

A BIBLE STUDY MANUAL
ON
CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

By

Daniel L. Buttry

A BIBLE STUDY MANUAL
ON CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

CONTENTS

Introduction

Participatory Bible Study

Crossing Cultures in Bible Study

How to Use This Bible Study Manual

Section 1: Analysis of Conflict

Session 1: Conflict as Holy Ground (Exodus 2.23-4.17)

Session 2: Conflict Escalation (Genesis 3.8-13; 4.1-16; 4.19-24; 10.8-12)

Session 3: Family Feud (Genesis 25.19-34; 26.34-28.9)

Session 4: Journey Toward Reconciliation (Genesis 28.10-33.20; 35.27-29)

Section 2: Conflict Resolution

Session 5: Conflict over Misunderstandings (Joshua 22.10-34)

Session 6: A Daring Mediator (1 Samuel 25.1-35)

Session 7: Conflict over Religious Values (Acts 15.1-15)

Session 8: Finding a Win/Win Solution (Numbers 32.1-33)

Session 9: When It Does Not Work Out (Acts 15.36-41)

Section 3: Mainstream and Margin

Session 10: A Conflict in Every Group (Acts 6.1-7)

Session 11: Finding One's Voice (Esther 4.1-17)

Session 12: A Grieving, Angry Mother (2 Samuel 21.1-14)

Section 4: Nonviolent Transforming Initiatives

Session 13: Loving the Enemy through Transforming Initiatives
(Matthew 5.38-48)

Session 14: Feeding the Enemy (2 Kings 6.8-23)

Session 15: Holy Disobedience (Exodus 1.15-22)

Session 16: Dramatized Symbolic Actions

(Luke 19.38-44; Isaiah 20.1-6; Jeremiah 32.1-15)

Session 17: Overcoming Evil with Good (Romans 12.9-21)

Sources

A Short Book List

INTRODUCTION

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5.9). Peacemakers enter into conflict with a commitment to bring God’s goodness out of that situation, however terrible it might be. Today the phrase “conflict transformation” has been used to describe the various processes whereby people and nations seek to establish constructive and positive dynamics and institutions in their communities in place of the destruction and sorrow of war and civil strife. Conflict transformation includes the work of confronting evil nonviolently, establishing justice, negotiating agreements, peace-building and forging reconciliation. As Christians we believe Jesus charged his followers to be engaged in positively transforming conflicts, for such people show themselves to be God’s children demonstrating the same care and compassion for people suffering in conflict as God has demonstrated through Christ.

This manual has been prepared to enable and strengthen the peace-building work of Christians, whether individually or together as congregations. The Bible is our primary resource, our guide for shaping our thinking and our action. These studies will help pastors and teachers to lead their fellow believers in learning from the Bible “the things that make for peace” (see Luke 19.42).

The manual does not just provide various texts of Scripture to be studied, emphasizing the points to be made to the learners. The manual also provides some direction on educational methodologies that will make the most of the learning for the Bible study participants. Many of the ways Bible study is conducted in church settings minimize how much people will remember and thus lessen the impact of those studies on people’s daily lives. This manual offers an approach that will engage the learners more fully in the learning process, resulting in the learners remembering more of the material and experiencing a deeper transformation of their approaches to conflict.

Peace and war are major topics in the Bible. This manual does not attempt to provide a complete study of such matters in the Bible. There are many excellent books and studies available in seminary libraries for those who wish to pursue these issues further. The book list at the end of the manual offers good starting places for such a study. Rather these Bible studies are presented specifically to equip and enable Christians and churches to engage more effectively in the conflicts around them in ways that bring healing, hope and reconciliation. This manual is directed to help transform conflicts and build peace in practical ways through the insights and lessons gained through our Christian Scriptures.

PARTICIPATORY BIBLE STUDY

Many Bible studies are held in a format in which the teacher is viewed as the one with all the correct information that has to be imparted into the minds of the students. The teacher is like a bottle of water that must be poured into the empty cups of the students. The participation is all one-way, from the teacher to the students. A variation of this will allow questions from the students that the teacher will answer or occasional discussion among the students, but with the teacher providing the final say on what interpretations or beliefs are valid.

This may often be an appropriate form of education, but this Bible study guide offers a different approach, one that is more participatory for all involved in the learning process. The format presented in this manual encourages the learners to take responsibility for their own learning, to be involved directly in discovery of what the Bible has to say. This format invites all the class or group participants to be teachers together; everybody has something to contribute to the learning of the whole group.

Research on how students learn has shown that people remember approximately 10% of what they read and 20% of what they hear. So a commonly used teaching format of lectures and homework reading has a low efficiency for lasting education. We remember 30% of what we see visually and 50% of what we both see and hear. The simple joining together of visual materials such as writing on a blackboard or large sheets of paper or providing handouts to go with the oral presentation dramatically increases the educational efficiency of the lesson.

People remember 70% of what they then discuss with others, so providing the opportunity for students to interact with each other about the material covered in a class will significantly increase their ability to retain the material. Furthermore 80% of what people discover for themselves is remembered. In a Bible study this means that people will remember far more what they discover through their own direct study than what is told to them by a teacher. Facilitating the opportunities for people to engage directly in the process of discovery is a more effective teaching methodology than lectures. People who then teach the material to others will remember 95% of what they learn. In a Bible study this can be done by having groups report to one another as well as encouraging participants to become teachers in other settings.

People learn through a variety of styles. One style of learning is *visual*, utilizing our *eyes*. Writing on blackboards or wall-charts, posters, handouts, overhead projection or video, all use our eyes as the doorway into our brains. Sometimes our language can trigger the visual style of learning with phrases such as “Do you see what I mean?”

Auditory learning utilizes our *ears*. Lectures are a common format for auditory learning. Story-telling and reading handouts aloud also are auditory. In language we might use phrases such as “How does that sound to you.”

Kinesthetic learning has to do with our **bodies**, with motion and touch. Gestures that relate to a point being made verbally are kinesthetic, bringing movement into the learning. Activities that move people out of their chairs and have them moving their bodies stimulate the kinesthetic channel for learning. Simulation exercises and role plays get people physically engaged. Language can stimulate kinesthetic learning with phrases such as “Does that comment move you forward?”

Emotional learning engages the learner at the **heart** level. Stories, besides being related by speaking and hearing, often engage the emotions and feelings of the listeners. There is emotional identification taking place. Testimonies about one’s previous life experience stir the heart and draw the emotions into the learning process. Concentrated and controlled re-creations of life experiences through role plays and simulation activities activate emotional learning. Language can stimulate emotional learning with phrases such as “Do you have a feel for that?”

We all can learn through each of these styles unless we are deprived of one of our senses, but usually each of us have one or two styles that are more dominant channels for our learning than the others. In any group there will be learners whose primary mode of learning could be in each of these styles. For a teacher, then, the challenge is to provide a variety of styles for learning, ideally utilizing all four styles at some point in the educational process. The more styles that are woven into the entire educational experience, the broader the access to the learner’s mind and heart.

TOOLS FOR LEARNING STYLES

<u>Visual</u>	<u>Auditory</u>	<u>Kinesthetic</u>	<u>Emotional</u>
Blackboards Posters Wallcharts Overhead projection Videos Handouts Visual language	Storytelling Reading aloud Lectures Tapes Singing Hearing language	Role-playing Simulation exercises Gestures Games Moving out of chairs Singing with motions Movement language	Testimonies Stories Videos Singing Role plays Simulation exercise Feeling language

For a Bible study leader, speaking, writing large for all to see, using gestures, providing worksheets, having people move back and forth from small groups to a large group, doing role plays or dramatizations of stories, telling stories, asking people to share their own stories that echo with the Bible story all provide tools for the learning experience to be richer and more effective.

The study guides in this manual encourage the use of many styles and the participation of the learners. The Bible study leader is encouraged to adapt or change the Bible study plans depending on the needs of the group. Adding a role-play or changing the sizes of groups might add to the richness of the learning experience for your participants.

Utilizing a participatory approach may result in many surprises emerging from the group. Group participants may uncover other lessons than those expected. Such new insights and applications are wonderful because the Bible has much more to teach us than any one teacher's knowledge or experience. Using "teachable moments" to draw out the wisdom of the group through participatory methods can enable people to learn much more than the "Lesson insights" written at the end of each session. With careful planning, flexibility and openness to the processes and insights of the group, the teacher can lead exciting and transforming Bible studies.

(The material on the ways people learn and remember and the styles of learning was adapted from Training for Change, 1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 19102 USA. Web site: www.TrainingForChange.org.)

CROSSING CULTURES IN BIBLE STUDY

Any time we engage in Bible study we are involved in a cross-cultural interaction. None of us live in any of the cultures in the Bible, for we are separated from those cultures by geography, time and language. Furthermore, there is no single Bible culture. The biblical writings cover a span of over 2,000 years, and Hebrew and Jewish culture changed dramatically through those centuries. The list of biblical cultures includes the nomadic culture of the Patriarchs, the rural/small town culture of the early tribal period of Israel, the centralized urban culture of the Davidic kings, the culture of the Jewish exile community forming an identity based on religion rather than place, the cosmopolitan culture interacting with Greek and Roman dominance, to name a few of the cultural types.

The biblical stories are very particular as all human stories must be. They are clothed in the particularities of the cultural setting of that time, sometimes with an overlay of a later culture that tells the story that took place in an earlier or different culture. When we read that ancient story we should not just transfer the commandments or even imagery to our time and place. Rather we need to enter into the particular setting of that distant culture

to grasp the principles, values and spiritual dynamics that are revealed in the specific context of that culture. Teachers who have been to seminary or Bible school will need to draw from their training about the biblical cultures. If the teacher can obtain books on biblical history either through a seminary or college library or from a nearby pastor, then a little research about the historical and cultural context of a story can greatly enrich the work with the biblical passage.

