

A SINGLE SESSION FOR A
CRISIS SITUATION



WAR:

SEARCHING FOR PEACE
IN TIMES OF CONFLICT



A DIFFERENT KIND OF CURRICULUM

Ministry Leadership Center Press
Holy Disruptions: War: Searching for Peace in Times of Conflict

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Special Session:

War and Peace



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Session Synopsis

War is a harsh reality that affects countless lives daily. In this lesson, we delve into the world of the White Helmets, brave volunteers in Syria who risk everything to rescue others amidst ongoing conflict. This lesson explores peace as not just the absence of war, but as *shalom*, true wholeness, justice, and restoration. We'll explore the stark realities of war, reflect on God's call to be instruments of peace, and dream together about a world where God's *shalom* (שָׁלוֹם) is a reality. This lesson isn't just about hoping for peace—it's about actively working to bring it to life in our own lives and communities.

Session Supplies

- Writing utensils
- Paper or notecards
- Printed peace sign templates like [this one](#): one per participant
- Bibles or copies of Micah 4:1-4 (printed or projected)
- Video playback equipment: computer, projector/screen, and speakers to show the [White Helmets](#) video
- Colored markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- God Section worksheet for each participant

Topic / Theological Lens

We were created to live in *shalom*, often translated as “peace” but with a deeper meaning. *Shalom*, rooted in the Hebrew verb *shalam*, which means “to be complete” or “to make whole,” encompasses more than the absence of conflict. It embodies communal wholeness, harmony, flourishing, and right relationships with God, others, and creation. *Shalom* is marked by justice, mercy, equity, and restoration, reflecting God's ongoing work in the world and inviting us to join in that work.

Yet our world falls short of *shalom*, marred by violence, injustice, suffering, and ongoing conflict. We often mistake peace for mere quiet or the absence of fighting. Or we mistakenly believe that violence can lead to peace. True peace, however, is *shalom*—a wholeness that requires active cultivation through compassion, curiosity, and restorative justice. Jesus embodies this pursuit, showing us through his life and death how to seek *shalom* in a world that often glorifies violence. In Christ, we glimpse God's vision for a restored world—and are called to live as peacemakers in this unfolding story.

In today's world of conflict and violence, we explore our role in seeking wholeness for all, following Christ's example of nonviolence and pursuing a world marked by *shalom*.

Preparing

For this lesson, prepare all materials in advance, and consider downloading the video to avoid buffering issues. Review the week's news so you're ready for questions. Remember that war is a heavy topic involving real suffering. Take time to spiritually ground yourself and pray for wisdom and compassion. Be aware of your own reactions so you can respond calmly and thoughtfully. Youth may feel sadness, anger, fear, or confusion as they grapple with the reality of conflict in our world. Your role isn't to have all the answers, but to create a brave space for honest conversation.

Dilemma—White Helmets

DISORIENTING DILEMMA (10 MIN)



INSTRUCTIONS

The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, is a brutal and complex conflict that started as a peaceful protest movement against the authoritarian regime of President Bashar al-Assad. It quickly escalated into a multifaceted war involving government forces, rebel groups, extremist factions, and foreign powers, resulting in the deaths of thousands and the displacement of millions. In the midst of this devastation, the White Helmets, or Syria Civil Defence, emerged in 2013 as a group of everyday Syrians—teachers, bakers, tailors—who volunteered to save lives. Unarmed and politically neutral, they rush into bombed neighborhoods to rescue civilians trapped under rubble, provide medical care, and offer hope in communities ravaged by war. Often targeted themselves, the White Helmets have become a global symbol of courageous, grassroots humanitarian response in the face of overwhelming violence.

Before you introduce [the video](#), give everyone a writing utensil and something to write on, so they can take notes while watching the video. In this dilemma, you'll instruct participants to put themselves in the shoes of the White Helmets depicted in the video. After you set the stage for them, you'll watch the video together. From there, we will begin to reflect on the effects of war and our role in working with God for peace.

