

A Christocentric Peacemaking Response to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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Introduction

Israel-Palestine is home to a controversial conflict that involves the clash of two people groups and their right to land, a history seeped with violence and oppression, and brave individuals who daily choose to risk their lives to love their enemy in the midst of struggle and chaos. Beginning any dialogue with the topic of Israel-Palestine can immediately become divisive, however it remains an important and timely issue to examine. This conflict is complex, and gaining a full understanding requires a deep exploration of historical facts and the current realities on the ground. My interest in exploring this topic is compelled by my personal experience of having a misguided perception of the history of this conflict, as well as the way in which my evangelical Christian church teaching has influenced my way of thinking about Israel-Palestine. Followers of Jesus are called to be peacemakers in a world filled with violence and wars. There are, however, some movements within American Christianity that have a tendency to embrace ideologies and positions that unintentionally support violence and prohibit peace within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I seek to counteract this trend by exploring how followers of Jesus can transform their response to this conflict in light of their call to be active peacemakers within this world. This response first entails learning the collective memory, history, and current realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with an emphasis on the often-unheard narrative of Palestinians. The second step is to deconstruct theologies and ideologies that hinder peace. Lastly, Christians must examine the peacemaking practices that Jesus modeled in the context of his day. Followers of Jesus must respond to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with the posture of a peacemaker, and through intersectionality, Christians can reflect this posture in their response to the conflicts directly before them as well.

This thesis project will be accompanied by a study guide (see Appendix A) that is meant to be experienced in a Christian group context, which will equip its readers with an in-depth review of the historical facts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This study guide will also go into detail about the current reality of the occupation of Palestinian land and people based on the narratives of Palestinians themselves. Lastly, an overview of how Jesus modeled perfect peacemaking will also be incorporated. This study guide will be a useful and immersive resource to gain an alternative perspective of the conflict than what is often promoted in American media. My aim for this subject is to inspire individuals to apply intersectionality and promote dialogue about the systemic oppression that certain people groups on the margins of society experience within communities in America. By doing so, I believe followers of Jesus can be moved to reflect a loving and compassionate response to those conflicts as well.

In order to gain a greater understanding of ways in which Christians can more effectively respond to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I partnered with The Global Immersion Project (TGIP), a faith-based organization that is dedicated to equipping Christians as everyday peacemakers. My experience with TGIP consisted of an immersive trip in Israel-Palestine, which has largely laid the foundation of my research. I was able to collect ample data through interviews and observations within Israel-Palestine and America, and this thesis is further shaped by the stories of my Israeli, Palestinian, and American informants. My time with TGIP also revealed the importance of understanding that peace is not limited to a tranquil feeling, and it does not mean the absence of disagreements and diverging realities. According to the founders of TGIP, peace is “the holistic repair of severed relationships” (Huckins and Swigart 33). This holistic restoration involves people and relationships that have been broken through ideologies, perceptions, and oppressive systems that teach to exclude rather than to embrace.

Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace, is a prevalent concept throughout the entirety of the Bible, and Jesus modeled what active and immersive peacemaking looked like in practice. Followers of Jesus are invited to do the same through the “embrace [of] their identity as God’s beloved and their vocation as seekers of their sister’s and brother’s shalom” (Huckins and Swigart 33). Christians have an opportunity to forge authentic peace within Israel-Palestine by learning the story of a perceived enemy, deconstructing beliefs that hinder peace, and embracing a more Christocentric approach and understanding of peacemaking.

Diverging Narratives Among Israelis and Palestinians: Learning the Story of a Perceived Enemy

The lack of understanding the historical facts and narratives of both Israelis and Palestinians is one prevalent contribution to various American Christian responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some of these responses, at times, include preconceived notions that Palestinians are dangerous and inferior to Israelis and that all Arabs want to “drive Israel into the sea” (Smith). An interview with a prominent pastor in America revealed the belief that “there were no such things as Palestinians... Palestine is a made-up word and never existed” (Smith) This pastor also confused Palestine as being a Muslim religion (Smith). This lack of understanding and awareness of an entire culture and people group is largely due to how Americans are often only hearing a one-sided narrative of this conflict. Alison Weir’s *Against Our Better Judgment* is an extensive text that notes how America has been inundated with only the Israeli narrative. This phenomenon is primarily due to America’s steadfast support of pro-Israeli policies through financial and military funding, as well as powerful pro-Israeli lobbyists’ influence on media sources that are partial to the Israeli perspective (85-93).

Religious ethnocentrism, heightened by the rise of Islamophobia in the United States, also informs the American Christian response to this conflict. Some experts state that this ethnocentrism “is induced by a very fundamental need, i.e. the need to establish and maintain a positive social identity. [This] is why people socially categorize others as inferior in comparison to their own group” (Pieterse 71). Mayer’s research describes how he found that Christian fundamentalists appear to be America’s biggest supporters of the Jewish state, and his surveys reveal that the conflict is often portrayed here in America as “Muslim Arabs verses Jewish Israelis” (706). This is significant as Christian fundamentalists have been very vocal about their critical views of Islam, which serves as a hindrance for feelings of empathy or solidarity for Palestinians who are predominantly of the Islamic faith (Mayer 706). While there is a thriving population of Christian Palestinians in the Holy Land, it seems that “globalization has blurred the connection between religion, a pristine culture, a specific society, and a territory,” thus promoting the idea that all Palestinians are of the Islamic faith (Roy 427). Both religious and racial discrimination, in any form, are inherently hindrances to peace because they are tools for dehumanization. Only associating with the Israeli viewpoint hinders any ability to see the plight of the Palestinian as well as distorts and supports already skewed views that American Christians may hold toward the Palestinian community.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie illustrates how threatening a single narrative can be in her TedTalk “The Danger of a Single Story.” She notes, “It is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place or person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar” (Adichie). Intentionally immersing into the history and narratives of both Israeli and Palestinian

viewpoints will better equip Christians with a more knowledgeable and empathetic response to this conflict. When doing so, it is important to be deliberate about “moving off the grid of dominant culture and into the lives of those of non-dominant culture” (Swigart “Peacemaking Orientation”). This can be achieved by intentionally moving oneself closer to those that can be found thrust to the margins of Israeli and Palestinian society, behind towering cement walls, and beneath the weight of a systemically unjust system, the Palestinian people themselves. Next, the collective memory of both Israeli and Palestinian culture will be examined in order to provide historical context to this conflict.

Israeli Collective Memory

A collective memory of trauma has played a significant role in both Israeli and Palestinian cultures and societies. The article “Perceptions of the Holocaust of Palestinian Young Adults, Citizens of Israel” notes that the general collective memory of any group “contains the narratives, symbols, models, myths, and events that mold the culture of the group. . . Its intention is not to provide an objective history of the past but, rather, to tell about the past in a way that is functional for and relevant to the society’s existence and future aspirations” (Litvak-Hirsch et al. 232). This article continues to describe how for Israelis, this memory of trauma is a symptom of the years of oppression and genocide that occurred within the Holocaust (Litvak-Hirsch et al. 233). The trauma and fear of this reoccurring to the Jewish people has largely shaped the highly militarized state of Israel that exists today.

I observed a symptom of this fear while visiting the Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem. While making my way through the exhibition, I was captivated by how many Israeli soldiers and police officers were walking through the museum in order to remember as well. Later, I was informed that it is part of their training to visit Yad

Vashem multiple times throughout their period of serving the state (Schrock 8 May 2017). This type of requirement reinforces a victim mentality, which is highly dangerous for a group that is in a place of power and dominance over another (Schrock 8 May 2017). Litvak-Hirsch notes that many Israeli young adults “see one of the lessons of the Holocaust as the need to protect Israel from the ‘Arab threat,’” which correlates with Israel’s extreme security practices and oppressive policies toward the Arab population (Litvak-Hirsch et al. 233). It was important to go to the Yad Vashem memorial, nevertheless, to understand more of the Israeli narrative as this is a people group that has suffered severe oppression and genocide. Learning more of this narrative allows for a greater understanding of their society that is deeply devoted to security and survival. It is imperative to note, however, that there are multiple Israeli narratives. Many Israelis are dedicated to forging peace with their Palestinian neighbors and seeing the end of their state’s militarization.

Palestinian Collective Memory

Just as Israeli society has been influenced by a collective memory of trauma and suffering, the collective memory of Palestinians is also filled with a distressing past. Their traumatic history, however, is largely still a reality for them today. Through researching the history of how the state of Israel came to be, as well as collecting personal accounts of numerous Palestinians, I came to understand that this people group has suffered immensely for the steadfast goal of the creation and continued safety of the state of Israel. As I mentioned before, this account is not well-known among certain parts of American Christianity due to the constant immersion into only the Israeli narrative.

In his text, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Israeli historian Ilan Pappé provides widespread detail about how the history of the state of Israel came to be established in 1948 and thereafter. Pappé notes that it was the Jewish Zionist movement that was very intentional with its

desire to colonize the country and create a “purely Jewish state, both as a safe haven for Jews from persecution and a cradle for Jewish nationalism” (Pappé 15). This colonization unfolded as extreme and deliberate strategizing took place, and a detailed outline called Plan Dalet, created by Ben Gurion in the late 1940’s, which called for the “systematic and total expulsion” of the indigenous Palestinian population (Pappé 28). The reality of this expulsion took the form of colossal massacres of Palestinian villages by armed Jewish militias. Most notable was the Deir Yassin massacre of 1948 where Jewish forces murdered the young and old, as well as raped a number of the women (Pappé 90). This massacre left nearly all of the village’s inhabitants dead, and Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, two of the commanders that were in charge of these events, would later become Prime Ministers of Israel (Weir 59-60). Massacres were the driving force behind the fleeing of thousands of Palestinians from their homes.

Huda, a Palestinian woman now living in Seattle, whose own family was displaced out of their home in Jerusalem during this time of ethnic cleansing, was able to describe her family’s experience and details of that time period. She stated, “Five hundred and twenty Palestinian villages disappeared off the face of the country” due to this ethnic cleansing that destroyed villages and homes and banished the indigenous population (Gibbons). Huda described how the 750,000 Palestinian refugees that were created from the armed Jewish militias in the late 1940’s fled into the surrounding Arab nations. Her own family heard about the massacres, which caused some to escape to Egypt and others to Lebanon in early 1948. That following May, the state of Israel was declared. Upon this declaration, an absentee landlord law was put into place, which stated that if people were not living in or on their property, it immediately became the property of the state of Israel (Gibbons). Huda’s family could not return to their home in Jerusalem, and they “have not been compensated to this day” (Gibbons). Thousands of Palestinian families have

had the same fate as Huda's, and though they remain unable to return, many still possess the keys to their original homes. After seeing numerous keys hanging in the homes and businesses of Palestinians, I was informed that they are known as "keys of hope" because they represent the hope of Palestinians to one day return to their family's homes that they were banished from many years ago (Schrock 6 May 2017).

May 15th, 1948 also represents the diverging narratives of Palestinians and Israelis. This day is widely celebrated by Israelis every year because it is the day that the state of Israel was officially declared. For Palestinians, however, it is known as the Nakba, or "catastrophe," as this is the day that Palestinians spend in remembrance of the ethnic cleansing of their people. While this may have happened many years ago, like the Holocaust, it is ingrained in the collective memory of Palestinians whose current reality is not considerably different because they now live life under Israeli military occupation. Runa, a 23-year-old Palestinian woman, describes this occupation, commenting, "[the Holocaust] is their trauma, but it still influences [Palestinians'] destiny" (qtd. in Livtak-Hirsch 231). The Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and bodies is a symptom of Jewish Holocaust victims' fears of genocide happening again, resulting in a new victim beneath the old.

Life Under Occupation for the Security of Israel

Along with a limited understanding of the historical narrative of Palestinians, it is apparent that some American Christians lack a familiarity about the current reality that Palestinians face under Israel's military regime. As previously stated, this is largely due to how America is frequently only immersed in the Israeli narrative because what is often reported in mainstream media rarely depicts the Palestinian side of the story. The article "Women for Ending Israeli Occupation in Palestine and for Building Peace" gives a glimpse into the occupation based on interviews with

various Israeli and Palestinian women activists that are seeking peace and justice for Palestinians. These women relay how “occupation” and “war” are inadequate words to define what is happening in Israel-Palestine because “occupation is merely one phase of aggression,” faced by Palestinian people, and “war does not describe the aggression of an occupying army that uses the most advanced and sophisticated armaments against a virtually defenseless population” (Kabasakal Arat 516-517).