Once the lessons of the biblical story or teaching are understood in the original context, we then bring those principles, values and spiritual dynamics to bear within our own contemporary cultural context. We ask the questions of what form those principles, values and spiritual dynamics would take among us today in our own cultural setting. The same spiritual principle might take very different form in a different culture. For example, teachings about modesty in dress might take very different expressions depending on the cultural norms regarding what is appropriate clothing.

This cross-cultural “translating” is especially vital in studying conflict and conflict transformation. Most conflicts are full of specific details of the problems and issues between the groups in conflict with each other. Those specifics can seem very alien to us, causing us to skip these passages and focus on biblical texts that are easier to understand. Taking a bit more time with passages, utilizing role plays to engage our emotions and minds in these distant but very human experiences can assist in opening stories that at first glance seem too complex and strange for our attention.

To facilitate cross-cultural Bible study we can ask the following questions:

1. What was happening in the Bible story?
2. What did those actions or events mean to the people who experienced them?
3. What were the spiritual lessons, including about conflict and reconciliation, that they learned through the actions and events?
4. What would those spiritual lessons say in our own context?
5. What could we do in our lives, our conflicts, our relationships, that would put those lessons into practice?

We may not perfectly translate from the biblical culture across to our culture, but we can get a strong sense of what God is saying to us today. In the struggle to immerse ourselves in the Bible stories we find God’s story breaking into our own stories in new and fresh ways.

HOW TO USE THIS BIBLE STUDY MANUAL

This manual may be used for a major course of study over time or to study just one of the passages given here. For each study, the teacher should read the passage a number of times. The background notes can provide some assistance either in understanding some

of the cultural and language issues or the larger context of the story in the Bible. Ask the questions about crossing cultures from the Bible to your context. Go through the questions for the particular session in the manual. Note the “Points of Importance” with the “Lesson insights.” The lesson insights highlight matters that have been very useful in peacemaking work. Go back over the passage again with those questions and points in mind. Be sure that you feel familiar with the story and concepts.

Select the approach you will take in the study. Feel free to add to or adapt the lesson plan according to your own experience or the needs and interests of the group. Think about ways to increase the participation of all group members in the learning process, utilizing a variety of tools and teaching methods to aid every style of learning.

As you facilitate the learning process for the class participants, keep in mind some of the key points that need to surface in the lesson. If the group raises those points from their own interaction with the biblical text, you can emphasize them by calling special attention to them and restating them. If the group does not raise them, you can mention them later in the session, perhaps by asking a question to prod the thinking of the group in that direction. It is best not to simply make these points at the end of the session, but rather to weave them in at appropriate places in the group discussion.

Trust the participants to come up with many good points, including some things you had not seen or considered. In fact, expect the group to come up with some insights, ideas or ways of applying the biblical teaching that neither you nor the author of this manual thought of. That is good, because you can be a learner as well as a teacher! Affirm, encourage, praise and thank group members for the wealth of wisdom they bring into this journey of discovery with the Bible.

Most of the sessions involve work in small groups. Some of the sessions involve role-plays or skits. The room should be arranged to more easily facilitate these activities. Moveable chairs are best. They can be set in a circle or semi-circles so that dramatic activities can be in the center and easily seen by everyone. Chairs can also be moved into three or four groups for the small group studies then returned to the circle when the entire class is re-gathered.

Pray before you start the preparation and before the class. You are not the ultimate teacher, rather the Holy Spirit is. Your role is to be a teaching tool for the Spirit to use in opening the minds and hearts of the participants to what the Spirit has placed in the Scriptures for their learning and growth. The Spirit will bring the “teachable moments” to your class, including those moments that may be unplanned and a surprise to you. Be open to God’s gift in those moments. Remember as well that the Spirit wants to teach you in the process. The one who teaches can learn the most, so be ready for the wonderful lessons God can teach you!

SECTION 1:
ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT

Session 1: Conflict as Holy Ground (Exodus 2.23-4.17)

Session 2: Conflict Escalation (Genesis 3.8-13; 4.1-6; 4.19-24; 10.8-12)

Session 3: Family Feud (Genesis 25.19-34; 26.34-28.9)

Session 4: Journey Toward Reconciliation (Genesis 28.10-33.20; 35.27-29)

SESSION 1

CONFLICT AS HOLY GROUND

TEXT: Exodus 2.23-4.17

BACKGROUND:

The descendants of Jacob had settled in Egypt to avoid a famine in Canaan at a time when Jacob's son Joseph was the Pharaoh's most powerful administrator. Over the decades and centuries the memory of Joseph's leadership in Egypt faded. A new dynasty was established in Egypt with no connection to Joseph or his legacy. Eventually the Pharaohs of the new Egyptian dynasty enslaved all the Hebrews. Fears about the increasing Hebrew population prompted the Egyptian Pharaoh to introduce increasingly harsh measures against them.

After a failed attempt to get the Hebrew mid-wives to kill Hebrew boy babies at birth (see Session 15 on Exodus 1.15-22), the Pharaoh ordered the massacre of the young Hebrew boys. The mother of Moses hid him in a basket along the riverside. Pharaoh's daughter discovered the child and raised him in the royal household.

As a man, Moses became concerned about the burdens of his own people. He witnessed an Egyptian slave-driver beating a Hebrew slave. Moses killed the Egyptian and hid his body. Shortly afterward Moses intervened in a fight between two Hebrews, and it came out that they were aware that Moses had killed the Egyptian. Pharaoh heard about the killing and tried to seize Moses. Moses fled to Midian, properly Arabia, but probably broadened to include the Sinai region.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

Begin the class by writing the word "CONFLICT" on the board or a large sheet of paper. Ask class members: What words, feelings or images come to mind when you think of "conflict"? Put all their words and phrases on the board or paper. Invite people to add to the list cultural sayings or proverbs about conflict. Allow plenty of time for people to think and go deeper in the process. When the group has developed a good list, ask people to look at the whole list. Perhaps read through each word, phrase and saying. Ask the group what they notice about the list.

In almost every situation the list will be made up of words perceived as negative. Some positive words might be on the list, and you might want to acknowledge those as positive. There are positive things to be gained in conflict experiences.

Then write the words "*Holy Ground*" over the list. Ask participants:

What does the phrase "*Holy Ground*" imply?

How might conflict be thought of as *Holy Ground*?

Does anyone know where the phrase “*Holy Ground*” appears first in the Bible?

If a student identifies the story of Moses at the burning bush, invite the student to share as much of the story as he or she remembers. If not, then tell the story briefly about Moses seeing the burning bush, approaching it, and hearing a voice call out from it, “Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” Ask the class to take off their shoes for the rest of the Bible study session. Demonstrate by taking off your own shoes.

Divide the class into groups of 5 to 6 people. Ask them to study the passage for 20 minutes, answering these questions:

What were the smaller and larger contexts of conflict for this story? (They might need to refer back into chapter 2 some.)

What did Moses learn about God?

What did Moses learn about himself?

What did Moses learn about others (Pharaoh, Aaron, the Hebrew people)

After the small group study, gather the class together again. Invite one group to give their answer to the first question. Then invite other groups to make any comments that might add to what the first group said. Then invite another group to answer the second question, with the other groups making further comments if they choose. Continue in that manner through all four questions.

Comment about revelation taking place on Holy Ground. As we see in this passage, in the middle of a severe conflict situation, Moses learned about God, about himself and about others. In our conflicts we can experience revelations or new insights about ourselves, about others and about God. Those new insights, which may have been possible only through the difficulties and challenges of a conflict, can help us grow as people and as communities.

Then ask what it was like to go through the Bible study without their shoes. Some may have enjoyed it. Others may express that they felt strange or uncomfortable. If someone voices that they were uncomfortable having their shoes off, ask others in the group who were uncomfortable to raise their hands. (Feel free to raise your own hand!)

Speak about how conflict makes us uncomfortable, referring back to the list generated at the start of the session. Yet conflict can be a “holy ground” in which we can learn many things about ourselves, about others and about God. Draw the “Comfort Zone” diagram (see diagram at the end of the session). We tend not to learn much when we are in our Comfort Zone because everything is easy and safe. We also tend not to learn much when we are in the Alarm Zone. In the Alarm Zone we feel overwhelmed, in danger, and terrified. We tend to shut down and protect ourselves rather than open ourselves to new information. The Discomfort Zone is the place of greatest learning, for we are challenged, alert, and perhaps frightened just enough to give us energy. We are not

satisfied, so we are looking for a new way to deal with the challenge before us. Conflict often moves us out of our comfort zones. Some conflict takes us into the Alarm Zone where we feel overwhelmingly threatened. But if we can work constructively and creatively with our conflicts, we can make them a Discomfort Zone where we learn and grow. The Discomfort Zone is Holy Ground.

Ask the class to form into groups of two or three people. Invite them to share with each other three things they have gained through conflicts in their lives—perhaps an insight, a skill, an opportunity, a friend. Then have them share one thing they would like to gain in a conflict they are experiencing at the present time. Just before closing the session do a brief “popcorn harvest” asking each group to share one or two positive things gained from their experiences of conflict.