*****Trigger Warning: This video contains real images of war, including footage of injured bodies. Please consider informing students ahead of time and offering anyone who feels uncomfortable the option to step out before the video begins.*****

Introduction for Students



In just a moment, we're going to watch a video about the White Helmets. Also known as Syria Civil Defence, the White Helmets are a volunteer rescue group working for peace in the midst of the Syrian Civil War. This war began in 2011, when peaceful protests against the government turned into a violent, years-long conflict involving the government, rebel forces, and other groups. Since then, hundreds of thousands of people have been impacted by the Syrian Civil War, either killed, injured, or forced to flee their homes. Amid the chaos, a group of everyday people—teachers, bakers, and firefighters—came together to form the White Helmets. They're named for the distinctive white helmets they wear, which symbolize peace, hope, and protection, and help identify them as rescue workers in dangerous and chaotic environments. The White Helmets risk their lives to save others, often rushing into bombed buildings to pull survivors from the rubble. Their courage and compassion have brought hope to many. Today, both the war and the White Helmets' life-saving work continue, as Syria still struggles with violence, destruction, and the long journey toward peace.

Before we watch this video, put yourself in the White Helmets' shoes. I'm going to read a brief scenario to help you get into the mindset of someone who might volunteer and risk their life in this way.

Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and imagine. *[Pause for youth to get settled in.]*

You're a teenager living in Syria during the civil war. Your city has been bombed, your school is closed, and you've seen neighbors, or even family, harmed. But instead of giving up or running away, you choose to help. You join the White Helmets—a group of volunteers who rush toward danger to rescue others. You train alongside people from your neighborhood, teachers, bakers, students, and ordinary people who want to protect their community. You put on a white helmet, not because it makes you feel fearless, but because it marks you as someone who brings hope, someone committed to saving lives. As we watch this video, keep that mindset—step into the shoes of that person, and feel the courage, fear, and compassion that drive the White Helmets every day.

We're going to watch a short video about the White Helmets. While we watch, take notes of any images, words, thoughts, or feelings that stand out to you. **(Heads up: This video includes real images of war, including footage of injured bodies. If you're not comfortable watching that, that's completely okay. You're welcome to step out of the room now or at any point during the video.)**

WATCH: [White Helmets](#)

Sharing our WOW

WOW MOMENT (5 MIN)



Now that we've learned a bit about the Syrian Civil War and the White Helmets, we're going to explore what that made you think or feel while you were watching that and what you think and feel about war in general. Most importantly, we're going to identify one moment from putting ourselves into that scenario and watching the video about the White Helmets that stuck out to you and made you say, "WOW." Remember that "WOW" can come from something inspiring, heartbreaking, shocking, or powerful.



- How did it feel to put yourselves in the shoes of someone in an active war zone?
- What do you think it feels like to be someone growing up around war?
- What would make someone want to risk their lives and become a White Helmet?
- Look back at the notes you took. What is one thing that really impacted you from the video? **(This is their WOW moment)**



- How did it feel in your body to put yourself in the shoes of someone in danger from active violence going on around them?
- Looking back at your WOW moment, what is it about that moment that impacted you most? What about that moment opened your eyes to the reality of the white helmets?
- In general, when you think about the reality of violence and war, what thoughts, emotions, or questions come up for you?

What would culture say?

WHAT? (10 MIN)



War is a hard reality in our world. Most people would probably say they don't like the idea of war. But when big conflicts happen, war can seem like the only option for some people. And, whether we realize it or not, we're surrounded by messages that normalize or even celebrate war. Think about it: there are huge industries built around making weapons, but also around making war look exciting—like in video games, movies, or even how we talk about history and heroes. We talk about war as a way to achieve peace, without even realizing the contradiction. Let's take a minute to discuss how we talk about war and peace, culturally.



- When you hear war and peace talked about in school or in culture, what are the main messages you hear?
- How are soldiers and war portrayed in movies, video games, or TV shows you've seen?
- In general, what voices do you hear speaking most loudly about war? What voices are speaking about peace?
- Have you ever heard peace described as unrealistic or "too idealistic"? Why do you think that is? Who benefits from that idea?
- When you hear the word "peace," what images, feelings, or people come to mind?
- Do you think real peace can exist without violence? Why or why not?

What does God say?