Upon my immersion into Israel-Palestine, I came face-to-face with the oppression and dehumanization of the Palestinian population. What I found most ironic is that for the sake of Israel’s security, the security of another people group has been entirely stripped away. I observed Arab and other darker-skinned people being heavily frisked at Israeli security stations while I, a white American woman, walked by freely. I saw black water tanks sitting on top of the homes of Palestinians because they have an unequal access to water in their own land (Jubran). I heard the twenty gunshots of an Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldier that massacred a 16-year-old Palestinian girl in East Jerusalem for allegedly having a knife, and I traveled down one of the designated Israeli-only roads, which Palestinians are forbidden to use. In addition to being banned from Israeli-only roads, Palestinians also have to use a specific version of identity cards and license plates on vehicles. Contrary to being separate but equal, these requirements are physical representations of the lack of freedom that Palestinians face through the unequal access to basic human rights and movement of their physical bodies (Vosgueritchian). This discriminatory system is set in place because Palestinians are seen as foreigners in their own native land (Vosgueritchian).

I would have been unable to learn many of these details of Palestinian lives if I were in Israel-Palestine as a typical Christian tourist. Because the state of Israel controls tourism by

requiring tour guides to be licensed through the state, many Christian tours of the Holy Land only depict the stones of where Jesus once walked and the narrative of the Jewish people. There is much more to the current reality of the land than what typical Christian tourism reveals. It only requires trailing away from the paths of sightseeing and into the lives of the people in the center of this conflict to know the extensive suffering that Palestinians face.

One of the largest “keys of hope,” specifically designed by Palestinians, lies at the opening of the Aida Refugee camp. This specific key was cleverly made on the same day that Israel made the largest Israeli flag in the country (Jubran). This type of resilience and creative memorialization can be seen throughout the camp as the names of Palestinian children, men, and women that have died in the occupation have been painted on the walls that were built to hold the refugees in. I was informed by a Palestinian interviewee that the possibility of the refugees being shot by IDF soldiers is a constant reality (Jubran). Many of the mothers are missing children because soldiers are known for conducting raids in the night where they take, imprison, and torture under-aged kids. There are also numerous health problems that the refugees face because of the constant stream of tear gas canisters that are thrown into the camp that is “a little cage” for its inhabitants (Jubran). These circumstances are what Palestinians are exposed to throughout the country, yet Palestinians are often deemed as the threat to Israeli existence because of the violent acts that some do in order to resist the occupation of their land and bodies. While violence of any kind is not acceptable and always hinders peace, this idea was put into perspective by Ben, a peacemaker dedicated to waging peace among the African-American community and police officers in Oakland, CA. He explained, “When you can rejoice in the narrative of David slaying the giant, yet can’t see the rock in the hand of the oppressed in a similar way, it is because of your blindness and not the failure of the oppressed” (McBride).

Knowing and understanding the diverging narratives among this conflict is essential to forging peace. When followers of Jesus understand the reality of suffering that Palestinians face, this allows for a greater understanding of this conflict and why Palestinians resist the continued occupation of their land. This narrative also shows that this people group remains on the underside of systemically unjust policies that stem from a Zionist goal of self-preservation through the ethnic cleansing and excluding of the other.

American Christianity's Support for Israel

Along with understanding the historical and current realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is essential for American Christians to recognize how peace has been hindered through various theologies and ideologies. McNeil describes the chilling effects that distorted theology can have on society based on the events of apartheid South Africa (22). She states that it was “distorted Christian theology... that fueled many Afrikaners’ belief that they were God’s chosen people... [and were] biologically superior to other races,” thus leading to a segregated society in which white South Africans inflicted ruthless treatment on the non-white population (22-23). Followers of Jesus owe it to Palestinians, as well as every other marginalized community, to challenge any beliefs and positions that knowingly or unknowingly justify the oppression of others. It is also imperative that Christians learn to approach the Bible and Christianity in an inclusive way that aims to embrace instead of exclude. Miroslav Volf states, “Jesus condemned the world of exclusion – a world which the innocent are labeled evil and driven out and a world in which the guilty are not sought out and brought into the communion” (73-74). Deconstructing these positions is important to developing a Christian response that reflects effective peacemaking positions and the inclusive nature of God.

I can best narrate the trend of American Christianity's support for Israel based on my own personal experience. I grew up in an evangelical Christian home and church, where I was taught many pro-Israeli ideas. I was told to refrain from praying for world-peace because war, especially in the Middle East, was needed for Jesus' return. My own non-Jewish mother even sent me off to college with an extraordinarily large Israeli flag to hang in my dorm room at my private Christian university. Romanticizing Jewish culture and the Jewish right to the Holy Land is what I assumed to be normal of any Christian because I was taught that the Jewish people were exclusively chosen by God, thus allowing them the necessary right to the land of Israel. I was oblivious to any of the effects that this way of thinking had on the lives of Palestinian people.

I personally observed the phenomenon of Christian Zionism during my first trip to Israel-Palestine several years ago with a team of evangelical Christians. This trip was a typical Holy Land tour where we saw all of the major tourist destinations. What I did not expect to see was the giant looming separation wall that intentionally divides Israelis from Palestinians, and even Palestinians from Palestinians, running throughout the West Bank. The portion of the wall that I saw was in Bethlehem, the city where Jesus was born. Many questions came to my mind as I looked at this structure that provoked feelings of anger, sadness, and confusion, and these questions continued as I passed through Israeli checkpoints with ease because I was not a Palestinian. As appalling as these sights were, what was equally as shocking was how it appeared that most of the Christians that I was with lacked this same uneasiness as I was feeling and were not taken aback by these discriminatory policies and infrastructures. I quickly learned that asking any questions, or any details regarding the conflict and occupation, was extremely discouraged because most everyone advocated for the need of the Jewish possession of the land. It became very apparent during this trip that Palestinians were perceived as an enemy among the people

that I was traveling with. I also realized that this land of peace is not so peaceful at all, and perhaps American Christianity's embrace of positions that unintentionally support discrimination has played a role in that.

Deconstructing Christian Zionism and Dispensationalist Theology

The Jewish Zionist colonization of Palestine has been largely reinforced by a Christian Zionist ideology since before the nation of Israel was officially declared. Bush depicts Christian Zionism as “a mission movement that believes in a literal fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of the land to the Jews, regardless of the implications for Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza” (Bush 144). This belief system is reinforced by an interpretation of biblical scriptures to promote Israel's exclusionary policies that have stripped basic human rights from the Palestinian population. Christian Zionism is known to promote the idea that there is no distinct Palestinian culture or people group while rejecting the historical reality of Palestinian's presence in the land (Bush 144, 145). The Zionist movement also brands Palestinians to be terrorists and supports the use of militarized force to execute God's supposed mission of Jewish control over the land (Bush 144, 145). Supporters of Christian Zionist beliefs may not realize the implications that this interpretation of the Bible has among the Israeli-Palestinian society, which is why knowing and understanding these contextual realities is necessary.

Walter Brueggemann echoes this notion when he describes the importance for Christians to deconstruct Christian Zionism through reinterpreting biblical scriptures that are often used to support exclusionary policies, especially in light of the realities that Palestinians suffer from. According to Brueggemann, when Christians interpret the Bible in a way to support Zionist positions, it leads to an oversimplification of the text that lacks desperately needed critical thinking and factual realities on the ground (11). The notion of Israel being God's chosen people

that is described in Deuteronomy 7:6 is used in Zionist presumptions to exclude those that are perceived to be “unchosen” (i.e. Palestinians) in light of this scripture. Brueggeman, however, describes God’s intended inclusivity by how the Genesis narrative provides “an awareness of the other peoples and an effort to make a place for them as those who are blessed by the life of Israel” (22-23). Regardless of who is perceived to be chosen or “unchosen,” embracing destructive policies and oppressive practices by anyone is not reflecting an inclusive Jesus and his call to neighbor love. Rabbi Michael Lerner states that “Christian Zionists are not serving the interests of the Jewish people or being loyal to God when they champion oppressive policies that violate the most frequent command in the Torah... to ‘love the stranger/ the Other,’” (qtd. in Bruggemann ix). Followers of Jesus have an opportunity to love the Jewish people of Israel while simultaneously loving Palestinians by advocating for their freedom from the Israeli occupation. This will require Christians to deconstruct any hardened beliefs that unintentionally allow for the oppression of Palestinian people, and any other people group, no matter who the oppressor is.

Robert O. Smith makes a bold address to Christians in his article, “Anglo-American Christian Zionism: Implications for Palestinian Christians,” by challenging Zionist framework in light of the Christian Palestinian population. By supporting Zionism, Christians are not only unintentionally supporting a system that perpetuates unjust actions towards the entire Palestinian population, but also for their own brothers and sisters in Christ. In an interview with Michael¹, a Christian Palestinian from the West Bank, he described how, as Palestinian Christians, they are “never persecuted by Muslims, only by Israeli soldiers,” through the occupation (Vosgueritchian). For the sake of all Palestinians, Christians must “call the churches of the world

¹ Name has been changed for privacy purposes.

to ‘revisit fundamentalist theological positions that support certain unjust political options with regard to the Palestinian people’ [and] ‘not to offer up a theological cover-up for the injustice [Palestinians] suffer’” (qtd. in Smith 28).

Smith continues to describe Christian Zionism as “political action informed by specifically Christian commitments, to promote or preserve Jewish control over the geographic area now containing Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. It is best understood as a political application of Anglo-American apocalyptic hope” (28). This apocalyptic hope that Smith speaks of is a reference to dispensationalist theology, which is largely why Zionism is so popular among various Christians (Jubran). This theology promotes the Jewish return to Palestine as a sign of the second coming of Christ. This return of the Jewish people is needed for the Third Temple to be erected where the Dome of the Rock is currently standing in order to usher in Christ’s return. The Dome of the Rock is the third holiest site in all of Islam (Jubran). A large percentage of the Palestinian population is of the Islamic faith, so this goal of erecting the Third Temple prohibits peace in this conflict because it would require the eradication of one of Islam’s most divine spaces. From the Muslim Palestinian perspective, one of their holiest sites must fall to the same fate as many of the Palestinian people’s homes and villages– demolished, all in order for Christ to return (Jubran).

Another way in which dispensationalist theology prohibits peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be found in TGIP co-founders Jer Swigart and Jon Huckin’s book *Mending the Divides*. They explain dispensationalism as “a reading that identifies God’s declared plan in the world as moving everything toward a violent end” (47). Because of this intended violence, this theology “renders peacemaking as not only a waste of time, but also antithetical to what God is doing in the world. Dispensationalism generates a form of faithfulness that looks more like

survival than participation and requires us to label and avoid our enemies rather than to know and love them” (47). This apocalyptic hope that entails the support of war and violence diverges from the life and shalom that Jesus stood for. Dispensationalist theology is complex and has evolved into a hardened theology. Similar to Christian Zionism, it lacks contextual realities and room for love, embrace of the “other,” and the forging of peace. Dispensationalism must be analyzed and re-examined by Christians to create room for understanding in this conflict. Deconstructing theological beliefs, ideologies, and the inner workings of faith can be a vulnerable and challenging experience, but for the sake of the Palestinian population, it is imperative to do in order to respond to this conflict as peacemakers.

“Burger King Christianity”

American cultural trends also play a role in the formation of ideological belief systems. According to Geert Hofstede’s Cultural Index, Americans have an exceedingly high rate of individualism (“Compare Countries”). Individualism means that the “interests of the individual prevail over the interests of the group” (Hofstede 91). While these individualistic ideas may prevail, the phenomenon of how American Christians bring their individualistic ideas and “engage in spiritual consumerism,” or “Burger King Christianity” is explained by Christina Cleveland in her text *Disunity in Christ* (26). American Christians often attend churches that best fit their own culture and values, thus isolating themselves from meaningful, cross-cultural interactions or engaging with people whose thoughts are different from their own. This is called “group polarization,” where “in the absence of diverse influences, homogenous group members tend to adopt more extreme and narrow-minded thinking as time passes” (Cleveland 27). While being surrounded with like-minded people whose culture, religious denomination, and ideas are similar can produce feelings of safety and normalcy, this type of lifestyle may lack needed depth

and growth. Cleveland continues to discuss the importance of cross-cultural contact through the idea of contact theory (153). She describes this as,

“a way of bringing groups together in order to reduce prejudice. The idea is that if group separation causes inaccurate perceptions of other groups, negative emotions and discrimination... then under certain conditions, direct contact between members of different groups will reverse those inaccurate perceptions... It works by forcing individuals to see the similarities between themselves and the other group. In the end, people often find that their negative beliefs about the other group are overgeneralized and untrue” (153-154).

If Christians are called to cause redemptive change through peacemaking, then this will require engaging with those whose thoughts, theological beliefs, political views, and culture are different from their own.