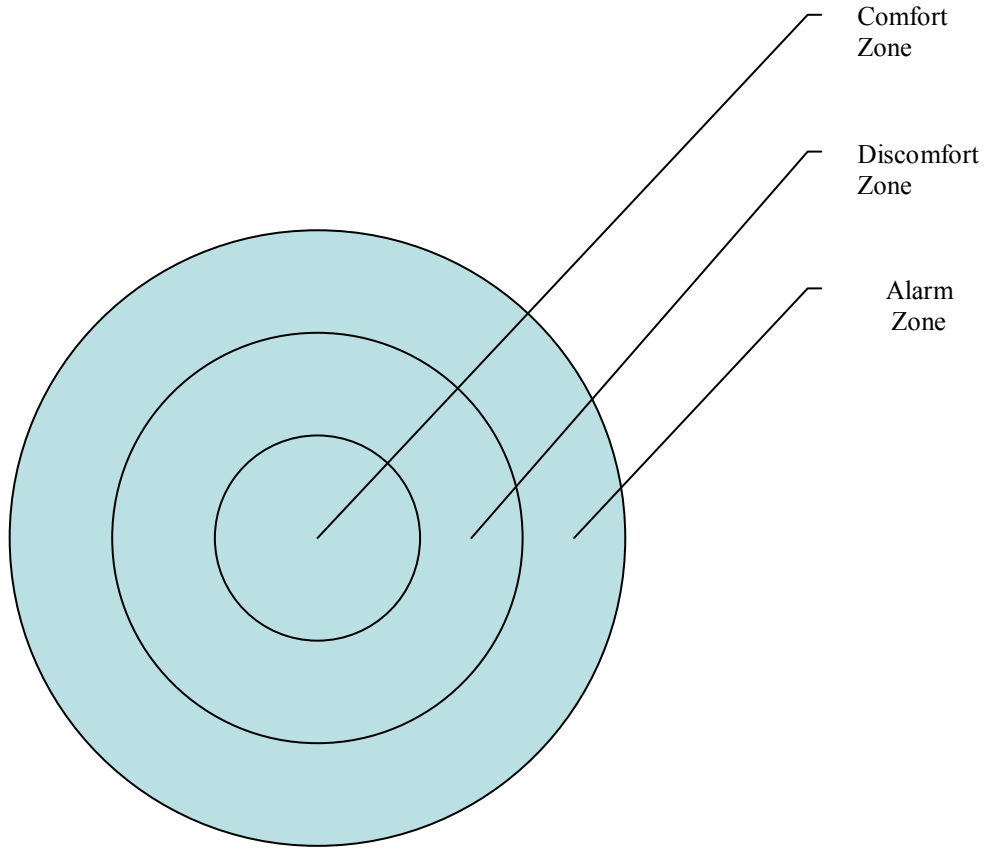
POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

* Though many of our experiences with conflict raise negative feelings and produce negative consequences, there are positive things that can be gained through conflict. People can come to understand each other better. Problems can generate the energy and commitment for us to come up with workable solutions for everyone involved. We can also grow as individuals by being stretched and challenged in conflicts. **Lesson insight: Conflict can have positive elements to it which we can work toward and build upon.**

* Christians often speak about how God is with us in our difficulties. The Bible speaks repeatedly about God being our “shield” or “defender” or about the blessings to the “one who overcomes.” These are all images of conflict. Conflict is within the scope of God’s care and activity. In fact, we could describe the entire salvation story as an epic of God’s creative, loving, redeeming and judging engagement in the conflict with humanity. Since all this is part of our faith, we need to recognize that the conflicts in our homes, communities, churches and nations which touch us directly are also spheres of divine involvement. God is with us in conflict situations to act, to guide, to teach, to liberate, to challenge, and so much more. **Lesson insight: All our conflicts can be Holy Ground where we encounter God and are changed as a result of that encounter.**

* Our greatest growth and learning takes place in contexts in which we are challenged to dig deep within ourselves and struggle with questions and challenges. Conflict can be a great teacher in taking us outside our Comfort Zone into situations where we need to learn and grow in order to reach a satisfying and successful resolution. Also, in education, the most learning takes place not in feeding the students the answers but in presenting them with the questions that challenge them to think deeper, interact with each other and discover wisdom together. **Lesson insight: Learning takes place best in the Discomfort Zone, including amid the discomfort caused by conflict.**

COMFORT ZONE DIAGRAM



SESSION 2

CONFLICT ESCALATION

TEXTS: Genesis 3.8-13; 4.1-16; 4.19-24; 10.8-12

BACKGROUND:

The first chapters of Genesis give a picture of the primal human condition. The Creation story is quickly followed up by the story of the Fall (humanity's "fall" from intimate relationship with God into disobedience, sin and death). Conflict erupts immediately between the man and the woman. In each story that follows there seems to be an increase in the intensity and levels of conflict, including eruptions of violence.

In Genesis 10 Nimrod is called a "mighty man," a phrase that indicates a ruler or tyrant. Nimrod's name is associated both with the Babylonian war-god and with the first Assyrian king to rule over all of ancient Babylonia.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

Divide the class into four groups, giving each group one of the following passages:

Genesis 3.8-13

Genesis 4.1-16

Genesis 4.19-24

Genesis 10.8-12

Ask each group to examine the conflict in their assigned passage and answer the following questions in their study:

What is the conflict in the passage and who are the parties?

What brought about the conflict?

How was it handled?

How did the conflict expand?

What were the results?

The group working with Nimrod in Genesis 10 will have to think more carefully about what is going on and the implications regarding conflict. As soon as the groups break up, the leader should go to the Genesis 10 group and share the information about Nimrod provided in the Background section above. Ask them what new development in humanity took place related to conflict with the rise of Nimrod as the first ruler of a kingdom or empire? How would his empire have been established?

Give each group 15 minutes to read and discuss the passages. Each group should come up with a brief skit to present the story or theme in the passage if they can. Then have each group report in the order the stories appear in the Bible. When all the skits and reports have been presented ask the following questions to the whole group:

What changes do you see in the way that conflicts are handled in these stories?
How do conflicts you experience tend to escalate or get worse? What are some of the different steps in conflict escalation?

Have someone read Genesis 6.11-13. The story of Noah takes place between the stories of Lamech and Nimrod. What does this say about Lamech's method of dealing with conflict, both in relation to other people and in relation to God?

How do these passages about ancient stories reflect the nature of conflict in your own life and in the drama of international affairs? Are there any lessons you can gain from this comparison?

In the discussion the teacher could present the information in the Points of Importance to illustrate some of the ways these ancient stories are reflected in our contemporary struggles with conflict.

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

* John Paul Lederach in the *Mediation Training Manual* produced by the Mennonite Conciliation Service describes 7 steps of the Social Transformation of Conflict:

1. *Problem-solving*, where the parties disagree but share a problem.
2. Shift from disagreement to *personal antagonism*; the person is seen as the problem.
3. *Issue proliferation*—moving from the specific to the general, from one issue to many.
4. *Triangulation*—talking to other people about the person in conflict not directly to that person. (“Triangulation” means making a triangle, in this case with two people who bring in a third person to the conflict, not as a mediator to assist in resolving the conflict, but in an effort to get the third person on one side or the other.)
5. *Reaction and escalation*—an eye for an eye.
6. Antagonism increasing to *hostility*.
7. *Polarization*—a change in the social organization (breaking of friendship, divorce, church split, civil war, etc.)

The further along the conflict goes through these steps there is more violence, less trust, less accurate communication and less direct contact. In the Genesis stories we see Adam and Eve at step 2 where Adam is blaming both Eve and God for the problem. Cain is also at step 2 seeing Abel as the problem, but he jumps quickly to step 7 in committing

murder. Lamech is settled in steps 5, 6 and 7 avenging himself many times over. **Lesson insight: Conflict that is not handled constructively tends to get much worse.**

* In Nimrod we see the birth of domination in a political system of kingship or empire. Domination is where one person or group gains power that is used in a threatening or abusive way over others. Throughout the Bible violent political domination is a problem, whether looking at the oppressions of Pharaoh in Egypt or Samuel's concerns about establishing a king in Israel (see 1 Samuel 8). The climax of this violent domination is seen in Revelation 13 where the Roman Empire that persecuted the Christians is described as a demonic beast. In contrast to the demonic view of worldly government in Revelation, Paul in Romans 13.1-7 presents a view of government that is divinely established to protect society from wrong-doers. Every human government has a mixture of both the divinely-established and the demonic. Some governments may exhibit more of the demonic nature in their destructive behavior, while other governments may be more supportive of the well-being of all the people under their authority. **Lesson insight: Violent or dominating ways of dealing with conflict can be institutionalized, challenging Christians to understand structural dynamics of power if they are to constructively transform organizational, social or political conflicts.**

SESSION 3

FAMILY FEUD

TEXT: Genesis 25.19-34; 26.34-28.9

BACKGROUND:

Isaac and Rebecca were nomadic people who lived in Canaan. Isaac's father Abraham had traveled from the Fertile Crescent, from the cities of Ur and Haran, down into Canaan. They were herders of sheep and goats.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

The story of Jacob and Esau is a long story in Scripture, so it might be helpful to assign the scripture readings ahead of the class or study time. This study breaks the story into two parts: "The Journey Into Conflict" and "The Journey Toward Reconciliation." Summary versions of the story may be copied and used in place of the Scripture texts during the class, though members should be strongly encouraged to read the Biblical texts beforehand so they will be familiar with the story.

Divide the class into four groups. Assign each group one of these characters: Jacob, Esau, Isaac and Rebecca. Each group will choose a person to represent their group as the character before the entire class. Within the group, read the story aloud either in the summarized form or all the Scripture verses. Then have the group discuss and answer the following questions within the role of the assigned character:

- * What do you imagine are the feelings this character experienced at different points of the story?
- * What are the issues this character faced, and in what way were the character's views expressed?
- * How did or how might the character justify the actions taken?