GOD? (20 MIN)



It used to be commonplace—and maybe it still is—that when someone was asked what they wanted for their birthday or Christmas and didn't have a specific answer, they'd respond with, "Oh, I don't know... world peace." It was often said with a shrug or a laugh, not because the person truly expected peace on Earth, but because it had become a kind of joke. That phrase—"world peace"—was famously associated with beauty pageant contestants, who were often mocked for giving idealistic, overly simple answers to complex questions. Over time, "world peace" became shorthand for something unrealistic or out of reach—something you say when you don't want to give a real answer. But what if peace wasn't just a joke or a dream? What if it was something worth taking seriously—and something we could actually work toward?



READ: Micah 4:1-4



Often when we talk about peace today, we mean the absence of violence. Issues swept under the rug, rather than solved, so that we may live in a tenuous state of coexistence. This concept of peace is not what scripture means when it refers to peace. Rather, the concept of peace, or *shalom* in Hebrew, means something more. *Shalom*, rooted in the Hebrew verb *shalam*, which means “to be complete” or “to make whole,” encompasses more than the absence of conflict. It embodies communal wholeness, harmony, flourishing, and right relationships with God, others, and creation.

You see, when God created humans and called us, along with the rest of creation, very good, we walked in oneness and harmony with God and creation. God created us to live in perfect *shalom*. But shortly after, we broke that *shalom* as sin entered the picture. Throughout human history, we have continued that pattern—catching glimpses of the wholeness and beauty of *shalom*, and then, consciously or unconsciously, breaking it. Through selfishness, violence, injustice, and fear, we disrupt the harmony we were made for. And yet, God continues to invite us back into *shalom*—to repair what’s been broken, to choose peace over power, and to live in right relationship with God, others, and all creation.

Throughout all of Scripture, we see God again and again extending the invitation to live in *shalom* with God, creation, and each other. But *shalom* doesn’t just happen; it requires us to work for it, often in ways that are difficult and sacrificial. It calls us to choose love over fear, justice that restores rather than punishes, and communal flourishing over our own self-interest. Ultimately, God sent Christ—the embodiment of *shalom*—to show us what it truly looks like to live in peace with all people. Through Jesus’ life, teachings, and self-emptying love, Jesus modeled a way of being that confronts injustice, lifts the marginalized, and restores what is broken. In Christ, we see that *shalom* is not passive—it is active, courageous, and requires us to depend on God and each other to achieve. In Ephesians 2:14, the letter’s author reminds us that Jesus is our *shalom*—breaking down the walls that divide us and bringing forgiveness, unity, and ultimately wholeness.

The prophet Micah was a messenger of God’s desire for *shalom* to the people of Israel, who were deeply broken. The threat of war loomed, and the people of Israel were not living out their call to *shalom*. In Micah 4:1-4, God reminds Israel that they were created for *shalom*. Micah lays out God’s vision for a world where all nations seek God’s wisdom, where weapons are turned into tools for growing food, and where every person lives in safety and dignity, under their own vine and fig tree. This vision of *shalom*—a peace rooted in justice, wholeness, and right relationship—is not just a dream for someday; it’s a call to live differently now.

Like Israel in the days of Micah, we live in a world that celebrates war as a means for peace. Atrocity after atrocity is being committed—innocent lives lost, communities destroyed, and fear used as a tool for control. Just as Micah’s world was marked by corruption, injustice, and violence, so too is ours. But into that brokenness, God, through Micah, spoke a different vision—a vision of *shalom*, where swords are turned into plowshares and people live without fear. God’s words through Micah remind us that the way things are is not the way they have to be. We are invited, like the original audience was, to imagine a different future—and to begin living into it now by choosing justice, compassion, and peace over power, fear, and violence.

Is it possible for us, today, to be messengers of *shalom* in the world? In a culture that normalizes and invests in war, glorifies violence, and treats peace as a fantasy, choosing the way of *shalom* is radically hope-filled. War destroys lives, corrupts the goodness of our hearts, and insults the image of God in others and in ourselves. It promises safety through domination but delivers only fear and suffering. Rather, *shalom* is the bold belief that peace is not only possible but worth pursuing with our whole lives. To be messengers of *shalom* means rejecting the lie that violence can save us and instead living as people who sow peace with our words, actions, and choices. It means standing with the vulnerable, boldly confronting injustice, and refusing to accept war as the final word. In a world aching for hope, may we dare to embody *shalom*. The good news is this: we are not alone in our pursuit of *shalom*. God promises to be with us and gives us each other—to guide, strengthen, and empower us as we work for peace, justice, and restoration.