The Christian Response: A Christocentric Approach to Peacemaking

Daude, a Christian Palestinian from the West Bank, declares, “The world will be a different place when North American Christians follow the Jesus they talk about” (qtd. in Huckins and Swigart 19). A Christian’s response to conflict, whether interpersonal or international, should be based on the understanding of who Jesus is and what he taught in the context of his day. It should also come from a place of knowing that peacemaking is central to what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Intentionally living out a peacemaking approach based on these ideas is essential to a framework that embraces the many narratives of conflict and taking responsibility for various Christian beliefs that hinder peace. If “shalom is the biblical ideal for human well-being,” (Myers 97) then understanding the context of the Prince of Peace and the life he led on this earth is necessary.

Jesus on the Underside of Empire: The Posture of a Peacemaker

Just as Israel-Palestine is under Israeli occupation in this current day, the Roman Empire occupied the land of Palestine when Jesus walked the earth, and Jews were an occupied people in the midst of this Roman rule (Wink 23). As a Jew on the underside of this empire, Jesus did not remain silent and obedient to the demands of his occupants. Instead, he actively engaged in challenging both Jewish and Roman power structures with radical humility, compassion, and nonviolence. He did not passively accept the existence of Roman rule and legalistic worship because he was not only a peacemaker, “but also a peace disturber... shaking up the status quo to reflect the inclusive nature of God’s love” (Love). He disturbed false peace, which exists from maintaining the status quo by silencing those beneath power structures, fixed his gaze on the marginalized, proclaimed the Gospel, and healed those who were sick and afflicted (*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* Matt. 4:23). His love for the other was not lived out unintentionally. He embraced a lifestyle and commitment of being in close proximity to people’s pain and dined with not only the religious elite, but also those deemed by society to be unworthy offenders. Jesus’ “notion of sin” was “exclusion,” and, “Rather than focusing on ‘unclean’ people Jesus focus[ed] on the *boundary* separating ‘clean’ from ‘unclean’” (Beck 78). His life was radical, and he eventually endured a highly political and violent death on a Roman cross, which was meant for rebel leaders (Wright 543). Jesus was a peacemaker by all accounts, and his life must compel Christians to not sit detached from the world in passivity, but to play an active role in its restoration.

Similar to the life that Jesus lived, Christians are also called into a dynamic and active relationship within humanity. This requires the church to not separate their faith from taking part in seeking the restoration of broken systems. This must include Christian ethics that seek to

“dismantle dehumanizing and destructive forces such as racism, colonialism, classism, sexism, ecological degradation, and seeks to cultivate conditions that enable right relationships within the Earths’ web of life and with God” (Moe-Lobeda 17). Reconciliation must also “never become a tool of the powerful to preserve the status quo,” (Katongole and Rice 148) because this is simply an act of keeping peace, a *false* peace, and there is a vast difference between peacekeepers and peacemakers. In order for Christians to authentically work towards restoration, they must “remove themselves from a place of privilege in order to be a student of conflict that seeks to listen and learn rather than to immediately fix” (Swigart “Key Conversation 1”). Too often are conflicts made worse, or people’s experiences misunderstood, through a goal of quick fixes rather than making time to be present and humbly listen.

Another fundamental aspect of peacemaking entails that peacemakers do not take a neutral stance when it comes to conflict. Just as Jesus stood for those ostracized within society and sought to dismantle oppressive systems, so should the church. This does not mean that Christians must stand against the oppressor, but to instead stand against the oppression and seek the transformation of the oppressors (Groody 97). There should neither be pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian sides, only pro-*people*, “while having a lens for those who need protection” (Schrock 8 May 2017). It is undeniable that Palestinians have been stripped of their humanity and dignity beneath the power structure of Israeli rule and are in dire need of the international community and the church to stand for Palestinian rights. Restoration is God’s desire, and Christians must embrace an active peacemaking approach that seeks to protect those beneath oppressive systems. Followers of Jesus must also actively speak truth to those in power for the transformation of those in control.

Along with understanding the many narratives within conflict and deconstructing beliefs that unintentionally hinder peace, there are several peacemaking postures that Christians can embrace in order to respond as peacemakers to this conflict. These postures include a love that transcends enemy lines, taking part in nonviolent action, the practice of lament, and embracing intersectionality.

Jesus and Neighbor Love, Enemy Love: Love of “The Other”

Jesus’ call to love “the other,” whether neighbor or perceived enemy, is integral to the Christian faith. In his text, *Exclusion and Embrace*, Miroslav Volf describes how people “are satisfied to assign ‘others’ the status of inferior beings [by] mak[ing] sure that they cannot live in our neighborhoods, get certain kind of jobs, receive equal pay or honor; they must stay in their proper place, which is the place we have assigned for them” (Volf 75). This accurately depicts the experience of a Palestinian among Israeli society, and various movements within Christianity support this exclusion. Jesus, however, invites Christians into a much grander and all-encompassing type of love and lifestyle through a posture of neighbor love, enemy love, and love of “the other.”

Lalsangkima Pachuau’s article, “Ethnic Identity and the Gospel of Reconciliation” describes the importance of a Christian’s mandate to love the other in light of peacemaking. The author communicates how “the church’s missionary calling of being other-centered rather than being self-centered is the theological foundation for a conciliatory existence” (40). This other-centeredness and love of the other can be cultivated through gaining “the capacity to see and recognize the ‘imago dei’ in [them]” (Pachuau 57). In order to do this, Pachuau describes that it is imperative to recognize the differing worldview and ethos of the other, or in the authors’ words, to “gain a respectful recognition of the otherness of the other” (Pachuau 59). Gaining any

type of this recognition entails drawing near to those that are cast aside within society, or those perceived as enemies.

Sam², a Christian Palestinian from the West Bank, emphasized this need to draw close to perceived enemies as an act of love. He described how so many Christians love the verse Matthew 5:43-48 when it advises followers of Jesus to love their enemies, but “love parallels relationship which involves proactively engaging in knowing and understanding your enemy” (S. Awad). Just as Jesus immersed himself into the lives of others, Christians are also called to intentionally move themselves into a space of knowing and understanding those in the margins of this world. This requires authentically engaging in the lives of others because love is “a matter of action” (Moe-Lobeda 169).

It is also important to understand that Jesus’ call to neighbor love in Luke 10:29-37 is not a passive suggestion for his followers and also transcends the people that live in close proximity to their homes. In this passage, the religious leader that asked Jesus who his neighbor was “wanted to limit the definition of neighbor so that the demand of neighbor love remained within his comfort zone” (Love). Neighbor love requires Christians to move beyond the race and religion of their own kind in order to know and love the many “others” within this world. Practically, American Christians can embrace this love by intentionally overcoming discriminatory and ethnocentric beliefs by drawing closer to the people that are ethnically, culturally, or religiously different from themselves. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this can be achieved by visiting a mosque or synagogue, intentionally seeking out different sources of media that describe alternative perspectives, and even inviting a Jewish or

² Name has been changed for privacy purposes.

Palestinian neighbor over for dinner. A powerful act of love is making oneself available to others in a way that seeks to humbly listen and learn from their life story.

Jesus and Nonviolence

In Walter Wink's *Jesus and Nonviolence*, he highlights Jesus' way of responding to oppressors outside of passivity and violence (13). Jesus radically challenged the authorities of his day by choosing to neither sit in indifference nor advocate for violent responses. Instead, he embraced creative nonviolence, which is an act of enemy love in and of itself. Jesus taught those on the underside of empire how to "recover the initiative... how to assert their human dignity in a situation... the rules are Caesar's, but not how one responds to the rules – that is God's, and Caesar has no power over that" (Wink 24). Wink notes that this act of asserting one's dignity to oppressors can be observed through Jesus' instruction to turn the other cheek, to give the inner garment, and to go the extra mile (14-24). Each of these actions were not meant to be obedient, passive answers, but creative ways for those who lived on the margins of Roman society to affirm their humanity to their oppressors. While Jesus embraced nonviolence, he did not intend for this to remain as "a technique for out-witting the enemy," but also as a way to love his enemies in order for them to possibly be transformed from their oppressive ways (Wink 45). Nonviolent action is an important posture and response for a peacemaker because violence of any kind is a hindrance to peace and further dehumanizes those that have also been created for love.

I observed this type of creative, nonviolent action in response to the unjust treatment in Israel-Palestine from Daude, a Christian Palestinian man. He owns a farm in the West Bank, which also serves as a camp to help traumatized children. This farm has been in his family for generations, and he still has the documents of land ownership dating back to the Ottoman Empire

(Nassar). Israeli officials have been relentless in trying to seize Daude's land for many years by "invoking twenty-two demolition orders and blocking one of the few roads to reach the farm" (Nassar). Two hundred and fifty olive trees that Daude's family and children's camp rely on have been destroyed by IDF soldiers and surrounding Israeli settlers. He, along with the guests of the farm, live in caves because he is unable to build any type of structures due to his land being located in Area C of the West Bank. Palestinians located in this area must receive permits from Israel to build infrastructure of any sort, even if it is on their own land. Daude has been fighting the Israeli court system for over thirty years, which he believes is "entirely built to be against Palestinians" (Nassar). Even though fighting legally through this system is expensive and discriminatory, Daude remains inspired by the creative nonviolence that Jesus teaches. He continues to use nonviolent resistance to assert his dignity and humanity to this oppressive system by being relentless in his pursuit for equality. Instead of passively letting the occupation run its course, Daude spoke of the importance of being active. Part of his active resistance has taken the form of a sign that sits at the opening of his farm that declares, "We Refuse to be Enemies" (Nassar). He also intentionally holds major celebrations with his family, camp children, and international volunteers in an area where the surrounding Israeli settlements can see in order to show the settlers that they are humans just like them. Based on numerous interviews with other Israeli and Palestinian peacemakers within the country, along with Daude, creative nonviolence is essential to a life of a peacemaker that follows in the steps of Jesus.

American Christians can embrace practices of creative nonviolence to advocate for the end of the occupation of Palestinian land and bodies as part of their response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This can be achieved by advocating for the United States to stop funding the Israeli military and by joining solidarity movements that host nonviolent protests and gatherings

that advocate for the rights of Palestinians. American Christians can further engage in creative nonviolence by educating others about the plight of Palestinians and by joining the Boycott Divest and Sanction (BDS) movement. While BDS has been determined to be controversial by some in the US due to America's popular support of the Jewish state, it is still a popular and effective approach to nonviolently advocate for Palestinian freedom (A. Awad). BDS can take the form of boycotting Israeli companies that are on occupied Palestinian land, divesting money from Israeli investments, and advocating for America to place sanctions on Israel for their inhumane treatment of Palestinians (A. Awad). This movement was recently nominated by a member of the Norwegian parliament for the Nobel Peace Prize for its nonviolent and peaceful strategy of seeking the equality of Palestinian citizens and the end of Israel's military rule (Moxnes). John³, a Christian Palestinian that works closely with a Jewish Israeli settler for peace in Palestine, declared that "his freedom will never be achieved by Jewish bodies, only through Jewish hearts" (J. Awad). American Christians must embrace creative nonviolence in order to reach the hearts of others for the sake of Palestinian suffering.

Learning to Lament

Throughout my time spent with TGIP, I learned that embracing the practice of lament is another fundamental posture and response within peacemaking. Katongole and Rice note that lament "is the cry of those who see the truth of the world's deep wounds and the cost of seeking peace. It is the prayer of those who are deeply disturbed by the way things are... Over and again, lament teaches us about both what must be learned and what must be unlearned in order to live well in a broken world" (78). The authors continue to add that at its core, lament is a cry that is directed towards God (78). Lament can be observed in the Bible when Rachel "refuses to be comforted

³ Name has been changed for privacy purposes.

for her children because they are no more” (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Jer. 31:15). Katongole and Rice describe how Rachel’s response “is a protest against the world [as she] allows the truth to shake her to the very core” (79). She did not allow soothing words to console her into a quick and easy comfort, and she was entirely immersed into pain. Jesus was also found absorbed in this type of lament in the gardens of Gethsemane when he “threw himself on the ground” and prayed for God to “remove this cup” from him (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Mark 14:35-36). Throughout his life, Jesus was close to the pain of people, and he allowed himself to be moved by their suffering. When he went to Mary and Martha to heal Lazarus, he saw the sorrow and grief of many and was “greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved... [he] began to weep” (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, John 11:33-35). Peacemakers are also called to be in this type of close proximity to pain in order to lament for what is broken in this world. Being active in advocacy work to seek the restoration of the marginalized is very important. It is just as essential to make time to be close to those that are broken, reflecting on the areas where there is room for personal growth, and being present in a way that seeks to listen rather than solve problems with quick and easy solutions.

Loni⁴ is an Israeli woman who has dedicated her life to peacemaking in her small village close to the border of Gaza. She does this by helping the Palestinians in Gaza to obtain permits in order to leave its walls. She is able to be close to the suffering Gazans through Facebook and other social media platforms to hear their stories to try to mobilize help in whatever way she can (Keidar). Her work is significant as her village has been the victim of deadly Qassam⁵ rockets

⁴ Name has been changed for privacy purposes.