Allow 20 minutes for the reading and discussion. Then bring the class together for a dramatized character interview, inviting the person playing the role of the biblical character to come from each group to the front or the center of the class. Invite each character to present their concerns and views about the family conflicts. You can begin in any order, or you can assign an order (such as: Isaac, Rebecca, Esau, Jacob). Give each character a few minutes to state their concerns and views, then ask the characters questions that might probe deeper, such as (use the characters' names, not the actual participants' names):

"Esau, why did you give up your birthright so easily for a bowl of lentils?"

- “Jacob, some people would say you took advantage of your brother’s suffering to benefit yourself—how would you respond to this criticism?”
- “Isaac, were you giving up your family leadership by letting this conflict between your sons go on without any parental intervention?”
- “Rebecca, by favoring Jacob over Esau did you make things worse and contribute to a decline in Jacob’s own morals?”

Ask the rest of the class if any of them have a question they would like to ask one of the characters.

You can ask all the characters to respond to some questions, such as:

- “Who has the most power in the family? In what way do you experience that power?”
- “What were your expectations about other family members in this situation? How were those expectations met or disappointed?”

Thank all the role play participants. Then invite the entire class to help in identifying:

- What were the immediate issues in the conflicts?
- What were the deeper issues in the conflicts?
- What were some of the emotions experienced by various characters in these stories?
- What were the choices made by each character that caused the situation to become more difficult?
- What are some alternative choices each of the characters might have taken that might have decreased the level of conflict? (Make a written list of the alternative choices the group suggests.)
- What structural or cultural elements can you identify that might have made the conflicts worse or better?
- What lessons might be drawn about conflicts going on now from this ancient family conflict?

Ask people to think of a conflict in which they are presently involved and identify some of the choices they have made, for better or worse. Are there some decisions they might make that could move the conflict in a more positive direction? Ask the participants to share from their thoughts the types of actions that would be more likely to have a positive effect on conflicts. Make a list of the ideas and suggested actions. Close with silent prayer about those “choice points” for each person in the class.

The next session will examine steps this family took on a journey toward reconciliation.

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

* Conflicts always have at least two levels. One level has to do with the content or issue. In this story, the content of the conflict between Jacob and Esau can be identified as the birthright and the blessing. The other level has to do with the relationships. Jacob and Esau were in a destructive competitive relationship. Their parents were also divided, each one siding with and favoring one of the sons. Many times the focus is on the particular issue that is the content of the particular conflict, but the conflicted relationships keep generating more conflict over different issues. Both content and relationship need to be recognized in understanding what is going on in a conflict, and both must be addressed in a constructive manner if the conflict as a whole is to be positively transformed. **Lesson insight: Tend to both the relational and the content issues in trying to constructively transform a conflict.**

* At many points in conflict there are “choice points” where a person can make the conflict worse or move it toward transformation. Each character made repeated decisions that made the conflict deeper and more difficult. There is not an inevitable nature to our conflicts, in which the situation is destined to get worse. Rather all those involved in a conflict make choices. Those choices can move the conflict in a positive or negative direction. Choices can create more problems and increase hostility, or choices can be made which open communication and create new options for solving the problems. Many choices are made to create the steps that escalate a conflict. So, too, it takes a series of positive choices to de-escalate the conflict step-by-step. We need to take responsibility for our choices in our conflict situations. **Lesson insight: Watch out for the choices before us in conflicts, and take responsibility for your choices.**

SESSION 3 STORY SUMMARY

Jacob and Esau, Part 1: The Journey Into Conflict

For twenty years after getting married Isaac and Rebecca were unable to have children. Isaac prayed for Rebecca, and she conceived twins as God answered Isaac's prayer. The children struggled within her so much that Rebecca despaired: "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" Rebecca prayed over this difficult pregnancy. God told her that two nations were in her womb, two people who would be divided. One would be stronger, and the elder would serve the younger. When the time of delivery came, the first came out all red and hairy and was named Esau. His brother came out grasping Esau's heel. The second son was named Jacob, which means "the one who grabs the heel" or "the usurper."

As the boys grew Esau became an outdoorsman, skillful at hunting. Jacob was quiet, staying in the tents. Isaac preferred his son Esau, whereas Rebecca favored Jacob. One day Esau came in from the field feeling very hungry. Jacob was cooking lentil stew. Esau begged Jacob for a bowl of the stew, but Jacob bargained, "First sell me your birthright." (The birthright was all the privileges of being the first-born son, including receiving the main inheritance.) Esau, obviously overstating his situation, said he was about to die, so what value was a birthright to him? Jacob insisted that Esau swear an oath, and so he did, surrendering his birthright to his younger brother. Jacob then gave Esau the stew, bread and drink. When he was satisfied Esau went back out.

When he was an adult, Esau married two Canaanite women. These women made life bitter for Isaac and Rebecca, so there was a lot of conflict in the family.

When Isaac was old and nearly blind, he told Esau to go hunting and prepare a meal for his father. Then Isaac would give his son the paternal blessing before his death. Rebecca was listening, and after Esau went out hunting she conspired with Jacob. She told Jacob to kill two young goats so that Rebecca could prepare Isaac's favorite dish and then receive the blessing from his father in place of Esau. Jacob protested that even blind Isaac could tell because of Esau's hair and Isaac's smooth skin, and he would be cursed by his father rather than blessed. Rebecca told him to let the curse be on her and just to obey her in what she said. So Jacob killed the goats, and Rebecca cooked the meal. She got Esau's best clothes and put them on Jacob. She took the goat skins and tied them on Jacob's forearms and neck, then gave him the food to take into his father.

Jacob went to his father saying he was Esau and offering Isaac the food. Isaac wondered how it all happened so quickly, but Jacob smoothly replied that God had granted him success. Isaac had some doubts and called his son near. He felt Jacob's arms and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are of Esau." Again he bluntly asked, "Are you really my son Esau?" "I am," Jacob lied. So then Isaac ate. When he was done he asked for a kiss and smelled the outdoors in the clothing. Then Isaac gave Jacob the blessing, thinking he was Esau. In the blessing he said he would be lord over his

brothers, and that everyone who cursed him would be cursed and those who blessed him would be blessed.

Jacob had just left his father when Esau came back from his hunt. He prepared the meal and went into his father. Both were dismayed to discover the deception. Isaac trembled violently as he told that he had already given the blessing. Esau cried out loud and bitterly, pleading for a blessing. Isaac said he had already made Jacob lord. Esau said Jacob was aptly named for he had now usurped Esau twice: for his birthright and now for his blessing. He begged and cried before his father for a blessing. Finally Isaac said Esau would live by the sword and serve his brother, but that finally he would break the brother's yoke from his neck.

Esau was filled with hatred toward Jacob. He didn't want to upset his aged father, so he decided not to act until his father had died and the mourning period was finished. But he went around talking about planning to kill Jacob. Word of Esau's threats got to Rebecca who arranged for Jacob to flee to the distant city of Haran to live with her brother Laban. She convinced Isaac to let Jacob go, using Esau's ethnically-mixed marriages to Canaanite women as her rationale—Jacob could find a wife from his own people through his relative Laban. Isaac blessed Jacob to go to Haran to find a non-Canaanite wife. Esau realized his Canaanite wives were a disappointment to his father, so he married a cousin, the daughter of Ishmael.

(This part of the story was drawn from Genesis 35.19-34; 26.34-28.9)

SESSION 4

JOURNEY TOWARD RECONCILIATION

TEXT: Genesis 28.10-33.20; 35.27-29

BACKGROUND:

Isaac and Rebecca were nomadic people who lived in Canaan. Isaac's father Abraham had traveled from the Fertile Crescent, from the cities of Ur and Haran, down into Canaan. They were herders of sheep and goats. In part 1 the conflict between Jacob and Esau begins before birth and continually deepens. Jacob manipulates Esau to trade his birthright as the eldest son in exchange for some soup. Later Jacob defrauds his brother of his paternal blessing. Esau is so bitter and furious that he threatens to kill Jacob. Jacob flees to his uncle Laban's home in Haran with the stated purpose of finding a wife.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

This portion of the story takes many chapters of Genesis, so it might be helpful to assign the scripture readings ahead of the class or study time. The summary version of the story follows the session notes. The summary may be copied and read by participants in their small groups during the class or before the class meets.

Break into groups, providing 30 minutes for reflection and discussion about the story using the following questions:

What experiences did Jacob have that eventually changed his perceptions and attitude toward his brother Esau? In what way did those experiences affect him?

What steps did Jacob take that moved the conflict with his brother toward reconciliation?

What were the results of those actions?

What changed within Esau, and why? What choices did Esau make that made the reconciliation possible?

Call the groups together to report back. Take turns asking each group to give just one experience of Jacob that changed him and how he changed. Go around with each group until all the points the groups have come up with have been shared with the entire class. Use the same procedure to harvest the steps Jacob took toward reconciliation and the changes and choices of Esau.

Then ask: What are some of the steps or elements for reconciliation that emerge from this story which might apply to the conflicts we face in our own lives?

Invite class members to think of the conflict they reflected on last week. Are there some steps toward reconciliation identified in this study that need to be taken in that conflict? Allow time for silent reflection and prayer.

