (Mk 7:21). Those who accept the gospel of Jesus are able to acknowledge the violence within and be healed by God's mercy, becoming, then, instruments of reconciliation. The peacemaking ministry of Jesus in the world encountered continual resistance, and he warned his disciples that the church would experience the same struggle. When Jesus was preparing his disciples for their mission, he told them, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt 10:34). By this, he is not calling his followers to armed conflict against their Roman oppressors; rather, he is warning them that God's kingdom will encounter great resistance

from the supernatural powers of evil seeking to prevent the manifestation of God's peace. He wields the sword against the powers of selfishness and hatred, while struggling to inaugurate God's reign of peace.

Jesus consistently preached God's unconditional love, teaching his disciples to love their enemies, to repent and forgive, and to be abundantly merciful. As the influences of evil and sin sought to bind their human victims to a life of misery, Jesus demonstrated his power through divine forgiveness and healings. He marked out the path of nonviolence when he stopped the accusers of the woman caught in adultery from stoning her, and when, on the night before he died, he told his disciple to put away his sword. And Jesus walked that path to the very end. Ultimately, the powers of evil and sin led Jesus to the cross, where he defeated them through his self-giving love and offered his disciples the peace of his resurrection.

The battle is ongoing between Christ present in his church and the powers of evil, manifested by hatred, injustice, war, and violence in the world. Although the victory has been won by Christ on the cross and his ultimate triumph is certain, disciples of Jesus continue the struggle through the ages. The era of peace promised by God is assured, but the church continually experiences determined resistance to God's reign in the world. The mission of the church is to carry forward Christ's peacemaking mission, the manifestation of God's kingdom of peace on earth as it is in heaven.

#### **Reflection and discussion**

- In what sense is peace more than an absence of conflict and strife?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- In what sense did Jesus bring a sword to the world? In what sense is Jesus the embodiment of God's peace?

### **Peace through Nonviolent Struggle**

During the ministry of Jesus, the Jewish factions offered three different ways forward in the face of the Roman occupation: fight, flight, or accommodate. The Sadducees and priestly families chose accommodation, collaborating with their oppressors in order to maintain their own power and influence. The Essene community chose flight, withdrawing into the desert to form their own isolated community at Qumran. And the Zealots chose to fight, which resulted eventually in violent devastation. Jesus knew that these ways were ineffective and inevitably disastrous. When arriving in Jerusalem, he wept over it, lamenting that his own people did not understand “the things that make for peace” (Luke 19:42).

In contrast to these three dead ends, Jesus guides his followers along an alternative way, the path of active nonviolence. His way is not merely a tactical strategy but a way of being, an attitude of the heart that is unafraid to confront evil with the authority of God’s truth and the strength of divine love. Jesus opposes both passivity and violence as responses to evil, and he teaches a way in which evil can be opposed without being mirrored. When Jesus exhorts his followers, “Do not resist an evildoer” (Matt 5:39), he is not advocating passivity; rather, he is urging them not to strike back against violence with violence. They must not retaliate with violence against anyone who does them harm.

By teaching and modeling this path throughout his life, Jesus shows his oppressed followers how nonviolent practices enable them to overcome docility, unsettle their persecutors, assert their own human dignity, and seize the initiative in the situation. The creative nonviolence of Jesus calls forth strength and courage in the oppressed, giving them new self-respect. At the same time, it robs oppressors of the power to humiliate and dehumanize their victims, while also unmasking the cruelty of the system that allows such oppression.

This nonviolent way is not just an act of defiance designed to confront an oppressor. It is also designed to change the oppressor’s heart. Rooted in Jesus’ command to “love your enemies and pray for your persecutors” (Matt 5:44), the nature of creative nonviolence offers the opponent the opportunity of repentance. Loving respect for one’s opponent avoids not only external physical violence but also the internal violence of the spirit. Love of enemies allows

for the separation of the deeds from the doers, the evil act from the person, allowing for the possibility that the doers of evil may change their behavior and perhaps also their beliefs.

Violence is a great deceiver: it tries to convince us that it is the only way to protect oneself, that power grows out of the barrel of a gun, that military conflict is the only way to defeat a tyrant or win lasting change. But when we study the teachings of Jesus and his apostles, we never find an exception to the constant teaching that disciples must refrain from violence. Countering violence with violence leads to greater suffering, including more deadly conflicts, terrorism, crime, human trafficking, refugees, environmental devastation, and many other evils. Violence cannot be a cure for our broken world, it never achieves anything of lasting value, and it never comes from God.