⁵ Qassam is the name of a type of rocket that is launched by Hamas over the Gazan border into Israel.

launched by Hamas⁶ from the Gazan boarder. Though her life remains under constant threat, she described how “we must listen and try to understand people, but we can’t just stop at listening and dialogue; we have to let these people’s stories penetrate us, to move us. We have to be open to being moved so that way we can overcome our prejudices and move in love” (Keidar).

Christians must be willing to be compelled by those that suffer, including the Palestinian population, in order to open up their hearts, sit in the pain of others, and cry out to God from that sacred place. The practice of lament allows for this to happen.

Embracing Intersectionality

In accordance with the peacemaking postures and responses noted above, it is also important to embrace intersectionality among the vast experiences of people found beneath the weight of oppressive systems. Intersectionality is defined as “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups (“Intersectionality”). The question that I originally had when walking into my research was based on the idea of how American Christians can better respond to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in light of being a peacemaker. Soon throughout my research, however, that idea quickly evolved into wondering how American Christians can better respond to *any* conflict where there is a trend that involves continually taking the oppressor’s side. Jer Swigart encouraged the idea of intersectionality when he explained how “American Christians should look at justice within their own conflicts and allow that to ripple into the conflict in Israel-Palestine” (Swigart 11 May

⁶ Hamas is “the largest of several Palestinian militant Islamist groups ... [and] is designated a terrorist group by Israel, the US, EU, and UK” (“Profile: Hamas”).

2017). This transformed the way I perceived conflict and restoration by broadening the scope through intersectionality.

Nancy J. Ramsay describes how intersectionality is an interrelated approach that should be embraced by pastoral theologians in order for systems of oppression and social justice movements to be analyzed and engaged (454). She states that intersectionality is “a model that effectively addresses complex individual, relational, structural, and ideological aspects of domination and privilege arising from forms of difference treated oppressively” (455). Intersectionality is a framework that was originally created by women of color in order to understand “their experience of complex, multiple forms of oppression” (Ramsay 455). Intersectionality compels peacemakers to not isolate incidents of oppression, but to instead work towards analyzing the similarities in order to collaborate with others to work for justice in many areas. As Martin Luther King so eloquently stated, “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (qtd. in Davis 62). The events in Israel-Palestine are not isolated to the dusty roads of that country alone.

I had the privilege of learning from African American peacemakers while in Israel-Palestine, and gaining their perspective was highly influential in furthering my understanding of intersectionality. The systemic oppression that Palestinians face in Israel-Palestine is exceedingly similar to the experiences of African American communities across the United States. One of the African-Americans that I was traveling with exclaimed with tears falling from his eyes, “I’m all the way over here to learn about Gaza, but I have to go back home to America and live in my own Gaza. I’m tired of seeing fucking walls” (Holder). His Gaza that he speaks of are the streets of Oakland, California, and the walls of his context are that of a systemically oppressive system of redlining in America. Instead of being trapped behind physical walls like Palestinians, there

are parts of African American communities, and other communities of color, that are trapped behind the invisible walls that redlining creates through a “discriminatory practice by which banks, insurance companies, etc., refuse or limit loans, mortgages, insurance, etc., within specific geographic areas, especially inner-city neighborhoods” (“Redlining”). African Americans also face a similar plight as Palestinians through mass incarceration within the prison industrial complex, murder at the hands of police, and other forms of racial discrimination, which are discussed throughout Angela Davis’ *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*. Davis places an emphasis on the need for intersectionality in her explanation that, “when we are engaged in the struggle against racist violence, in relation to Ferguson, Michael Brown and New York, Eric Garner, we can’t forget the connections with Palestine... that when we see the police repressing protests in Ferguson we also have to think about the Israeli police and the Israeli army repressing protests in occupied Palestine” (45). Utilizing intersectionality when analyzing systems of oppression must not end with Palestinians and African-Americans, but also the story of Native Americans, apartheid South Africa, the LGBTQ community, and so many other places and people groups around this world. With intersectionality, collaboration can further take place, allowing for freedom movements to learn from, walk with, and believe in one another. American Christians must embrace this approach when responding to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because it can promote empathy and understanding towards the conflicts directly before them as well. Actively engaging in caring for the oppressed does not have to be unique to just Israel-Palestine. It can also be embraced in America, and around the world, as well.

The Project

There is a great need for more understanding of the various narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how to respond to this issue as peacemakers. In order to help meet this need, I have created an extensive six-session study that guides learners through the numerous topics that have been discussed within this paper: the historical realities of the conflict, the current Israeli occupation, various beliefs, theologies, and ideologies that hinder peace, peacemaking in light of who Jesus is, and intersectionality. The study is designed to be explored within a Christian group context with a heavy emphasis on personal reflection and community discussion. The resources that are used within the study are relative documentaries, short videos, and texts that are important to the topic of each session. Each study session is comprised of a written narrative of an interview with either an Israeli or Palestinian informant that was conducted in either Israel-Palestine or America. This was an important addition to the study because my goal is to highlight the narratives of the people that have lived, and are currently still living, at the epicenter of this conflict.

While this study was not designed for any specific church or organization, my hope is that it will be a helpful resource to those that want to embark on an immersive journey of learning about peacemaking in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It will make a very useful educational tool for church groups that are preparing to go to Israel-Palestine, or for any Christian-based learning community. While learners will need to invest in purchasing the external text resources required for each session, the study itself will be a free resource. My hope for the future is to continue developing more in-depth lessons over additional topics and important geographical locations within Israel-Palestine, which will ideally be a useful resource to bring while traveling in the country.

Conclusion

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a complex topic that is often portrayed inaccurately in the US due to American mainstream media sources and sects of Christianity that promote a one-sided narrative of the conflict. While Christians are called to be peacemakers within the world, there are some movements within American Christianity that have a tendency to embrace ideologies and positions that unintentionally prohibit peace within this conflict. In order to counteract this trend, Christians must embrace what it means to be a peacemaker. Followers of Jesus can do this by learning the various narratives and historical realities of this conflict and deconstruct theological beliefs that hinder peace. Christians must also embrace a Christocentric approach to peacemaking based on what Jesus taught in the context of his day, and apply intersectionality to the marginalization of the Palestinian people. As peacemakers, Christians must turn their gaze to the “others” within society and actively work to restore the unjust systems that are broken within this world.

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APPENDIX A.

THE UNDOING

*CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A
PEACEMAKER IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT AND WAR*



Introduction

The Undoing is an immersive study designed to guide followers of Jesus through the dynamic and complex conflict within Israel-Palestine in order to better understand how to advocate for peace and neighbor love in this context. This study was designed in order to provide a glimpse into Israel-Palestine that is not often reported in mainstream media here in America by elevating the personal stories of the Israeli and Palestinian people, themselves. With the help of outside texts and media sources that will accompany this study, learners will embrace what it means to be a peacemaker rather than a peacekeeper. Additionally, readers will work through the process of unlearning positions and beliefs that hinder peace, as well as be introduced to the history and diverging narratives of those at the epicenter of this conflict.

The Undoing will be a transformative process that is best experienced within a group context in order to discuss, learn, and challenge one another in the midst of beloved community. This study is designed with six sessions, and learners can move as fast or as slow as they would like to throughout this journey. Extensive reading will be required outside of meetings with the supplementation of Lectio Divinia prayer and meditations. The Undoing is meant to be an immersive learning experience, and it would be non-existent without the dedication, work, and stories of the people that have been on the transformative process of peacemaking long before this study's existence. Take heart, for there are people of great inspiration within these pages and resources. Be moved, be transformed, be undone.

Lectio Divina Explained

Lectio Divina is Latin for “divine reading” and is an ancient Catholic prayer method (Dees). There will be specific passages assigned at the end of each session for learners to reflect on using this method of prayer. Setting time aside to do this will assist with encountering scripture in a deep and meaningful way while on this journey. For those unfamiliar with Lectio Divina, there are several specific steps to follow, which are noted below:

1. Read – Slowly read the passage a few times to yourself and out loud. When reading, intentionally pay attention to any words or phrases that stand out to you within the scripture.
2. Meditate – Spend some time reflecting and meditating on the word(s) or phrase(s) that stand out to you along with the entire section of scripture as a whole.
3. Pray – After meditating, have a conversation with the Lord. Your prayer can consist of giving thanks, asking him for deeper revelations, or anything that you feel compelled to say or ask of him.
4. Contemplate – Spend a moment in silence with the Lord and embrace his presence.

Session Schedules and Homework

Session 1

- Introduction to Peacemaking and History of Conflict
 - Session 1 questions
 - Who are the peacemakers? Why Israel-Palestine?
 - A perceived enemy
 - Historical context of the conflict
 - Narratives of the people – Huda
 - Viewing: Jewish Voice for Peace’s “Israel Palestine Conflict Explained” on YouTube
 - Homework: Elias Chacour’s *Blood Brothers* chapters 1-6

Session 2

- The Current Plight of the Palestinian: Life Under Occupation
 - Session 2 questions
 - Occupied land and water
 - Occupied bodies
 - Narratives of the people – Laith
 - Viewing: Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi’s *5 Broken Cameras* documentary on YouTube
 - Homework: Elias Chacour’s *Blood Brothers* chapters 7-13, Walter Brueggemann’s *Chosen? Reading the Bible Amid the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*

Session 3

- Analyzing Theologies, Ideologies, and Beliefs that Prohibit Peace (pt 1)
 - Session 3 questions
 - Christian Zionism and dispensationalist theology
 - Ethnocentrism and Islamophobia
 - Narratives of the people – Loni
 - Viewing: “Twisted Scripture Joshua 14:9” by Greg Boyd on YouTube
 - Homework: Izzeldin Abuelaish’s *I Shall Not Hate* chapters 1-5

Session 4

- Analyzing Theologies, Ideologies, and Beliefs that Prohibit Peace (pt 2)
 - Session 4 questions
 - Christian Zionism and dispensationalist theology
 - Ethnocentrism and Islamophobia
 - Narratives of the people – Husam
 - Viewing: *With God on Our Side* on YouTube, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “The Danger of a Single Story” TedTalk
 - Homework: Izzeldin Abuelaish’s *I Shall Not Hate* chapters 6-9 and John Huckins and Jer Swigart’s *Mending the Divides: Creative Love in a Conflicted World*

Session 5

- Jesus in His Context: The Call to be Peacemakers
 - Session 5 questions
 - Neighbor love, enemy love: love of the “other”
 - Creative nonviolence
 - Learning to Lament
 - Narratives of the People – John
 - Viewing: “FULL FILM: A Reading of the Letter from Birmingham Jail” by The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity
 - Homework: Angela Davis’ *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*

Session 6

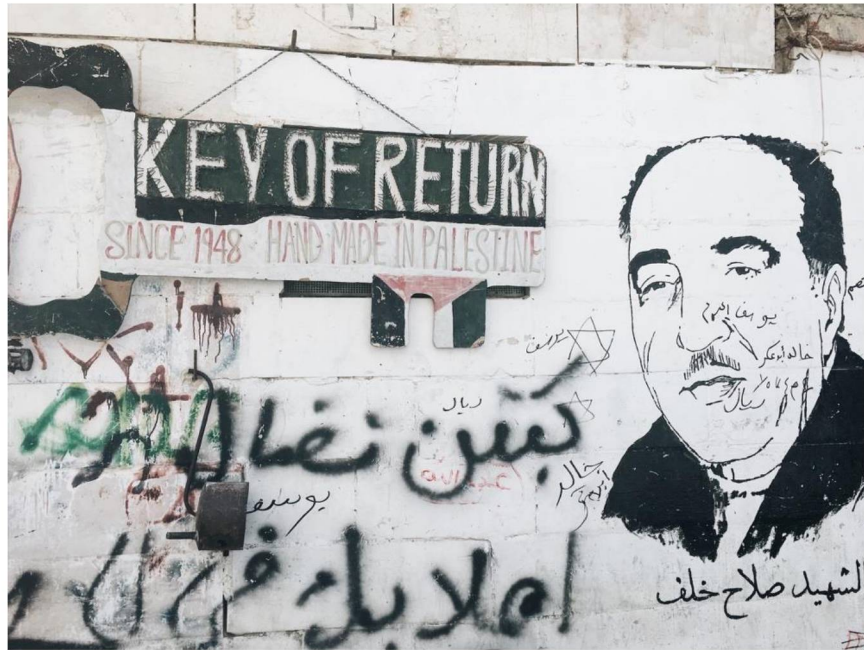
- Embracing Intersectionality and a Commissioning
 - Session 6 questions
 - Intersectionality
 - Commissioning as Peacemakers
 - Narratives of the People – Sam

Session 1 Pre-Meeting Questions

Thoughtfully work through these questions before gathering with your group to discuss.