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

* Note how much of Jacob's journey toward reconciliation was a spiritual journey with God, both in the vision of the angels on the ladder to heaven and wrestling through the night. A large part of any journey toward reconciliation is an inner transformation in which we recognize who we are (Jacob being forced to say his name—face his “usurper” past), then receive the grace and make the commitment to act God's way. The result of the inner transformation of Jacob was also a commitment to take personal responsibility for his actions, including being accountable for restoring the relationship damaged by his wrong-doing. **Lesson insight: Reconciliation is as much of an inward journey with one's own self as an outward journey with the other person.**

* Reconciliation takes risk. Jacob had no guarantee Esau would accept him. Jacob could have been slaughtered, but he took the risk to be open, humble, and repentant. We cannot be responsible for what the other person or group will do, but we are responsible for the choices we make, including taking the risks of the steps we can take toward reconciliation. **Lesson insight: Reconciliation in serious conflicts is never possible without someone, and in some cases everyone, taking risks to restore the relationship.**

* Jacob experienced a measure of reconciliation with his father-in-law Laban before meeting Esau. He experienced what it meant to be cheated himself (something Esau had experienced from Jacob). He faced the anger of Laban in being cheated. Jacob and Laban communicated about their conflict and feelings. They came to a mutually-acceptable agreement where they could live in peace and maintain a family relationship. These all prepared Jacob for the reconciliation process for the longer and deeper alienation with his brother. **Lesson insight: Success in transforming a conflict can give us experience upon which to build as we seek to transform other conflicts in our lives.**

SESSION 4 STORY SUMMARY

Jacob and Esau, Part 2: The Journey Toward Reconciliation

Jacob left his family with the double purpose of evading Esau's murderous threats and finding a wife among his own people in Haran. One night on his journey Jacob lay down to sleep and had a dream. He dreamed about seeing a ladder extending from earth up to heaven with angels going up and down the ladder. God appeared beside him and renewed the covenant promises made to Abraham and Isaac, promising that Jacob's offspring would be a great nation, that they would receive the land where he slept, and that they would be a blessing to all the nations. God promised to be with Jacob wherever he would go and to bring him back to this land. When Jacob woke he was filled with awe. He felt he had been in the house of God and at the gate of heaven. He set up a pillar and called the place Bethel ("House of God").

When Jacob went to Haran he fell in love with Rachel, daughter of his uncle Laban. He made an agreement to work for Laban as a shepherd for 7 years, but Laban tricked Jacob by giving his older daughter Leah to him at the wedding. Jacob stayed another 7 years to marry Rachel. Jacob prepared to go back to Canaan and for another 6 years worked to gather a flock in payment for his services to Laban. He tricked Laban by using selective breeding to gain a large herd of sheep and goats at the expense of Laban's herds. Laban was very upset when he realized the deception, so Jacob secretly slipped away with his wives, children and herds. Laban pursued him, but in a dream God warned him about how he should relate to Jacob.

When Laban caught up, he and Jacob talked with great feeling about the ways they had hurt each other and the mistrust that developed. Jacob shared his feelings of fear and betrayal in all the years he had served Laban. Laban shared that Jacob's wives were his daughters and their children were his grandchildren. So the two of them made a covenant together not to harm each other and that Jacob would care well for his wives and children. Laban kissed his daughters and grandchildren, and then departed.

Jacob continued on back to Canaan. He sent messengers to Esau about his return, saying he hoped to find favor with his brother. The messengers came back warning that Esau was coming with 400 men to meet him. This terrified Jacob. First he divided all his family and herds, hoping that one group would survive. Then he prayed for deliverance. He humbly acknowledged that he was not worthy of God's love and faithfulness. He acknowledged his fear of Esau, but also his trust in God's covenant promise to him.

Then Jacob change tactics. He sent ahead a large gift of animals from his herds and servants with a conciliatory message for Esau. Jacob hoped to calm his brother's anger, to be able to see his face and that Esau would accept him. Then Jacob sent all his family, including his children across the river into Canaan.

Jacob was alone. Then a man came and wrestled with Jacob till daybreak. When the man could not win, he struck Jacob's hip, putting it out of joint. Jacob still wouldn't let go until the man would bless him. The man asked him his name. Jacob said his name, which means "usurper." Then the man said he would no longer be called "Jacob," but "Israel," which means "the one who strives with God." Jacob then asked for the man's name, but no answer was given. The man disappeared and Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved. He continued on his journey, crossing the river and limping because of his injured hip.

Jacob saw Esau coming with the 400 men. He came forward in front of his family and bowed low to the ground. Esau ran up and embraced him. They kissed and wept. Esau looked at the large family Jacob had and was introduced to them. Esau asked about all the gifts sent, and Jacob said he hoped to find favor. But Esau said he had enough and told Jacob to keep his herds and gifts for himself. Jacob asked Esau to keep his gifts, for in his mind seeing the face of his brother Esau was like seeing the face of God. God had dealt graciously with him and he experienced that same grace from Esau. Esau received the gift.

They continued the journey with Jacob showing humble gratitude and Esau showing kindness. Jacob settled down in Canaan. When Isaac finally died, the two brothers buried him together.

(This part of the story was drawn from Genesis 28.10-33.20; 35.27-29)

SECTION 2:
CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Session 5: Conflict over Misunderstandings (Joshua 22.10-34)

Session 6: A Daring Mediator (1 Samuel 25.1-35)

Session 7: Conflict over Religious Values (Acts 15.1-35)

Session 8: Finding a Win/Win Solution (Numbers 31.1-33)

Session 9: When It Does Not Work Out (Acts 15.36-41)

SESSION 5

CONFLICT OVER MISUNDERSTANDINGS

TEXT: Joshua 22.10-34

BACKGROUND:

During the conquest of Canaan by the people of Israel, all 12 of the tribes participated. But the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh had decided to settle on the eastern side of the Jordan in the regions of Jazer and Gilead. Numbers 32 (see the study on that passage in Session 8) relates the story about how the tribes agreed under Moses for Reuben, Gad and Manasseh to participate in the conquest before settling in the eastern territories. In Joshua 22.1-9 Joshua proclaims that the work of the conquest is over and releases the 2 ½ tribes to go to the eastern side of the Jordan to establish their homes.

Two earlier experiences of Israel are mentioned in this passage. Understanding those earlier events is important for understanding the concerns of the tribes from the western side of the Jordan. V.17 refers to the “sin of Peor.” This is a reference to a story recorded in Numbers 25.1-9 in which the Israelites engaged in idolatrous practices related to the worship of Baal. 24,000 people died in the plague associated with God’s judgment for this idolatry.

V. 20 refers to “Achan the son of Zerah.” Achan’s story is told in Joshua 7. Achan stole some of the spoils from the destruction of Jericho, keeping for himself what should have been offered to God. As a result Israel suffered a military defeat in their next encounter at Ai. God revealed that the entire community was being judged for failure to faithfully offer up all the spoils of Jericho to God. Achan was exposed as the guilty one, and the treasure found buried in his tent. He was killed to cleanse the community from his wrongdoing.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

One way to study the passage is to break into small groups to read and discuss the passage with the following questions provide to guide their study. Allow 40 minutes for the group to work together. Then invite one group to report on what they learned. Ask other groups not to retell the entire story but to share their insights from the passage. When all groups have finished the leader can raise any further points that might have been missed and provide a concluding summary.

Questions for the groups to use in their study:

What is the conflict about? What is the immediate issue? What are the underlying or deeper concerns for both sides?

What factors make the conflict more severe? What do the Israelites under Phinehas do that is helpful? What does Phinehas say or do that might not be so helpful in resolving the conflict?

What do the Reubenites, Gadites and half tribe of Manasseh (or the Easterners) do that is helpful? What do they do that is not so helpful in resolving the conflict?

What dynamics worked toward resolution? What was the solution? How was it achieved? How was the solution received by the parties to the conflict? What did the parties to the conflict do to make their agreement formal?

Another way to organize the study would be to have three groups do the study, each with a different focus or task. The first group would identify with the eastern tribes (Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh). The second group would identify with the western tribes (under the leadership of Phinehas). These groups would study the story with an emphasis on the particular viewpoint of their assigned tribes. They would need to discover: What were the concerns, fears and viewpoints of their tribes? How did their tribes articulate their positions and needs? Each group would select a spokesperson who would then represent them in a role play.

The third group would be a mediator group. They would study the dynamics between the groups, trying to identify where the common ground might be. They would select one member to be a mediator between the groups in the role play.

Give the groups 30 minutes to read the passage and get prepared for their roles. Then invite the spokespersons to the center or the front of the class to do the role play. The mediator will host the talks between the two groups, inviting each side to tell the story. The mediator should help each group to identify their concerns, interests and needs, assisting both groups in trying to find common points of interest. Then the mediator will try to help them come to an agreement which answers the concerns and meets the needs of both parties. This would be a “win/win” solution.

Following the role play, ask the entire class to compare the solution from the role play to the solution arrived in the Bible story. What interests of each side were met by the solutions achieved?

Close the session by inviting the members to form into groups of two or three. Invite them to practice by reflecting on a current conflict they have with someone in which they have not clearly stated a fear or concern they have. Ask the participants to state as clearly as they can what their fear or concern is. Then the listeners may invite the person speaking if they want to go a little deeper by thinking if there is anything beneath or behind that fear or concern that might bring more understanding to what is at risk in the conflict.

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

- * It is very easy to project onto others what we fear, but those projections may have no basis in reality at all. The easterners projected their fear that the westerners would eventually exclude the easterners from the community of Israel because of the natural boundary of the Jordan River. The westerners projected their fear of God's judgment for behavior against the covenant upon the easterners. Neither side checked out their projections by communicating with the other group before acting on their fears. The easterners built the altar without talking to the westerners about their fears or providing an interpretation for their actions. The westerners mobilized for war without first talking to the easterners about what their action of building the altar signified. Wisely Phinehas began to talk before starting the war. **Lesson insight: Communicate first to see whether your projections and fears are accurate!**

- * Some communication issues emerge in the story:
 - **It is important to identify and share one's own fears or concerns**, such as Phinehas did in sharing the concern about unfaithfulness to God bringing judgment upon the whole community.
 - However, Phinehas began with very accusatory language (see v.16). **"You"-language that is accusatory can stimulate a defensive response. "I"-language, in which a person shares clearly their own fears, concerns or hurts, opens the opportunity for further communication between the sides.** "I"-language invites clarification, honesty and a chance to look for solutions rather than stimulating defensiveness that keeps the parties apart.
 - **A specific proposal that offers something to the other side** (such as put forward by Phinehas in v.19) **can open up the discussion for a workable and mutually acceptable solution.**
 - **Clarify motives** (as the eastern tribes did in v. 24-27) **so the other side can understand the thinking and feelings behind the actions taken.**

- * **Take follow-up actions to make the agreement formal and widely understood** (such as reporting to the rest of Israel what happened and naming the altar "Witness"—see v.32-34).