READ

All humanity is made in the image of God. To slap another human is to slap the image of God. To lie to another human is to lie to the image of God. To exploit another human is to exploit the image of God. To kill another human is to kill the image of God. To declare war on another human, an ethnic group, a religion, or a nation is to declare war on the image of God.

Lisa Sharon Harper. (2018). *The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right*. Waterbrook, p 32-33.


 READ

The vision of wholeness, which is the supreme will of the biblical God, is the outgrowth of a covenant of *shalom* (see Ezekiel 34:25), in which persons are bound not only to God but to one another in a caring, sharing, rejoicing community with none to make them afraid.

Walter Brueggemann. (2001). *Peace (ubt Series)*. Chalice Press, 15.

Where is God?


 SAY

Let's take a few minutes and discuss the scripture and the theology quotes.


 ASK

- How does the Bible's idea of peace—*shalom*—differ from our everyday understanding of peace?
- Micah 4:1–4 gives us a picture of God's vision for peace. What stands out to you in that vision, and how is it different from the way the world is today?
- Micah 4:3 says, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; no nation will fight against another, and they will stop learning about war." This means taking tools made for war and destruction and turning them into tools that help grow food and create life. What would we need to do today to make this vision of peace happen in a world still full of war and violence?
- Throughout Scripture, God keeps inviting people back into *shalom*. Why do you think God continues to offer peace, even when people keep breaking it?
- Lisa Sharon Harper writes that harming another person is harming the image of God. How does this idea deepen your understanding of why peace matters so much to God?
- *Shalom* is something God calls us to work for, even when it's hard. What do you think it looks like to actively live into God's peace in your own life?

Alignment activity

ALIGNING WITH GOD (10 MIN)



Now, let's take some time to imagine what *shalom*—God's perfect peace—could look like in our world today. You'll each get a peace sign shape to work with. On it, write or draw your ideas about what true peace means to you. Think beyond just "no fighting." What would it feel like? What would people be doing? How would communities and nature look? What changes would need to happen so that everyone could live safely, happily, and fairly? Don't worry about getting it perfect—this is your chance to dream big and think creatively about the kind of world God invites us to help build. When you're done, we'll share some of our ideas and see how they connect to the vision of *shalom* from the Bible.



- What part of your peace sign feels most important to you? Why?
- Now that we have explored both the reality of war and God's design for *shalom*, where do you find hope in the midst of it all?
- What is one small way you could help bring the vision of *shalom* closer to reality in your own community or life?
- How can you use your voice and your influence for good?

Prayer

CLOSING ACTIVITY (5 MIN)



READ

Holy and Gracious God,

We pray for the people of the world who live with the realities of war each day; for their countries and their leaders.

We pray for all those who are afraid; that your everlasting arms hold them in this time of great fear.

We pray for all those who have the power over life and death; that they will choose for all people's life, and life in all its fullness.

We pray for those who choose war; that they will remember that you direct your people to turn our swords into ploughshares and seek for peace.

We pray for leaders on the world stage; that they are inspired by the wisdom and courage of Christ.

Above all, Lord, today we pray for peace. We ask that you use our hands and feet, our hearts and voices, all we have to be instruments of your peace in this world.

And we ask this in the name of your blessed Son.

Lord have mercy.

Amen

Adapted from the Prayer for Ukraine by The Methodist Church, UK.

God Section Worksheet

As you read the theological section, use the boxes below to take notes. As you listen or after completing the statements as a way to process the talk and quotes.

CONFUSED

These concepts, ideas, or points the author has made don't make sense to me...

ASK: Who can shed some light on this?

MY EXPERIENCE

This helps me see my own experience of people, the world, God or myself in this new way...

ASK: Who else has had this experience?

MY BELIEFS

I'd never before thought about this idea that the author presents:

Do you believe the author is correct? Why or why not?

ASK: Who else doesn't believe it? Who does?

GRASP IT

Another way to explain one of the author's main points is this...

ASK: Do others think that's the main point?