1. What do you think it means to be a peacemaker, and what does that practically look like within your context?
2. What makes peacemaking so important within the Christian faith?
3. Contemplate on what you know about the Israel-Palestine conflict up until this point. What are your perceptions of the conflict, the nation of Israel, and the Palestinian people?
4. Meditate on who a perceived enemy is within this conflict. If you can think of one, what has contributed to that perception?

Session 1: Introduction to Peacemaking and the History of the Conflict



"... let them seek peace and pursue it" 1 Peter 3:11 "Blessed are the peacemakers ..." Matthew 5:9

Peacemakers

First and foremost, it is important to understand that peace does not mean the absence of disagreements, diverging narratives, or conflict between people or nations, but, in this context, is actually "the holistic repair of severed relationships" (Huckins and Swigart 33). If peacemaking simply meant managing situations in a way to decrease conflict, then this would promote the idea that peacemakers must be *passive* people that maintain the status quo of society in order to not stir up trouble. Sounds more like *peacekeepers*, right? Peacemakers are the *opposite* of peacekeepers. Peacemakers are active people that speak truth to the people in power, practice creative nonviolence in order to advocate for the oppressed, as well as actively engage in loving perceived enemies by moving themselves into a place where they can come to know and understand all sides of the narrative. Through these actions, and so many others, peacemakers can work towards the transformation of oppressors and exploitive systems as well as help to restore dignity for those suffering beneath power structures – all in order to reconcile relationships, which have been broken.

Peacemaking does not have to be a lofty concept, or something limited to only being achieved by governmental diplomats and political treaties. Peacemaking, in this context, is simply a lifestyle committed to living just as Jesus did when on this earth. He loved enemies, he challenged the authorities of oppressive systems during his day, he embraced creative nonviolence, and he contended for the marginalized. As followers of Jesus, **you** are invited to do the same. **You** are a peacemaker.

Why Israel-Palestine?

It just so happens that the land where Jesus was born is the home of a highly complex conflict that is often misunderstood within America due to policies and mainstream media sources that relentlessly support the nation of Israel and promote a one-sided narrative of the conflict. Even certain parts of Christianity sometimes promote false assumptions and ideas about the conflict that not only hinder peace, but also further hurt those that find themselves beneath the weight of a highly oppressive system. If peacemakers are supposed to play an *active* role in seeking the transformation of oppressors and exploitive systems, then why not begin with Israel-Palestine?

A Perceived Enemy

If your experience has been anything similar to what mine was, you may only know what you've heard through mainstream media sources and various church conversations about Israel-Palestine. Through those sources, you may have been taught to believe and assume that Palestinians are trying to take all of Israel's land, that they are all violent towards Israelis, or maybe that Palestine never even existed. Perhaps you are coming from the perception that all Israelis are the enemy, or maybe you find yourself without much insight about either people group within this conflict. Whichever road you are coming from, you are welcomed here in this space. I only ask that you be open to deconstructing your various perceptions by allowing the history, stories, and experiences of others to move you towards love and understanding of whoever your perceived enemy may be.

Historical Context of the Conflict

You will now watch a video that does a great job of explaining the historical context of the conflict. Pay attention to what you see and hear, take notes, and then discuss with your community afterwards. We will dive further into the Israeli and Palestinian historical experience afterwards.

Viewing: Jewish Voice for Peace's "Israel Palestine Conflict Explained" on YouTube

NOTES:



Centanni, Evan. "Political Geography Now." *Political Geography Now*.

Palestine existed long before the state of Israel was ever declared, and it has a long history of being occupied by various forces. Prior to the Israeli occupation, it was under British rule. In the early 1900's, a prominent British man, Lord Balfour, advocated for the creation of the purely Jewish homeland in Palestine, *a land that was already inhabited*. The United Nations would soon pass a partition plan to make way for this to happen, and Jewish Zionist forces would begin ethnically cleansing the land of its Arab inhabitants. Through colossal massacres and the annihilation of Palestinian homes, villages, and people, many Palestinians were forced to flee for their lives to surrounding Arab nations.

Elias Chacour's text demonstrates that Palestinians have always had a beautiful relationship with their land. Being a mostly agricultural society, it is part of their culture to deeply care for the land and homes that have been passed down throughout their families for generations. Imagine how painful and frightening it must have been for Palestinians when foreign governments, foreign people, and a foreign organization allowed and initiated the destruction of entire villages and the ethnic cleansing of their people for the formation of a purely Jewish state.

There has always been a community of Jewish people living among Palestinians, even since before the Holocaust, which played a major role in the mass immigration of Jews to Palestine. There was a time when Jews and Palestinians lived at peace before Jewish Zionism took over. The desire for a purely Jewish state was not, and still is not, a universal desire for all Jewish people. After the horrific events of the Holocaust and years of oppression and genocide, the Jewish people have suffered immensely, which is largely why the state of Israel is so dedicated to the security and survival of their

nation. This devotion to security, however, has stripped the entire Palestinian population's security, lives, and well-being away from them. There are, however, many Israelis that are risking their lives by working for peace and the end of the occupation in order to promote equality and inclusiveness for the Palestinians, and there are many Palestinians risking their lives to make peace with Israelis. You will come to know many of these people throughout this study. As you continue reading *Blood Brothers*, pay attention to the historical aspect of the conflict from Chacour's perspective.

Extended and optional reading for this session:
Ilan Pappé's *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*

Narratives of the People

Huda, Palestinian American

Born in Egypt to a Palestinian family that fled from the ethnic cleansing that was happening in Palestine and then eventually relocated to America, Huda describes the story of her family's journey and details of that time period.

"We never called it ethnic cleansing, we never knew that word. The first person to term it that word recently was a Jewish professor from Haifa named Ilan Pappé. Ilan Pappé began to dig up the true story from the archives of Israel. When they opened the archives, all the notes from the committees and what had happened in the early days of Israel were available to people, and this man's eyes nearly fell out of his head because he began to read the notes of Israeli generals.

In 1947 and early 1948, there were three Jewish militias. These three militias, young Jewish men and some women who were very dedicated and well-armed because some of them had fought in World War II, and because these governments who were fighting, like Britain and the US, helped them. So, they got arms and organized themselves very well and went into the villages and the towns and actually terrorized the Palestinians. At gunpoint, they would walk into your house and say 'In fifteen minutes you need to leave your house.' People were just frightened to bits. The British mandate did not allow Palestinians to have an army or a police force. There was no army or police force of their own. So Palestinians are absolutely defenseless and faced at gun point to leave their homes. These people had been living there for years and years and years and years, some of them centuries, and immediately within very few months, 750,000 Palestinians were made refugees.

If you were living in any place in the north of Palestine, your best place to go was into Lebanon, and if you were living anywhere in the South, the best place to go would be Gaza, or Jordan. You see? There are pictures of refugees crossing bridges and the Jordan River to go and live in Jordan, and Jordan wasn't ready for that yet. But they managed to somehow create refugee camps. The work of these three terrorist groups was to get rid of Palestinians and erase the villages and the towns. You have over five hundred and twenty [Palestinian] villages that have disappeared off the face of this country. How do they know where they are? Sometimes it's because the cactus keeps coming up. It doesn't stop. And what the World Zionist Organization created was a sort of administrative arm called

the Jewish National Fund. Its purpose was to get funds from governments and high-level organizations like the Rothschild's and wealthy Jews of the world to establish a foothold in Palestine for the Jews, so what they did was helped to ethnically cleanse the Palestinians and erase Palestinian existence. They planted trees over these villages and created parks, so when you see parks in Israel, ask to see what's under them, and don't accept anyone telling you there's nothing. Palestinians now who can go into Israel will go to where they know their village once was and they will sometimes see the leveling wasn't quite done right, and so you see stones of houses or mosques and they'll say 'Here's where our home was.' It's unbelievable. So this set the stage for everything.

In my case, we were living in Jerusalem. My extended and nuclear family lived in a suburb of Jerusalem and it fell on the west side, so it's now inside Israel. My family was reasonably well off. My uncles and aunts, along with a lot of other people, had lovely homes. My father and older folks had got together and said they had heard about the three armed militias and how they had done some horrible things - like rounding up all the men and boys in a village and shooting them. There were massacres - Deir Yassin, one of the more famous massacres because it was such a horrific massacre of Palestinians in 1947. So they got together, my family, and they decided that they would pack their things, but they would leave them in the houses because they thought this wouldn't last very long.

This would all resolve itself in a few months. After all, the British were in charge, and they had faith in the British. The British were enabling it, however. Anyway, we packed up and left and I remember some of the family went to Cairo, we went to Cairo, and some of the family went to Lebanon. People found apartments, something small to live in to buy their time until they would try to go back to their homes. Now, this was in early 1948, and in May of 1948, the Israelis declared a state of Israel. Little known fact, immediately upon the creation of the state of Israel, something was put into place called an absentee landlord law which said that if people were not living in or on their property, then it immediately became the property of the state. They caused people to leave and then they just appropriated their property. We have not been able to have compensation to this day" (Gibbons).

Lectio Divina Scripture: Matthew 5:2-11

"And he opened his mouth and taught them saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Session 2 Pre-Meeting Questions

Thoughtfully work through these questions before gathering with your group to discuss.

1. By now you have been introduced to Elias Chacour through his book *Blood Brothers*, which was written with the help of David Hazard. In the introductory section, Chacour asks Hazard, "Can you help me to say that the persecution and stereotyping of Jews is as much as an insult to God as the persecution of Palestinians?" (15). He continues to add, "I wish to disarm my Jewish brother so he can read in my eyes the words 'I love you.' I have beautiful dreams for Palestinian and Jewish children together" (15). Meditate on Chacour's statements. How is he exhibiting peacemaking behavior here? What other peacemaking behaviors are shown in chapters 1-6?
2. In chapter 4, Chacour asks, "Were there only two choices left to us – surrender to abuse or turn to violence?" (76). Discuss what you think the answer to this question is. Did Jesus do either of these actions?
3. Meditate on what Chacour describes in chapter 6. He states, "as my final two years in Nazareth passed, one conviction flickered dimly and grew: being a servant of God meant more than drifting above earth's struggles in an other-worldly realm like some pale figure in an icon. In this, I found encouragement from an unexpected source" (102). If being a servant is more than drifting above struggles, what do you think being a servant of God entails?
4. What did you learn about the culture of the Palestinian people-group in chapters 1-6?
5. Discuss and share parts of the reading that stood out to you. Why did they stand out to you?

Session 2: The Current Plight of the Palestinian: Life Under Occupation



"When you can rejoice in the narrative of David slaying the giant, yet can't see the rock in the hands of the oppressed in a similar way, it is because of your blindness and not the failure of the oppressed."— Ben McBride

Occupied Land and Water

As you learned from the last session, a lot of the land that belonged to Palestinians was violently claimed by armed Jewish forces in the process of Israel becoming a state. But what about the lay of the land today? The Green Line, or 1949 Armistice border, is the border between Israel and the West Bank that was agreed upon by Israel and the surrounding Arab nations. It is pictured in the map below as the green line.



(“Vocabulary of the Israel-Palestine Conflict”)

While the land on the right side of the green line is the Palestinian territory of the West Bank, in reality, the next map provides a more accurate picture of how much land Palestinians actually have. The 1995 Oslo II Accords separated the West Bank into three different areas that are represented in different colors. Area A is fully under the Palestinian Authority, while Area B is partially under Palestinian control and still under Israeli military jurisdiction. 61% of the West Bank is Area C, which is under full Israeli control of security and civil affairs. This involves planning, laying infrastructure, and development (“Planning Policy in the West Bank”). Area C is not only where illegal Israeli settlements and designated military zones are located, but also where much of the most fertile land throughout the West Bank can be found as well. Palestinian villages that fall in Area C cannot build any type of infrastructure without Israel’s approval, and if they do, it will be subject to demolition orders by the state (Ehrenreich 69).

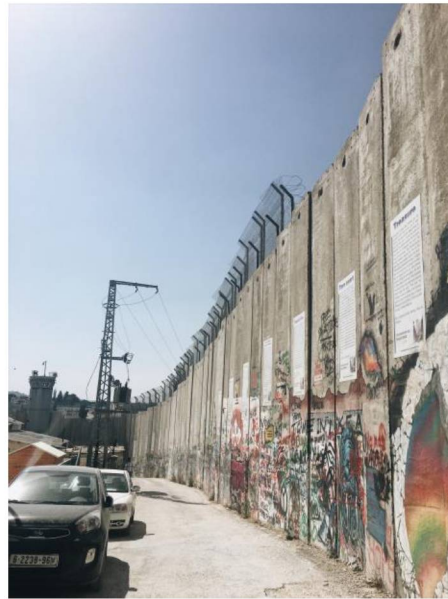


(Centanni)

Israel's land-grabbing policy does not cease with the building of Israeli settlements on Palestinian land and issuing demolition orders on land that is not their own. It also takes the form of a physical wall that runs in and throughout the West Bank in order to physically separate Israelis from Palestinians and even Palestinians from Palestinians. The wall's route can be seen in the map below.