- * In many conflicts opposing parties think that one side must win and the other lose. This is called a "win/lose" approach to conflict. Through the process of communication of the interests and needs of each side and finding common ground, a "win/win" solution can often be found. Both groups can have the experience of "winning," but not at the price of the other side losing. In this story the eastern tribes were able to have a physical memorial to indicate their common bond with the Hebrew people on the western side of the Jordan. The western tribes were reassured as to the religious faithfulness of the entire community including those who settled on the eastern side of the Jordan. **Lesson insight: Look for the "win/win" solution. It will leave everyone feeling much better about the resolution of the conflict than with a solution where one side loses.**

SESSION 6

A DARING MEDIATOR

TEXT: 1 Samuel 25.1-35

BACKGROUND:

David was living the life of a fugitive in the wilderness, for King Saul was trying to kill him. David gathered a band of warriors and social outlaws together. They survived by what they could forage, beg or plunder.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

Break into small groups to read and discuss the passage with the following questions provided to guide their study. Allow 30 minutes for the group to work together. Then invite one group to report on what they learned. Ask other groups not to retell the entire story but to share their insights from the passage. When all groups have finished the leader can raise any further points that might have been missed and provide a concluding summary.

Questions for the groups to use in their study:

List the principle characters in the story. What behaviors did each of these characters or group of characters show?

What were the issues and concerns on the sides of the conflict? What did various characters do to inflame the conflict?

Who acted so as to move the conflict toward a peaceful conclusion? How did their actions change the behavior of others?

Who yielded what in the negotiation? Who gained what in the resolution?

As an alternative approach a group could be assigned the passage in advance and asked to prepare a skit or brief drama about the story. After they have acted the story out, then the teacher can ask the rest of the group the study questions.

Ask the group to identify a number of areas or relationships where conflicts often arise, such as: between husband and wife, relatives, students, children playing in the neighborhood, workers on the job, employees and boss, merchant and buyer, government official and citizen. In each of these areas, who might be looked to for mediation help in a formal way? Are there people who might be able to be informal mediators? What type of qualifications would such a mediator need?

Invite a member of the class to share an experience in which they mediated in a conflict. After the story is told, ask the group to identify the points of opportunity taken to assist the parties in the conflict to move toward resolution. Also identify the qualities exhibited by the mediator that helped the process.

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

* The young servant in v.14-17 played a small but very important role in resolving this conflict. He was personally not in a position to affect either of the major parties to the conflict, Nabal or David. But he knew Abigail as a person of wisdom and that she would have access to the people involved. Though he could do very little, he did what he was able to do. **Lesson insight: Do whatever you can that might move a conflict in a positive direction.**

* Abigail wisely put herself within David's perspective and interests to show him his own need for a peaceful solution to the conflict (see v. 30,31). She showed him that he would be better off in the future as king if he had no massacre as part of his political history. **Lesson insight: To come to a resolution it can be helpful to get into the perspective, needs and values of the other side in order to frame a solution that would work within the framework and interests of the other side.**

SESSION 7

CONFLICT OVER RELIGIOUS VALUES

TEXT: Acts 15.1-35

BACKGROUND:

The first Christians were all Jews or Gentile converts to Judaism who then became followers of Jesus. As the gospel spread, more and more Gentiles became followers of Christ, especially once the missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas was launched out of the multi-cultural congregation at Antioch. The question then arose: Does a Gentile have to become a religious Jew in order to become a Christian? Is Christianity a branch of Judaism or a new faith that transcends the division between Jews and Gentiles? What are the religious and ethical standards that define the new faith? Circumcision of males was the covenant ritual that marked entry into the religious community of Judaism, so the focal point of the discussion was whether to require this of new male Gentile converts or not. These were the questions that the early church leaders were pondering as they gathered for the council meeting recorded in Acts 15.

Pharisees are mentioned in v.5, but they are specifically identified as “believers.” These were followers of the legal traditions of the Pharisees who had become followers of Jesus (see Nicodemus in John 3 as an example). They had a very high view of the Law of Moses and voiced the opinion that circumcision was necessary for all male converts.

In v. 7-11 Peter tells a story that is told more fully in Acts 10.1-11.18 in which the Gentile Cornelius and his household became Christians. They immediately received the Holy Spirit just as the apostles and other disciples had at Pentecost. Cornelius’ story was a foundational event for the early church and is retold many times within the book of Acts.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

Break into small groups to read and discuss the passage with the following questions provided to guide their study. Allow 40 minutes for the group to work together. Then invite one group to report on what they learned. Ask other groups not to retell the entire story but to share their insights from the passage. When all groups have finished the leader can raise any further points that might have been missed and provide a concluding summary.

Questions for the groups to use in their study:

What is the conflict about? What is the immediate issue? What are the underlying concerns for both sides? Identify the parties to the conflict. *(The teacher can decide whether or not to share the background information related to the issue of circumcision in the early church, depending on the depth of Biblical background of the class.)*

How does the conflict come to the point of being addressed? What are some possible factors that brought it to this point?

What was brought into consideration in trying to resolve the conflict? What dynamics worked toward a solution?

What solution was arrived at? How did the participants to the conflict act upon the solution?

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

* The turning point in the debate was Peter telling the story of Cornelius and then Paul and Barnabas telling the stories of their missionary journey. Prior to that there had been “much debate” (see v.7). In conflicts over values or theology it is very difficult for either side to convince the other by their own force of argument or Scripture passages quoted. Rather the arguments go on and on, sometimes becoming very divisive. Personal stories can change the entire atmosphere of the discussion. Stories move the discussion out of the theoretical realm into the complex realities of our lives. There is a different way that truth is seen and heard in stories, something that is easier to appreciate and respect even if the story comes from a very different place in life than where the hearer is. Stories create a common ground in our humanness, and in this case finding God acting in ways not expected in some of the theological frameworks people were holding. **Lesson insight: Use people’s stories to help people in a conflict to understand each other, to grow in respect for each other even if they have deep differences, and to open up new ways of thinking that can embrace the truth revealed in the stories.**

* After the agreement was reached, the council formalized their agreement in a letter that went with two delegates to the Gentile churches (v.22-31). When a resolution to a conflict is achieved it is important to find a way to formalize the agreement. A written agreement can be helpful so that everyone knows what was agreed to. **Lesson Insight: Formalize agreements.**

* Though circumcision was no longer required of Gentile male converts, the council did require converts to maintain standards of sexual morality, abstaining “from blood” (Does this refer to not committing murder or to not eating improperly killed meat? Most scholars believe this phrase refers to maintaining some of the kosher food laws), and not participating in idolatry by eating meat offered in sacrifice to idols. If these are the key ethical standards set by the early church for showing the faith, even in the New Testament we find a discussion beginning about what those standards mean. In Romans

14 and 1 Corinthians 8 the issue is explored by the Apostle Paul in a way that shows some of the complexities of living out theological beliefs in a particular culture. In cultures where there are no physical religious idols, such a key issue has no relevance at all. Faithfulness to Christ would be seen in other ethical matters. The point to note here is that in many conflicts an agreement may work for a while, but further experiences and thinking might require a reworking of the understanding behind the agreement or even the agreement itself. A change in the cultural context or various historical developments might make old issues of no concern but raise important new issues to become topics of further discussion and debate. **Lesson insight: Solutions to many conflicts are steps along the way and may need to be reworked later in light of new developments.**

SESSION 8

FINDING A WIN/WIN SOLUTION

TEXT: Numbers 32.1-33

BACKGROUND:

The people of Israel had finished their 40 years of travel in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. They were approaching Canaan from the east, coming up to the Jordan River. In Numbers 21 the story is told about the defeat of the Amorite kings Sihon and Og who ruled east of the Jordan. That region was under Israelite control as they stood ready to launch their invasion of Canaan.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

Break into small groups to read and discuss the passage with the following questions provided to guide their study. Allow 30 minutes for the group to work together. Then invite one group to report on what they learned. Ask other groups not to retell the entire story but to share their insights from the passage. When all groups have finished the leader can raise any further points that might have been missed and provide a concluding summary.

Questions for the groups to use in their study:

Who are the two parties to this conflict?

What are the needs and interests of each group? What are the fears that may affect the concerns and perceptions of either party?

What solution was achieved? How does that solution meet the needs and interests of both groups? What do you think contributed to arriving at an agreeable solution?

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

* Many conflicts become competitive: For one side to win the other side must lose. Initially, the positions of the Reubenites and Gadites on the one hand and Moses on the other were opposed. By looking at the needs and interests of both groups (the Reubenites and Gadites to have good grazing land for their cattle and the rest of the tribes to have full military support for the invasion) a solution was found in which both sides achieved what they wanted. This is called a “win-win solution.” The solution was not present in either

of the positions stated at the beginning, but it emerges once the needs and interests were clearly identified. **Lesson insight: Look for the win-win solution that meets the needs and interests of all parties to the conflict.**

* Moses stated a very harsh opinion about the Reubenites and Gadites in the beginning (v.14). The Reubenites and Gadites responded with a specific proposal that took into account the concerns Moses raised. **Lesson insight: Acknowledging and affirming the valid interests of the other side can help in crafting an acceptable solution.**

SESSION 9

WHEN IT DOES NOT WORK OUT

TEXT: Acts 15.36-41

BACKGROUND:

Paul, earlier known as Saul, and Barnabas had been together in ministry in Antioch (Acts 11.25-26). From Antioch they were sent out together on a missionary journey (Acts 13.1-3). A young man named John Mark accompanied them (Acts 13.5), but he left them and returned home early in the journey (Acts 13.13). The reason for John Mark's departure is not given.