Practicing nonviolence goes deeper than simply abstaining from violent words and behavior. It involves a positive call to action as well as a change of heart. It means overriding the impulse to be vengeful and cultivating compassion at every possible opportunity, even toward those with whom we strongly disagree. Nonviolence is active in its resistance to injustice, not passive; vocal in its engagement, not silent. It is a force more powerful than violence, an effective weapon for women and men, young and old, able-bodied and disabled, rich and poor, a weapon that dignifies the ones who wield it.

### **Reflection and discussion**

- What forms of violence persist in my behavior and in my heart?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How is nonviolence a more effective weapon against evil than violence?

### **Developing a Nonviolent Imagination through Bible Study**

As the early Christians discerned how to respond to the resistance and maltreatment they experienced, they were guided by the nonviolent life of Jesus. In the church's apostolic period, the followers of Jesus refused to join their Jewish compatriots in violent revolt against the Romans. In the face of persecutions, they suffered heroically with fidelity to their Lord and love for their enemies. Whenever the issue of military service and warfare was discussed by the theologians of the first three centuries, Christians were prohibited from participating because of the nonviolent character of the Christian faith. Their nonviolent resistance to evil and constancy in faith captivated the ancient world and gradually inspired mass conversions to Christianity.

Although, in later centuries, Christian believers have betrayed this central message of the gospel in many ways—participating in combat, persecution, oppression, exploitation, and discrimination—we are called anew in every age to discern the wisdom of Scripture in order to take on the mind and heart of Jesus. Biblical scholarship in the twentieth century began to rediscover the clear nonviolence of Jesus through a contextual study of his teachings, and today, in the twenty-first century, it is difficult to read the New Testament without being astounded by the nonviolence of Jesus.

The life and teachings of Jesus have inspired movements of creative nonviolence in our modern times. Stirred by the Sermon on the Mount and the literature of other religious traditions, Mahatma Gandhi developed his way of nonviolence, which led to independence and greater justice for India. The faith of Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr. led Americans to use the creative nonviolence taught in Scripture to bring about social justice and civil rights, while the nonviolent campaigns of César Chávez and Dolores Huerta secured advances for farm workers in California. Archbishop Oscar Romero and Fr. Rutilio Grande, SJ, were courageous proponents of nonviolent resistance in El Salvador, leading to their martyrdom, and the committed peacemaking of Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu helped to overcome the racial injustices of South Africa. The leadership of Lech Walesa and the witness of Fr. Jerzy Popieluszko led to the nonviolent solidarity that ended the Communist oppression of Poland, and the peacemaking efforts of Leymah Gbowee and thousands of women, organizing prayer and nonviolent protests, led to an end to civil war in Liberia.

These heroic lives and movements, and countless more like them, prove that the peacemaking traditions of the Scriptures, when actualized with real-world issues of our day, provide practical ways of empowering people to work for a more just and inclusive society. Indeed, nonviolence can wrest power from an imperial power, gain civil and economic rights, overthrow dictators, and secure peace from warring factions. These people and movements demonstrate that nonviolence is not merely tactical behavior but a spiritual way of being. These heroes inspire others with God's universal and personal love to be unafraid to fight evil with the weapons of truth alone.

As we study these Scriptures, may we dedicate ourselves prayerfully and actively to banishing violence from our hearts, words, and deeds, and to becoming nonviolent people building nonviolent communities that care for all the children of God. Let us develop within ourselves the virtues of nonviolence so that we may become artisans of peace.

### **Reflection and discussion**

- How might studying the Bible develop within me a nonviolent imagination?
- What person or movement in my lifetime has inspired me to work for peace?

### **Prayer**

*Loving Creator of all people, who sent your Son to proclaim in word and deed the peace of your kingdom, send your Holy Spirit to guide, encourage, and enlighten me as I begin this study of your inspired word. Let these sacred texts so transform my mind and heart that I may become a peacemaker in the image of Jesus. Help me to hope in a world freed from violence, to devote my energies to the task of making peace, and to unleash the transforming power of love in action.*

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FACILITATORS, GROUP SESSION 1

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1. If the group is meeting for the first time, or if there are newcomers joining the group, it is helpful to provide nametags.
2. Distribute the books to the members of the group.
3. You may want to ask the participants to introduce themselves and tell the group a bit about themselves.
4. Ask one or more of these introductory questions:
  - What drew you to join this group?
  - What is your biggest fear in beginning this Bible study?
  - How is beginning this study like a “threshold” for you?
5. You may want to pray this prayer as a group:

*Come upon us, Holy Spirit, to enlighten and guide us as we begin this study of peacemaking and nonviolence. You inspired the biblical authors to express your word as manifested to the people of Israel and most fully in the life of Jesus. Motivate us each day to read the Scriptures and deepen our understanding and love for these sacred texts. Bless us during this session and throughout the coming week with the fire of your love.*
6. Read the Introduction aloud, pausing at each question for discussion. Group members may wish to write the insights of the group as each question is discussed. Encourage several members of the group to respond to each question.
7. Don't feel compelled to finish the complete Introduction during the session. It is better to allow sufficient time to talk about the questions raised than to rush to the end. Group members may read any remaining sections on their own after the group meeting.
8. Instruct group members to read the first six lessons on their own during the six days before the next group meeting. They should write out their answers to the questions as preparation for next week's group discussion.
9. Fill in the date for each group meeting under “Schedule for Group Study.”
10. Conclude by praying aloud together the prayer at the end of the Introduction.



**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 2:4**

## God's Word of Peace and Disarmament

**ISAIAH 2:1–5** <sup>1</sup>*The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.*

<sup>2</sup>*In days to come  
the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
all the nations shall stream to it.*

<sup>3</sup>*Many peoples shall come and say,  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths."  
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

<sup>4</sup>*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 anymore.*

*<sup>5</sup>O house of Jacob,  
come, let us walk  
in the light of the Lord!*

The word of God, spoken through the prophet Isaiah, offers listeners a vision of future salvation for all the world. God's promise that all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through the children of Abraham (Gen 12:3) is being fulfilled as "all the nations" stream toward Jerusalem in pilgrimage (verse 2). "The mountain of the Lord's house," the exalted city with its temple, was acclaimed by the prophets as the redemptive center of the world, as the place where the Messiah would appear, and where Israel and the nations would be gathered in the days to come. One day Mount Zion will be raised above all the mountains and hills, not because of its physical elevation, but because the word of the Lord goes forth from it.

The peoples of many nations go to Mount Zion not only to worship but to learn, seeking "instructions" from God: "that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths" (verse 3). This word of God is a vision of peacemaking, disarmament, and demilitarization (verse 4). First, God will mediate between nations and settle international disputes. God's decisions will be so wise and just that peace will reign. Second, the peoples will turn their weapons of war (swords and spears) into instruments of peace (plowshares and pruning hooks). Their arms will no longer produce death from battle but will generate life from harvests. And third, the nations will forever abandon the practice of warfare. They will not use weapons against one another nor will they train for war again.

The prophet Joel had pronounced the words of an ancient battle call: "Prepare war, stir up the warriors... Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears" (Joel 3:9–10). Isaiah's vision of international disarmament—the recycling of swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks—is a divine reversal of this slogan of war. Likewise, the visceral instinct to "prepare for war" forms a strong contrast to the nations'

refusal to take up arms against the other and their determination not to “learn war anymore.”

Isaiah’s hope for mutual understanding of God’s ways and lasting peace among the nations remains elusive. Yet this hope is not based on coercive power but on God’s fidelity. The “days to come,” announced by Isaiah, have begun in the Messiah Jesus. God is moving people toward this vision of peace that Isaiah so eloquently describes. But it takes more than wishing and longing to make it a reality. It requires total reliance on God as well as our serious effort in the present time working for peace on the personal, local, and international levels.

The prophecy continues with an exhortation: “Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!” (verse 5). The hearers are challenged to “walk” toward the realization of this vision, to use their energy and imaginations to create structures and environments in which people are able to trust and communicate enough that they no longer need to be armed and resort to violence. The light of God’s word will illumine the way.

### **Reflection and discussion**

- Why must God “teach us his ways” before we can “walk in his paths”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- In what ways is Isaiah’s call for disarmament a divine reversal of the call to arms quoted by Joel?

- What are the swords and spears of my hostility and aggression? How can I transform them into tools for peace?
- How could Isaiah's vision of peace shape my hope and prayers?
- In what ways are people today working for peace on the personal, local, and international levels?

### **Prayer**

*Creator God, who promised blessings for all the nations of the earth, enlighten me with your word and teach me your ways so that I may walk in your path. Make me a peacemaker according to the vision of your prophet Isaiah, transforming weapons of hostility into tools for peace.*