("Map – Israeli Wall/Fence – Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.")



The motivation behind the wall is for security purposes, but this lacks credibility as there are numerous illegal Israeli settlements within the Palestinian side of the wall. The wall has also been intentionally built to place the most fertile land and water access points on the Israeli side (El Houry). The separation wall cuts directly through some Palestinian villages, which has forced the loss of land and water access points that have been in Palestinian families for generations. An article from Jerusalem's Applied Research Institute explains how "the route of the wall effectively cuts off several Palestinian villages, including Jayyus, Ras Al-Tira, Dab'a, and others, from their water sources. In the case of Jayyus, the wall's route, which was constructed in 2003, separates the village from all six of its wells, resulting in severe reductions in the villagers' water consumption" (El Houry). It has been reported that the separation wall has not only isolated vital access points to water, but has also "damaged, destroyed or rendered inaccessible vital sources of water, such as wells, springs, and cisterns. Once damaged or destroyed, water sources were not repaired or replaced due to Israeli restrictions" (Isaac et al. 3).

Besides the lack of access to water due to the separation wall, Palestinians' water access in the West Bank is severely unequal to Israel's and the Israeli settlements within the West Bank's border. While there are several aquifers in Israel, the largest being located directly beneath the West Bank, Palestinians inside of the West Bank are only allocated 20% of this water (El Houry). It is important to keep in mind that there is an estimated 4.75 million Palestinians and 6.34 million Jews within the country (Haaretz). Not only does Israel have access to the remaining percentage of groundwater, but

they also control all of the access points to the Jordan River, even the section that runs through Palestinian territory. This unequal allocation of water has caused the average Palestinian's consumption of water to be about 70 liters a day per person, which is below the World Health Organization's recommendation of 100 liters ("Troubled Waters – Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water"). Some villages only consume as little as 20 liters a day per person and sometimes are forced to go weeks with their water completely shut off ("Troubled Waters – Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water"). Amnesty International describes how Israelis use an average of 300 liters of water a day per person, and they do not need to fear their water being shut off as they enjoy "intensive-irrigation farms, gardens, and swimming pools" (Troubled Waters – Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water"). As you can see, there are highly prevalent and severe discriminatory policies that Israel has enforced on the lives of Palestinians who suffer greatly for the goal of the security of Israel.

Occupied Bodies

Not only are Palestinians' land and water occupied by the state of Israel, but their physical bodies are subject to the web of systemically oppressive policies as well. There are numerous checkpoints running between villages throughout the West Bank, along with Israeli-only roads, which Palestinians are forbidden to use. Checkpoints are often a humiliating experience for Palestinians, as they are subject to harassment by Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers, and checkpoints aren't always guaranteed to be open. These obstacles, along with the separation wall, hinder and prohibit the freedom of movement of the Palestinian people to do day-to-day activities, such as going to a neighboring village to visit relatives and driving to work with ease. Some Palestinians are still confined to refugee camps that were created during the massacres and land expulsions that happened prior to Israel being declared a state.

Besides being physically restricted in where they can and cannot go in their land, Palestinians are also subject to collective punishment and mass-incarceration by IDF soldiers who also go on night-raids, "a common tactic in the occupied West Bank... used to intimidate the Palestinian community" (Lynn). Night raids "are characterized by various degrees of force. Doors can be broken, adults and children alike can be awoken at gunpoint... when arrests are made, Palestinian detainees are typically blindfolded and handcuffed, and sometimes beaten in front of family members" (Lynn). Children are also arrested during these raids and taken to nearby prisons (Jubran, Lynn). When Palestinians gather to protest for their freedom from the occupation, IDF soldiers frequently meet them with rubber-coated bullets, tear-gas grenades, and "skunk trucks" – trucks that spray vile-smelling liquid at the Palestinians and their homes (Ehrenreich 30, 61-62).

While the circumstances are tremendously difficult, it is important to understand that many remain resilient in their hope of a better future, as Chacour demonstrates within his text. Many Palestinians are committed to nonviolently resisting the occupation of their land and people while bravely living in the midst of chaos and terror. You will now come to know more about the plight of the Palestinian

and nonviolent resistance in a documentary created by a Palestinian man from the West Bank village of Bil'in. Take notes and discuss the documentary with your community afterwards.

Viewing: Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi's 5 Broken Cameras on YouTube

Notes:

Extended and optional reading for this session:

Ben Ehrenreich's *The Way to the Spring: Life and Death in Palestine*

Michael Chabon and Ayelet Waldman's *Kingdom of Olives and Ash: Writers Confront the Occupation*

Narratives of the People

Laith⁷, Jewish Israeli

A former Israeli Defense Force soldier discusses his experience of being in the army and how he became a peacemaker by intentionally coming to know the Palestinian population. For more information about Laith's work, look into the organization Combatants for Peace.

"When people ask where I am from, I get confused. Tel Aviv? Golan Heights? Many other places ... my parents are from Italy, and my mother's parents were hidden in monasteries during the time of the Holocaust. Holocaust stories are central to my life. People can't be freely Jewish without a state or army, which is why my mom moved to Israel to raise her kids. My father was born in Libya. They received letters to not move to Israel because the state was discriminating against people [who were] not white. When my father married my mother, she convinced him to move to Israel. She questioned the discrimination. When we were young, after moving to Israel, our parents felt that our school was too secular. 'Peace' meant secular, and 'militarization' meant religious, and a peace process was seen as un-Jewish because if you compromise on the land, you can't be Jewish. My parents were nationalists, but soon changed to secular Jews because they thought religious Jewish people are extremists ... Secular schools eventually stopped talking about peace and praised the military, and I dreamed of being in a combat unit and the duty to serve my country. I joined the military and saw many people become traumatized – there is a heavy cost for being in the army and coming into contact with the Palestinians. I was shocked being in the army. My commander once told me 'We have a hostage and we need to guard him,' I went to guard him, but saw that he was just an eleven-year-old [Palestinian] child. This happens all the time. I started questioning the military and learning about the conditions of [Palestinians] for them to sometimes choose violence. Soldiers are hospitalized from psychological problems, some commit suicide. We have a serious problem from maintaining this conflict and occupation. It is really easy to be angry at soldiers because the service that they are forced to do contradicts human values, and the people that interact the best are Arabs because of their shared experiences of trauma. So I put away the politics of this place to have connection. I try to find places so I can talk to Muslims and Palestinians. I started leading programs and became addicted to shared spaces between Israelis and Palestinians, and I started to learn

⁷ Name has been changed for privacy purposes.

Arabic. I try to build places for people to share spaces to show that there is another way than division. Living in a shared space filled me – my humanity” (Maghen).

Lectio Divina Scripture: Matthew 6:9-13

*"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil."*

Session 3 Pre-Meeting Questions

Thoughtfully work through these questions before gathering with your group to discuss.

1. Chacour explains, "Unfortunately, we were to learn that Palestinians, indeed had been branded as ignorant, hostile and violent. And now, with no flag, no honor and no voice to shout our defense to the opinion fashioning world press, the reputation of our ancient people had degenerated to the status of nonpersons. We were the outcasts" (111). The plight of the Palestinian has been drastically misunderstood and misrepresented by American media and politics. Reflect on the importance of learning the narrative of others within conflicts, and reflect on how Jesus treated the "outcasts" within society in his context. How should this effect the Christian response to the Israel-Palestine conflict?
2. At the beginning of chapter 8, Chacour guides his readers into an alternative perspective of Zionism that the Palestinians experienced, which is highly relevant to this session's topic. He notes that he "had witnessed a terribly ironic twist of history in which the persecuted became the persecutor. As one of its victims, [he] had seen the cruel face of Zionism" (119). On the following page, he describes how many religious and pragmatic Jews were against the Zionist movement and its embrace of militarism. Reflect on what you know about Zionism up until this point. How does Chacour's experience with Zionism influence your perception of the Zionist movement?
3. "The Samaritan outcast became a person worthy of honor and concern. For one of the first things Jesus did when He reconciled man to God was to restore human dignity ... Suddenly I knew that the first step toward reconciling Jew and Palestinian was the restoration of human dignity ... this was the third choice that ran like a straight path between violent opposition and calcified, passive nonresistance. If I were really committing my life to carry God's message to my people, I would have to lift up, as Jesus had, the men and women who had been degraded and beaten down" (Chacour 150-151). Reflect on how to restore human dignity to marginalized people groups. What does this look like?
4. Work through the first and second study guide sections in the back of Walter Brueggeman's book for further reflection and dialogue about this week's topic.

Session 3: Analyzing Theologies, Ideologies, and Beliefs that Hinder Peace (pt 1)



"Is it possible to become more American than Christian? You end up defending American theology over Jesus." – Ben McBride

Deconstructing Theologies and Ideologies

Brenda Salter McNeil states in her book *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness, and Justice*, "Our theology informs our anthropology, which in turn informs our sociology ... what we believe about God will tell us what we believe about people; and what we believe about people will tell us what kinds of communities and societies we believe we should strive and create" (23). She continues to describe the effects of harmful theology that fueled apartheid South Africa (22). She describes how it was "distorted Christian theology that... fueled many Afrikaners' belief that they were God's chosen people. They saw themselves as biologically superior to other races and therefore called to create a new segregated society that would allow them to civilize other people while not tainting themselves with the 'darkness and barbarism' of those inferior groups" (22-23). Spending time to deconstruct our beliefs and theology is essential if we are going to be responsible Christians and peacemakers in our world.

Christian Zionism

Elias Chacour discusses the marriage between Christians and Zionism at the beginning of chapter eight. Since before the nation of Israel was officially declared in 1948, the Jewish Zionist colonization of Palestine has been largely reinforced by a Christian Zionist ideology, which is what Andrew F. Bush describes as “a mission movement that believes in a literal fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of the land to the Jews, regardless of the implications for Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza” (144). Chacour mentions a prominent British man by the name of Lord Arthur Balfour who, in 1917, declared the land of Palestine to be “a national home for the Jewish people” (qtd. in Chacour 123). Through this declaration, the way was paved for the Zionist control of Palestine, and it was the year 1917 when “Christian Restorationists” became aligned with Jewish Zionists, thus catapulting the support of Christians for the Jewish resettlement in Palestine.

Christian Zionism is reinforced by an interpretation of biblical scriptures to promote Israel’s exclusionary policies that have ultimately stripped basic human rights from the Palestinian population. Andrew F. Bush continues to describe how Christian Zionism is known to promote the idea that there is no distinct Palestinian culture and people group while renouncing the historical reality of Palestinian’s presence in the land (144,145). Followers of Jesus that support this ideology may not realize the extreme implications that accompany this interpretation of the Bible in regards to the lives of Palestinians, and this is why deconstructing this ideology is imperative.

In Walter Brueggemann’s text, he echoes this notion when he explains that when Christians reinterpret the Bible in a way to support Zionist positions, it leads to an oversimplification of the text that lacks desperately needed critical thinking and factual realities on the ground (11). The notion of Israel being God’s chosen people that is described in Deuteronomy 7:6 is used in Zionist presumptions to exclude those that are perceived to be “unchosen” (i.e. Palestinians) in light of this scripture. Regardless of who is perceived to be chosen or “unchosen,” embracing destructive policies and oppressive practices by anyone is not reflecting an inclusive Jesus that allows a seat at the table for all, or his call to neighbor love.

To gain a better understanding of major Christian Zionist views and narratives, you can spend some time looking at Pastor John Hagge’s organization, Christians United for Israel (CUFI), online, as well as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) webpage. These are major Israeli lobbies that have a major impact on American politics and foreign relations with Israel.

Dispensationalist Theology

Dispensationalist Theology is popular in the United States and another framework that we should spend time deconstructing. An excerpt from Jer Swigart and Jon Huckins book *Mending the Divides*, which you will soon be reading for homework, describes:

“... this theology suggests that God has chosen to deal differently with humanity in different eras, or dispensations. [John Nelson] Darby suggested that we are currently in the sixth of seven dispensations – the age of grace- (see Romans 5:20-21; Ephesians 3:1-9) – and that this current era will conclude with the resurrection of dead believers and the rapture of living followers of Jesus. This rapture, an exit-hatch strategy central to dispensationalism (1 Thessalonians 4:17), will supposedly initiate a seven-year tribulation that will conclude with the second coming of Jesus and the battle of Armageddon. It is believed that Jesus’ victory in this battle will usher in the seventh dispensation, a thousand-year reign of God ...” (47).