Paul and Barnabas are coming from the Jerusalem Council in which their ministry to the Gentiles was affirmed by the larger church.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

Divide into three groups. One group will read the passage to understand Barnabas' position. The second group will read the passage to focus on Paul's position. The third group will try to think about a role that a third party (person or group) might have been able to take.

For the Paul and Barnabas groups these questions may be helpful:

What was the primary concern? What deeper values do you think made the feelings so intense in this conflict?

For the Middle group:

What are the shared values and concerns between Paul and Barnabas? What solution might be possible that would meet both of their concerns? How might such a solution be presented to be of interest to both men?

Allow 15 minutes for study and discussion within the groups. Each group will select a spokesperson to enter into a role play. (The Barnabas group may also select someone to be John Mark.) Begin the role play with Paul and Barnabas discussing going on another mission trip and stating their positions about John Mark. Let them discuss the matter for a couple of minutes. Then invite the person from the Middle group to enter the scene and see if he or she can assist them in finding a solution. Let the role play move forward until it appears that the creative energy is slowing down or the participants don't seem to know where to go next.

Debrief the role play. Ask the larger group what happened? Identify the positions taken by Paul and Barnabas in the conflict. Identify the underlying values and concerns. What kind of role did the Middle person play? For example, was that person strong and directive or more questioning, helping the parties figure out their own solution? What did the person from the Middle group do that worked? What did not work? What were matters identified that were held in common? Was a solution found that was acceptable to all?

What lessons does the group see emerging in this exercise? How does the process seen in this role play relate to our lives? Invite group members to tell a story of someone playing a helpful middle role in a conflict they experienced. After hearing the story ask class members to identify attitudes, approaches and actions taken by that middle person that helped move the conflict in a positive direction.

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

* The solution in Acts 15.39 for Paul to take Silas and go one way and Barnabas to take John Mark and go another may have been an agreement worked out to maximize the mission work and develop workable mission teams. But there is no indication in Scripture one way or the other about whether or not they parted in a reconciled manner. The only statement is that the conflict was a “sharp” one. **Lesson insight: A respectful separation may be the best workable solution to some conflicts, though such a separation may also be an indication of a failed reconciliation.**

* We don't know what happened between Barnabas and John Mark after this story. Evidently the young man changed from being the undependable youth that Paul had been so critical of, probably due to the encouragement and mentoring by Barnabas. John Mark later wrote the Gospel of Mark. Furthermore, Paul as an older man asks Timothy to bring Mark with him “for he is very useful in serving me” (2 Timothy 4.11). Something significant happened to change Paul's opinion of Mark! **Lesson insight: We may see or experience a conflict at one particular discouraging point, but that may not be the end of the story! Further events may take place which can move the situation from a negative to a positive experience for those involved.**

SECTION 3:

MAINSTREAM AND MARGIN

Session 10: A Conflict in Every Group (Acts 6.1-7)

Session 11: Finding One's Voice (Esther 4.1-17)

Session 12: A Grieving, Angry Mother Rises (2 Samuel 21.1-14)

SESSION 10

A CONFLICT IN EVERY GROUP

TEXT: Acts 6.1-7

BACKGROUND:

The early chapters in Acts describe the life of the young church after Jesus had ascended into heaven. The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on Pentecost, as described in Acts 2. The followers of Jesus experienced a sudden growth in numbers. The core group was made up of Jewish people who spoke Aramaic, a derivative of Hebrew. They were sometimes referred to as “Hebrews.” The newcomers to the community included many travelers from distant regions who had come to Jerusalem for religious pilgrimage or business. They heard the gospel at Pentecost or shortly thereafter and became followers of Jesus. These people were also Jews, but they were part of the Jewish *diaspora*, those who had been scattered over the centuries following the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (*Diaspora* refers to the scattering of the Jewish people—or any people—far from their homeland.) They had settled in many cities throughout northern Africa, southern Europe, the Middle East and western Asia. They spoke Greek as their common language, the cosmopolitan language of the day. So in Jerusalem, these *diaspora* Jews who became followers of Jesus were called “Hellenists,” because they spoke Greek.

Following Pentecost the new community began sharing their belongings and taking care of any in need (Acts 2.44-45 and 4.32-37). Many people sold their lands and other possessions. The money was given to the apostles who then saw that it was distributed to anyone who had need.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

Prior to studying the passage, make a brief presentation about “mainstream” and “margin.” If you have the time you could do the following exercise to prepare for the Bible study:

Ask class participants to close their eyes and remember a time when they felt like they were on the edge or margin of a group—they clearly did not belong with the group in control. Encourage them quietly to remember what was said, what actions were taken. How did it feel? How did they respond? How did they feel about their response? Ask how the main group or person was like from their point of view. If they had a message they could safely say to that main person or group what would they say?

Invite people to share in groups of 3 or 4 for a few minutes, not telling the particular story, but telling what they felt at the margin, what the main group was

like, and what they would say to that main group from their point of view at the margin. Then gather the responses from the whole class to these topics in order: what it felt like to be in the margin, what the mainstream looked like, and what they would say to the mainstream from the position of being at the margin.

When the responses have been gathered on lists on paper or a board, tell the group that you have some “bad news” and some “good news” for them. The bad news is that everyone in the class, including the teacher, is all those things they said about the mainstream. We are all mainstream some of the time, and this is how we come across as the mainstream to those in the margin. However, the good news is that we can all act out of what we have taught ourselves from our experiences in the margin. We can listen as mainstream people to the voice of ourselves as margin people. We can act in accord with what we were challenging the mainstream to be and do from our marginal vantage point.

The passage for this session provides some examples of people trying to work positively from both mainstream and margin positions. Break into small groups to read and discuss the Acts 6.1-7 passage with the following questions to guide their study. Allow 20 minutes for the group to work together. Then invite one group to report on what they learned. Ask other groups not to retell the entire story but to share their insights from the passage. When all groups have finished the leader can raise any further points that might have been missed and provide a concluding summary.

Questions to use in the small group study:

Identify the parties to the conflict. What is the immediate issue? What are the underlying concerns for both sides?

Which group could be considered “mainstream” or at the “center” of the community? Why?

Which group could be considered on the “margin” or on the edges of the community? How did they experience being on the edge or the margin?

How aware was the “mainstream” group of the experience of those on the “margins”? How did that awareness change?

In what way did the decisions made affect the mainstream and the margins? The names of the seven people chosen are all Greek names. Does that signify anything about the nature of the resolution achieved? Were there other people on the margin that were missing in the solution? What implications do you see for those missing people?

What other ways, if any, did the decisions made not address issues of both those in the mainstream and in the margins?

What did those at the margins do that was most helpful?

What did those in the mainstream do that was most helpful?

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

* Perhaps the best way to understand the dynamics of the conflict in this story is in terms of “mainstream” and “margins” or center and edges. The mainstream is the part of the group that sets the values, rules, traditions and customs that predominate in the larger group. The mainstream may be the majority group, but not necessarily. The mainstream could be a numerical minority that still has the power to set the way things go in the group. The interests of the mainstream are what the group recognizes as the valid priority interests for the whole group. The mainstream may be a ruling or culturally dominant ethnic group, the parents in a family, the governing body of a church, the administration of an academic institution. The margins are the individuals or groups who have values, customs, and ways of being that are alternatives to the mainstream. Every group has a mainstream and a margin, from the smallest group in a school or church to groups of nations. People may be in the mainstream in one setting, and in the margin in another. Furthermore, one person may be mainstream in one way in a particular group, and margin in another way in that very same group (for example, a college-educated woman in a church group may be mainstream because of her education and margin because of her gender). Every one of us has the experience of being mainstream in some setting and margin in some other setting. **Lesson insight: We can learn from our experience at the margins how to listen better and act more justly when we are in the mainstream.**

* The mainstream is unconscious of its privileges and rank within the group. The mainstream is also unaware of the experience of the margins. The margin, however, is distinctly aware of both their own and the mainstream’s values and beliefs because they have to consciously function in relationship to the mainstream since the mainstream sets the ways for the group to operate. The Hebrew Christians, including the apostles, has no awareness of the suffering of the Hellenistic widows. We don’t know how the matter of the neglect of the Hellenist widows actually got to the attention of the apostles. Perhaps they complained directly. Perhaps a Hellenist community leader brought the complaint. Perhaps there was a sensitive Hebrew who picked up the concern and brought it to the apostles. However it happened, the apostles did not get defensive or criticize the one bringing the complaint. Instead they listened and then acted appropriately to address the concern. Listening is the best first step in countering the unconsciousness and unawareness of the mainstream. **Lesson insight: The first and best constructive step the mainstream group can do in a conflict is to listen!**

* When a conflict involves structural injustice such as in this case, some sort of structural change must be included in the solution. In the Acts 6 story the Hellenist widows were being neglected in the distribution of food, so the structural change involved both the establishment of a new position in the church to handle assistance to the needy and also gave power to the neglected community in the new structure. All those chose to

administer the new program came from the Hellenists who had been neglected. **Lesson insight: Involving the margins in formulating a just solution is required as part of resolving conflicts rooted in injustice.**

* After the conflict is resolved verse 7 tells about the dramatic expansion of evangelism. A conflict takes a lot of a community's energy, focusing the energy inward on the conflict. When the conflict is resolved the energy can then be turned outward in creative endeavors. **Lesson insight: Evangelistic effectiveness is supported by good conflict resolution processes in the church.**

SESSION 11

FINDING ONE'S VOICE

TEXT: Esther 4.1-17

BACKGROUND:

The Jewish people had been scattered following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. A large group of Jews had been carried off into exile in Babylon. Then the Persians conquered Babylon, establishing a kingdom that was supportive of many different religious groups. The Persian king Cyrus allowed Jews under Ezra and Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to rebuild. Many Jews chose to stay in Persia. The book of Esther tells a story out of the Jewish community in Persia. Esther was the queen of King Ahasuerus. Her uncle Mordecai had exposed a plot to assassinate the king. Mordecai refused to bow before Haman, an ambitious and vain official close to the king. In a rage at Mordecai Haman devised a plot to manipulate the king on the basis of false information to order the slaughter of the Jews.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

A skit could be prepared in advance by four members of the class playing the roles of Mordecai, Esther, Esther's maid, and Hathach. The four people doing the skit should read the story in advance and prepare a dramatized way of telling the story to the class. Once the skit is finished the class could discuss the questions below either in small groups or as a whole. All class participants might want to read the entire book of Esther prior to the study.