This theology requires a Jewish return to Israel in order to erect the Third Temple so Jesus will come. The Third Temple will need to be built where the Dome of the Rock currently sits. The Dome of the Rock is the third holiest site in all of Islam, so according to this theology, one of the holiest sites to Muslim believers must be demolished in order for the Third Temple to be erected for Jesus’ return. The majority of Palestinians are of the Islamic faith, so this adds salt to an already painful wound for Palestinians.

Dispensationalist theology is also “a reading that identifies God’s declared plan in the world as moving everything toward a violent end – an atomic holocaust that will usher in the second return of Christ” (Huckins and Swigart 47). Does this sound like peace? Does this coincide with our call to be peacemakers? No.

Chacour describes these notions when he discusses a Christian group that “believed they might bring to pass – by manipulating world events and reestablishing the nation of Israel – the second coming of Christ. The Zionists ignored this view, but the benefits of such a plan for them were obvious” (122). Because Christian Zionism and Dispensationalist Theology both call for the Jewish return to Israel without acknowledging the contextual realities and the oppressive system that Palestinians suffer from, they should both be analyzed and deconstructed so our theology aligns with our call to be active peacemakers within our world.

You will now watch a sermon by Greg Boyd where he continues to deconstruct Christian Zionism. Part II of this session will continue this topic as well. Take notes throughout the video and discuss with your community afterwards.

Viewing: "Twisted Scripture Joshua 14:9" by Greg Boyd on YouTube

Notes:

Narratives of the People

Loni⁸, Jewish Israeli

Loni is a brave woman that works for peace in her Israeli village, which is the closest village next to the Gaza strip.

“Everything was going great. Many people from Gaza would come to our village. We had a good relationship until a suicide bomber attacked in the 1990’s. Afterwards, the people were locked up in Gaza. I knew they had nothing. Now, unknown attacks can happen at any moment by Hamas’ Qassam rockets. We have 15 seconds to get into a safe-room shelter. I have to think about this all of the time. Once, there was an alert when my grandchildren were here and they had to hide in the bushes. One of the rockets killed one of our Thai farm workers on the spot, and our house was hit. I want something different for the children who live here ... What is a peace treaty? It can be torn up. We must listen. Dialogue is more powerful than anything. We must try to understand people. Being different doesn’t mean we must hate, and violence is not an answer. Instead of building another safe-room, why not think of another strategy? We must try to find a way into Gaza – to find a way to reach out to one another to see that there are just people on either side [of the wall]. As long as Gaza is still in the dark, our village will not have a quiet moment. I want to put a light shining into Gaza, and it is never going to be Palestinians instead of Israelis or Israelis instead of Palestinians, so why not try to live side by side? The solution must be decided upon together! I eventually found Israelis that think like me around our village, so we created Another Voice, an organization that strives to dialogue with Gazans through the internet and social media.

Every now and then, we try to get Gazans to come across to talk about education, but it takes three permits from Israel to leave Gaza. If you’re sick, it’s easier to leave, otherwise, it’s not. I sometimes wait by the crossing gate at the checkpoint to bring the sick to the hospital. My main work is trying to get permits for Gazans to come out. Freedom means freedom of movement, and I won’t take no for an answer – open your eyes, let these people live. For all our sake, let these people out. I love my country, but I have to be humble in knowing that on the day of my country’s independence, another people call it a disaster. The people in Gaza have a different reality, and

⁸ Name has been changed for privacy purposes.

people must be open to changing their mind. I want people to see Gazans differently. It is very easy to be radical when you're on the outside, but I want to say to Hamas, come and have a seat at the negotiation table.

We can't escape from telling the children why we are here in Israel, and I think that because of what we've been through, we should be able to relate to the Palestinians. We both know what it's like to be outsiders. We need to teach the children that we need this homeland, but they do too ... If I were Prime Minister of Israel, I would end the occupation. The only way is to start thinking peace. Some people say they would be at risk if the occupation ended – I say that I am already at risk." (Keidar)

Lectio Divina Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our body."

Session 4 Pre-Meeting Questions

Thoughtfully work through these questions before gathering with your group to discuss.

1. Abuelaish describes a beautiful experience of him and his friends in Gaza making shared spaces with themselves and Israelis in the Jabalia refugee camp on page 94. He describes how it didn't matter how heated or intense the discussions would get between them and the Israelis because they would always leave with having forged new friendships with one another. Reflect on how you act when discussing something with someone who has a completely differing view than you. How do you act? How have other people acted towards you in the past?
2. Reflect on Abulaish's discussion on page 99 and his experience with people who have closed minds towards the plight of the Palestinian. Can you think of how and where you may have a closed mind in regards to this conflict, other conflicts around the world, or anyone in your life? Can you think of a time when you may have felt misunderstood, or a time when you were not heard? How did that feel?
3. Walter Brueggemann explains the United States' perception of our country being the "chosen people" in chapter two of his text. He describes how "it has had the pernicious spinoff of U.S. military expansionism under the claim that the 'leader of the free world' must 'save' benighted peoples in other lands. The national passion for expansionism, coupled with the missionary rhetoric of the church, has been infused with racism and a sense of national superiority. That notion of the United States as an exceptional nation, as the chosen of God, has caused a confused sense of state and church that is often evident in the zeal for an American flag in church sanctuaries, as though the linkage is essential and 'natural' to a conviction of chosenness" (20-21). Reflect on what he's saying here and throughout this chapter. How have you seen this play out in your community?
4. Work through the third and fourth study guide sections in the back of Walter Brueggeman's book for further reflection and dialogue about this week's topic.

Session 4: Analyzing Theologies, Ideologies, and Beliefs that Hinder Peace (pt 2)



"We choose a different path – nonviolence. We refuse to be enemies. It's not passive, but an action."
– Daude Nassar

Ethnocentrism and Islamophobia

The concept of ethnocentrism is an important addition to our discussion of beliefs that we must intentionally spend time analyzing and deconstructing. Merriam-Webster defines ethnocentrism as "the attitude that one's own group, ethnicity, or nationality is superior to others" ("Ethnocentrism"). Ethnocentrism is capable of promoting discriminatory beliefs such as Islamophobia, which has become increasingly popular throughout America. A very important research article by Jeremy D. Mayer describes how he discovered that Christian fundamentalists are America's biggest supporters of the Jewish state (706). Additionally, he describes how the conflict is often portrayed here in America as "Muslim Arabs versus Jewish Israelis," which is significant because Christian fundamentalists have been very vocal about their critical views of the Islamic religion (Mayer 706). These critical views not only promote a lack of empathy for the lives of Palestinians, but also cause further division because the majority of the population of Palestinians in Israel-Palestine are adherents to Islam.

If we are to be peacemakers within our world then we *must* analyze where we find ourselves holding discriminatory views and beliefs of others – whether it be in regards to race or religion. Discrimination of any kind is inherently a hindrance to peace, so it is important to take part in internal reflection about this topic.

The rest of this session will be dedicated to watching films that will help expand these important topics. One is a short TedTalk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie where she discusses the importance of

learning all of the narratives of a place or person if we are to engage properly with them. In a way, this is what this study is designed to do for the Israel-Palestine conflict. Afterwards, you will watch a very important and relevant documentary that highlights the negative impacts of Christian Zionism on the Palestinian population. Take notes and have an open reflection with your community after each viewing.

Viewing: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "The Danger of a Single Story" TedTalk
Notes:

Viewing: With God on Our Side on YouTube
Notes:

Narratives of the People

Husam, Muslim Palestinian

Husam primarily works as a tour guide where he educates visitors about the dual narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

“I spent almost all my life in Bethlehem afraid to mention Palestine because it would cause a ruckus. During the 1987 intifada, I joined [the intifada] from feeling injustice. I threw stones, raised Palestinian flags, tried to reclaim the land. I went to prison and as soon as I got out I immediately began throwing stones again. An Israeli bullet once hit me in the butt. I eventually got my Master’s in Peace Conflict Transformation. I became involved heavily with nonviolence. I feel like it is easier for some American Christians to hear the Palestinian narrative when they are in the presence of a Jew. I value hearing so many narratives and teaching. For me, it was good for me to be in jail. The Israelis treated me very badly but it was like a baptism. What you gain from it emotionally – you don’t enter the prison without being tortured – all the time there is torture, all kinds. Right now, there are political prisoners on hunger strike because of it. Hamas is not joining the strike, which makes it weaker. [The prisoners] are simply demanding to improve their situation. There is no international support, however, and they may not get any results. Hope is not a privilege for us, but you have to have it... Some Palestinians still use violence, but we also use a lot of nonviolence – you just don’t hear about it.

You need to pay attention to the power structure when talking about reconciliation and co-existence. There are only a few Israeli activists that will demonstrate with the Palestinians, and Israelis will seldom use the word occupation. The role of American Christians – the church is very involved [in the occupation], very supportive. They fund and support the Israeli settlements. They think that if the land becomes Jewish then Jesus will come back, so a lot of money goes to right wing groups. This is why the Christian voice is important and Christians should be involved in ending the occupation. Pre-millennial dispensationalism is a theology that says as soon as we get rid of Palestinians we can bulldoze the dome of the rock, erect the third temple, and then Jesus will come. It’s self-serving, they don’t actually care about Jews. You will also not be President of the United States unless you seduce the Christians United for Israel (CUFI) lobby – it’s all for political gain. White evangelicals, given their

dispensationalist theology, they come here (Israel-Palestine) waving their flag on their finely-crafted, manicured tour and then they go home and say that the land is full of peace” (Jubran).

Lectio Divina Scripture: Matthew 5:43-47

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

Session 5 Pre-Meeting Questions

Thoughtfully work through these questions before gathering with your group to discuss.

1. In chapter seven, Abuelaish says, "I understand down to my bones that violence is futile. It is a waste of time, lives, and resources, and has been proven only to beget more violence. It does not work. It just perpetuates a vicious cycle. There's only one way to bridge the divide, to live together, to realize the goals of two peoples..." (196). Reflect on the path of nonviolence and how Jesus modeled nonviolence during his day. Why is nonviolence so important? How can you commit to and advocate for nonviolence in your context?
2. "Allow yourself to see what it's like to be in our shoes," is what Abuelaish says in regard to the world seeing and understanding the plight of Palestinians in Gaza (198). Reflect on what you have learned throughout his story of losing his daughters to Israeli airstrikes and using his career as a physician to help bring peace among Palestinians and Israelis. How has his story impacted you personally?
3. Abuelaish declares, "I assure you that this tragedy has strengthened me, and I am more determined than ever before to continue my efforts for the sake of humanity, but I also want you to know that willing is not enough. We must act. It is well known that all it takes for evil to survive is for good people like you to do nothing. It is time to do and to act." (205). What has his story compelled you to do? How will you "do and act" now that you've been introduced to the plight of Palestinians through his and other's stories?
4. *Mending the Divides* is a phenomenal book about the path of a peacemaker. What specifically stood out to you throughout the text and why?

Session 5: Jesus In His Context: The Call to be Peacemakers



"There's positive and negative peace. Positive peace means getting to the root of the problem, negative peace means just being okay with the status quo, the absence of tension"
– Jer Swigart

In modeling a peacemaking response inspired by the life of Jesus, it is important to understand the lessons that Jesus taught in the direct context of his day. We know that Jesus was Jewish, but it's important to highlight that he, along with the rest of his Jewish community, also lived life under occupation – Roman occupation, and Jesus "preached the kingdom of God in opposition to and as alternative to the Roman Empire, which for him entailed the alleviation of suffering here and now" (Scheffler 266-267). While Jesus was absolutely nonviolent when speaking truth to those in power – both Romans and the religious elite – he still remained active in loving those marginalized in society and not accepting or being passive to corrupt power structures. Peacemaking, however, is costly, and the fact that Jesus eventually became a political prisoner and ultimately died a highly political death on a Roman cross is a reminder of this cost. His life was countercultural to that of his society, and living a life of faith in him remains countercultural in much of today's society. While it's so easy to draw lines in the sand and say who is "in" and who is "out" when it comes to Christianity, what makes this faith, and Jesus, so radical is that everyone is invited to the table. Are we living a life that exhibits the inclusive nature of God's love? Or are we excluding people because of their faith, race, sexuality, immigration status, or class?

Similar to the life that Jesus lived, Christians are also called into a *dynamic* and *active* relationship within humanity, and this requires the church to not separate their faith from taking part in seeking the restoration of broken systems with a love that transcends enemy lines, nonviolent action, and being in close proximity to people's pain.

Neighbor Love, Enemy Love: Love of “the Other”

Jesus’ call to love the other, whether neighbor or perceived enemy, is integral to the Christian faith (Matthew 5:43-44, 19:19, 22:39, Mark 12:31, Luke 6:27, 10:27). When it comes to loving our neighbor, we must understand that this transcends the people that live in close proximity to our homes and within our comfort zones. Review these Bible verses while keeping in mind that this was Jesus’ command in the midst of Roman occupation.

Nonviolent Action

One way to love our enemies is through nonviolence, which Jesus perfectly models in his commands to turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, and give the inner garment. Scripture says:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles” (Matthew 38-41).

Contrary to what many think, these actions are not passive responses. They are actually creative ways for those who lived on the margins of Roman society to affirm their humanity to their oppressors based on the contextual realities of that day. Walter Wink explains that these responses often brought shame on the oppressor and *not* the oppressed (20). Wink states, “The person who turns the other cheek is saying, in effect, ‘Try again. Your first blow failed to achieve its intended effect. I deny you the power to humiliate me. I am a human being just like you. Your status does not alter that fact. You cannot demean me’” (16).

One practical nonviolent response to the systemic oppression of Palestinians that you can take part in is to join the Boycott, Divest, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. This is a global movement where people are boycotting Israeli companies and products that are manufactured on Palestinian land, divesting money from Israel, and advocating for sanctions to be placed on Israel for their treatment of Palestinians.

Along with the BDS movement, you can join nonviolent protests and commit to educating others about this issue.

Learning to Lament

The practice of lament is important in peacemaking. Lament is “a cry directed towards God. It is the cry of those who see the truth of the world’s deep wounds and the cost of seeking peace. It is the prayer of those who are deeply disturbed by the way things are... over and over again, lament teaches us about both what must be learned and what must be unlearned in order to live well in a broken world.” (Katongole and Rice 78). Just as Jesus was in close proximity to people’s pain, peacemakers are called to do the same in order to lament for what is broken in our world. This requires intentionally and physically inserting ourselves in the lives of others in an authentic way in order to be present and deeply listen rather than solve problems with quick and easy solutions.

You can read about lament in the Bible in the following scriptures: Mark 14:35-36, John 11:33-35, Jeremiah 31:15.

Jesus modeled perfect peacemaking and had a heart for those marginalized and broken throughout the world. While keeping this in mind, we must remember that there should neither be pro-Israeli nor pro-Palestinian sides – only *pro-people* “while having a lens for those who need protection” (Schrock). Palestinians are in need of the international community to advocate for them and it is due time that we listen and act.

Jesus was an incredible peacemaker, and we can continue to learn from other great people that practiced brave and costly peacemaking throughout their lives. In order to set the stage for the next session, you will now watch a video of the complete reading of Martin Luther King Jr’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Take into account that this letter was written in response to prominent white clergymen who called for people to withdraw their support from MLK and accused him of being an “outside agitator,” “extremist,” inciting hatred and violence, and claimed that the demonstrations he was a part of were “unwise and untimely” (Kirwan Institute). Peacemaking looks different than maintaining the status-quo, which, for those clergymen, looked like the complete opposite of what MLK was doing. Take notes over the video and discuss with your community afterwards.

Viewing: "FULL FILM: A Reading of the Letter from Birmingham Jail" by The Kirwan Institute of the Study of Race and Ethnicity on YouTube

Notes:

Extended reading for this section:

N.T. Wright’s *Jesus and the Victory of God*

Walter Wink’s *Jesus and Nonviolence*

Narratives of the People

John⁹, Christian Palestinian

Together with a Jewish Israeli friend, John operates an agricultural farm in the West Bank where he hosts camps for both Israeli and Palestinian children to foster relationships and work for peace.

“Palestinians are the victims of the others – not just Israelis, but the international community. I’m Palestinian born to a refugee family and many events in my life attack my humanity. I was not raised to hate though. My mother was part of the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization), a leader of resisting the Israeli occupation. We were under direct attack when growing up. My mother was beaten in front of me. I participated in the first intifada... I was arrested and tortured to gain more information about my mother, but I said no and I got ten years in prison. I was not a criminal, and I felt injustice. The Palestinian political prisoners were organized inside the prison, and the best people in the community were inside the prison. It was not a criminal environment. I learned English and Hebrew, and lawyers and professors were in the prison. I loved the library. My identity was created in prison, and I learned more about the land. My mother and I wanted to meet, but Israel refused so we went on a hunger strike. I encouraged myself because I wanted to see my mother. Today is the 26th day of the current political hunger strike. The prisoners right now are not asking for release – just dignity. They are human beings and should be treated as human beings, no matter the Geneva accord.

I started learning about nonviolence through Gandhi and Mandela. When fear and being a victim become your identity, you lose who you are. I was eventually released from prison after four years. I wanted to build community and security for both sides. The Palestinian Authority lost credibility, the peace process failed ... You cannot create peace by being nice with no dignity. I couldn’t leave the land because I have roots here. I was eventually shot in the knee and had to go to Saudi Arabia for treatment for three months. My brother was violently murdered by soldiers in my village. We were very close - one year apart in age. He was murdered – someone, on purpose, shot and killed him. I came back to our village with a very broken heart and even thought about revenge. I had many sleepless nights hoping Israel would disappear. Revenge is a just act when you are the victims of the

⁹ Name has been changed for privacy purposes.

victimizers, but is that justice? The only justice would be to have my brother back. It's about being just to yourself. You have to release yourself from the prison of the crime. You don't just reconcile with the enemy, but yourself.

Later, many parents that have lost kids wanted to get together, Jews and Palestinians, and my mother agreed to go. It was shocking to me that people like me wanted to get together. I saw a Jew crying when we met, and I believed that Jewish people had no tears... You don't have to be a Mandela to make peace. It is both Jews and Palestinians right to live here... both sides are right, but how do you succeed? Nonviolently – my freedom will never be achieved by Jewish bodies, but through Jewish hearts. We want solutions, which means getting out of the box of blame and victimhood. I have something that no one can resist – my humanity. I believe in my humanity. Here I can tell you, you are the occupier and there is no peace here without the end to the occupation. My problem is with the occupation. Palestinians must take it seriously to stop violence. The occupation's worst enemy is Palestinian nonviolence, and people can help by coming to where we suffer. I practice dialogue and reconciliation with dignity, and when you disagree, don't draw away, but draw near... being a silent person does not make you a peacemaker. You have to resist nonviolently” (J. Awad).

Lectio Divina Scripture: Mark 12:28-33

"And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, 'Which commandment is the most important of all?' Jesus answered, 'The most important is, Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.' And the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.'"

Session 6 Pre-Meeting Questions

Thoughtfully work through these questions before gathering with your group to discuss.

1. How does your understanding of Jesus as a Jew living beneath the power structure of the Roman Empire change the way you think about his call to love our enemies?
2. How can your knowledge of a Jesus-centered response to peacemaking in the Israel-Palestine conflict help you promote peace within conflicts in our own communities?
3. Why is intersectionality so important when looking at systems of oppression? How has the colonization of the land in Palestine and treatment of the Palestinian people in Israel drawn you to think about the experience of Native Americans and African American's in the American context?
4. From what you have learned throughout this study, how can you promote peacemaking and advocate for marginalized communities in your own context?

Session 6: Intersectionality and A Commissioning



"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you ..." – John 14:27

Intersectionality

As important as it is to learn about peacemaking within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, marginalized communities and oppressive systems are not isolated to this specific context. This is why intersectionality is so important. Merriam-Webster defines intersectionality as being “used to refer to the complex and cumulative way that the effects of different forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, and intersect – especially in the experiences of marginalized people or groups” (“Intersectionality”).

Applying our knowledge about peacemaking to our context within America is the reason that Angela Davis' book *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* was your homework for this session. She makes a perfect case for what intersectionality should look like in our work as peacemakers. Davis states, “When we are engaged in the struggle against racist violence, in relation to Ferguson, Michael Brown and New York, Eric Garner, we can't forget the connections with Palestine... that when we see the police repressing protests in Ferguson we also have to think about the Israeli police and the Israeli army repressing protests in occupied Palestine” (45). We can also apply intersectionality beyond racism against African Americans, but also to the experience of Native Americans, Hispanic and Latino immigrants, Muslim Americans, the LGBTQ community, and any other marginalized community within America.

Davis continues to add that “just as we say ‘never again’ with respect to the fascism that produced the Holocaust, we should also say ‘never again’ with respect to apartheid South Africa, and in the southern US. That means, first and foremost, that we will have to expand and deepen our solidarity with the people of Palestine. People of all genders and sexualities. People inside and outside prison walls, inside and outside the apartheid wall” (60). Embracing intersectionality will allow us to grow in solidarity with other freedom movements so we can fight for, believe in, and work towards freedom together.

A Commissioning

This journey has hopefully been an immersive and transformative process for you, and I hope you feel compelled to continue learning, practicing, and dialoguing with your community about all that you have learned and will continue to learn. Before sending you off to your last “Narratives of the People” and Lectio Divina prayer, read this commissioning prayer together.

Oh Holy One,

I am a beloved child of God, and I walk in the fullness of Your love.

Continue to teach me the way peace and continue to provide strength in me to love lavishly.

Instill in me a heart that seeks to humbly learn, and the ability to sit in the midst of the pain of others with no agenda, except to be present.

Give me the wisdom to speak words of truth to those in power and a heart that continually chooses to see and hear those that are pushed to the margins of society.

I was made for such a time as this, and I am commissioned for building peace.

Glory be unto You,

Amen

Narratives of the People

Sam¹⁰, Christian Palestinian

Sam lives and works in the West Bank where he runs an organization that is centered on promoting nonviolent resistance to the Israeli occupation.

“What does it mean to live love free from fear? This is the land of stories. Every person’s story is absolute truth and fact. What is the beginning line for your story? For Palestinians, it’s 1948. Sharing the story with that line makes the story and sets the stage for only conflict – this idea that we’ve always been fighting. What was life like before 1948? The neighborhood that my father came from in Jerusalem - both Christians and Muslims all lived together. It wasn’t specifically for peace, they just all got along. Muslim kids and Christian kids would help Jews out during Shabbat. What happened? What shifted this whole reality? Our grandfather died and we lost our house. My grandmother’s whole future was destroyed and they thought 1948 was only going to be temporary.

Faith never causes us to seek revenge. As followers of Christ, we will never remain silent in the face of injustice. These are the lessons I learned from my grandmother. My uncles and aunts live in Gaza. There are a number of Christians that live in Gaza and the Israeli military will sometimes give permits to people on Christmas and Easter to leave and go see their family in the West Bank. I hadn’t seen my uncle since the year 2000 until this past Easter for a couple of hours. He is an American Citizen and a Palestinian, but he is not allowed to be an American Citizen here in Israel-Palestine ... Israel could have drafted the Palestinians into the country, but instead they chose military occupation. No democracy, no freedom of speech, even to apply for a phone line for your home, the Israeli military could take up to twelve years. There’s also ‘administrative detention’ for Palestinians – one of my workers was taken away the other night for this. They will be in an Israeli prison for six months and it will possibly be renewed at the end of the six months.

I am easily justified in my hatred. How can I grow up in a situation where everything was clear? Good guy, bad guy... My family’s narrative is seeking peace, justice, and reconciliation. 1988 was the first intifada where Palestinians were seen as being a threat to national security. My uncle was

¹⁰ Name has been changed for privacy purposes.

prisoned and deported – gone forever and never allowed to return. During his trial, my uncle’s eyes fell upon me in the crowd while being shackled, and he smiled at me.

In 1993 started the Oslo years where it was now about peacemaking, except what was happening on the ground was not peace. It was just a restructuring of apartheid and the occupation, and finally it collapsed in 1999, and in 2000 the second intifada began. This is what inspired my organization that is dedicated to nonviolent activism and doing what political leaders were supposed to be doing. No other peace is possible but the two-state solution. Outside of this, there is no peace. That is why settlers and Hamas were labeled ‘anti-peace,’ and the more you marginalize, the more violence there is. We pushed them into the corners when we should have invited them to the table. We seek to liberate the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem from occupation, and I often came home bruised and beaten from protests [during the second intifada].

Eventually some things began to shift and a spiritual journey began for me. Jesus would be a nonviolent activist, but really, Jesus stands against no one. What does it mean to love your enemy? Christians love that verse, but how many people are really doing it? My nonviolent activism was coming from a place of hatred and a place of exposing how terrible they are. I wanted everyone to see how horrible the soldiers were, but how do you do activism in love from a place where you want reconciliation? Love equals relationship where you proactively engage in knowing and understanding your enemy. Meet people where they are at. That’s what Jesus would be doing ... How do we love in getting to know the other side?” (S. Awad).

Lectio Divina Scripture: Ephesians 2:13-22

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows in to a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

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