If the skit is not done, break into small groups to read and discuss the passage with the following questions to guide their study. Allow 30-35 minutes for the group to work together. Then invite one group to report on what they learned. Ask other groups not to retell the entire story but to share their insights from the passage. When all groups have finished, the leader may raise any further points that might have been missed and provide a concluding summary.

Questions for the small groups or entire class to use in their study:

What were the feelings of Mordecai and Esther when they heard the news about the planned destruction of the Jews?

What were their vulnerabilities as Jews in the society? In what way was Esther vulnerable even though she had the seemingly powerful position of queen?

Recalling the discussion of mainstream and margins (or center and edges) in the Acts 6 study, what challenges did Mordecai and Esther have to overcome within themselves as more marginal people in the story? What actions did they take to strengthen their efforts to transform this dangerous conflict?

How did Mordecai mobilize Esther to action?

What did Mordecai believe about the opportunities in life to take transformative action? If we thought in the same way as Mordecai, how might this understanding affect the way we relate to people and situations in conflicts?

What support did Esther seek for her action? How did this support strengthen her? How did her requests build solidarity among the Jewish community?

Was Esther's action civil disobedience? In what way did Esther act so as to call forth the king's mercy and openness to her message? (Esther 5.1-3 shows the beginning of her process of approaching the king.)

Ask class participants if they have ever had the feeling that they were the particular person at a particular time and particular place who had to respond in an important way to a challenge or a conflict? What was the situation? What did it feel like? What did you do or say? Do you feel you are in a situation right now where you might be the one with a special responsibility to act so as to bring about constructive change in a conflict? Invite the participants to form groups of 2 or 3 people to share those experiences and challenges with each other. If any members of the group are facing a current situation requiring responsible action, pray for each other just as Esther drew upon the prayers of her community to support her action.

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

* Esther courageously risked her life to speak before the king. She planned carefully about how to approach the king so that her request would get a fair hearing. Mordecai took public action in mourning the impending slaughter. Though he personally had no access to the decision-makers, he prepared himself through planning, gathering information (such as a copy of the king's decree), and placing himself in a position where his action would be noticed. **Lesson insight: Good planning and the courage to take risks are often critical ingredients to conflict transformation.**

* One of the most difficult things for those in the margin to do is to find their voice and speak out, especially when they feel threatened. Those in power, the mainstream or the center, are often unaware of the problems their actions are causing as was the case with King Ahasuerus. Others may be outright hostile as was Haman. Esther needed both to gain knowledge about what was about to happen to her people and to be personally challenged to take a risk because only she was in a position to reach the decision-makers.

Lesson insight: Finding a way for marginalized people to effectively speak the truth of what is happening is critical for conflict transformation.

SESSION 12

A GRIEVING, ANGRY MOTHER RISES

TEXT: 2 Samuel 21.1-14

BACKGROUND:

During the Israelite conquest of Canaan the Gibeonites secured a peace agreement with the Israelites by deceitful means. That story is recorded in Joshua 9.3-27. Joshua made a covenant with the Gibeonites to let them live, an agreement viewed as holy and not to be violated. Evidently there was a massacre of the Gibeonites under the reign of King Saul. Saul and three of his sons, including David's friend Jonathan, were later killed in battle by the Philistines. David became king and the protector of Jonathan's crippled son Mephibosheth. Saul's surviving concubine Rizpah had earlier been used as a possession symbolizing growing political power in a struggle between Saul's son Ishbosheth and his general Abner (see 2 Samuel 3.6-11). By the time of the story in 2 Samuel 21, David is well in control of his kingdom, having survived various wars of consolidation and a number of revolts.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

Break into small groups to read and discuss the passage with the following questions to guide their study. Allow 30 minutes for the group to work together. Then invite one group to report on what they learned. Ask other groups not to retell the entire story but to share insights from the passage. When all groups have finished, the leader may raise any further points that might have been missed and provide a concluding summary.

Questions to use in the small group study:

The original incident of violence of Saul against the Gibeonites is not told in the Bible except in its reference in this passage. What do you think probably happened? (The Gibeonites had been pledged safety within Israel in Joshua 9.)

What bargain did David make to appease the Gibeonites? Who was to suffer in the newest round of violence? Is there any indication that these individuals were responsible for the initial incident of violence? Why would the Gibeonites and David feel that such an action would make the situation "better"? How is David in the mainstream in this story? How does he act toward the margins?

Who is Rizpah? How is Rizpah in the margin in this story? What action did she take? Was this a public action? Was she doing more than grieving for her loss? How is her choice different from the choice made by Merab, the other mother in the story (some translations call her Michal)? What inner issues do you think

Rizpah might have had to face to act as she did? What do you think gave her the energy and courage for her action?

What impact did Rizpah's action have? How does David as a mainstream person respond to Rizpah as a person in the margin? What does it signify for David, who handed the men over for execution, to bury the bodies with royal dignity?

Where is God in the story? Does God condone the deal made between the Gibeonites and David? When does the divine blessing return to the land? How is religion used to justify political actions?

After the reports from the small groups, ask if anyone can think of a modern example of someone like Rizpah. You might want to share the stories of mothers who have mobilized to act because of violence against their children (see below). Have the class divide up into groups of two or three to discuss where Rizpah might rise up if she came back today. Who would she be with? What might she do?

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

* David sacrificed the lives of Saul's descendents while operating within the framework of mainstream political power. He was completely focused on solving the political problem of the Gibeonites, as well as perhaps protecting his own throne from possible threats from descendents of his predecessor, Saul. David evidently gave no thought to the impact of this massacre on the mothers of the dead or on the innocence of those being sacrificed for political expediency. Injustice is often a result of the blindness of the mainstream to the values, needs and concerns of the margins. Merab took no action to counter the injustice, so she remained part of the invisible, silent margins. Rizpah exposed the injustice for what it was, refusing to let the mainstream represented by David go on with business as usual. She made the injustice experienced by the margins visible and poignantly plain. **Lesson insight: The mainstream will often persecute the margins, so the margins must stand up for themselves to challenge the unjust situation, structure or actions.**

* Mothers have sometimes organized in the face of violence to speak against violations of human rights that have claimed or threaten to claim the lives of their children. Three examples stand out:

The Mothers of the Plaza del Mayo in Argentina organized in the 1970s during that country's "dirty war." Tens of thousands of young people "disappeared," seized by members of the military. They were never seen again. People were killed and buried without record or dropped from helicopters into the ocean. When the mothers received no explanations for the disappearance of their children they began to organize. They held silent vigils every week in the capital city, carrying photos of their missing children. In the face of severe repression

they continued their actions, becoming a moral voice for the nation that eventually brought an end to the military's reign of terror.

The Mothers of the Disappeared in El Salvador organized to pressure the government for information about their missing relatives. They became one of the strong voices for human rights and an end to the war in that country.

The Naga Mothers Association began as a women's social group in Nagaland in Northeast India. They began going to Indian army bases and police stations to gather bodies of Nagas slain in the war that has gone on since 1955. Nobody else would openly claim the bodies for fear of being harassed by the soldiers. The women came to bury the bodies properly according to their culture, wrapping each person in a newly woven shawl. As the number of Naga dead increased, the mothers then began raising their voices and engaging in political actions for an end to the violence. The Naga Mothers Association has become a consistent voice for human rights and peace.

Lesson insight: The energy of a mother's love can become a powerful force for justice and peace when faced with actual or threatened violence against her children.

* Rizpah's action was a long-term public action. She kept her vigil from the barley harvest till the rains came (v.10), from roughly October to May. She kept the deaths of her sons before the people of Israel. When David came to Rizpah and buried her sons, David's action was public. He was publicly changing his policy, doing an action of repentance in response to Rizpah's witness. **Lesson insight: Public nonviolent actions can sometimes sway the hearts or at least the policies of the powerful.**

* The political deal made by David and the Gibeonites was cloaked in religious language. The 7 young men were slaughtered "before the Lord" (v.6,9). Though in the story God raised the original problem of the unresolved massacre of Gibeonites by Saul as the cause of the famine(v.1), God does not respond to the slaughter of Saul's descendants by lifting the famine. Evidently David's action was not what God wanted. However, when David repented publicly in coming to Rizpah to bury her sons with honor after she had vigiled for months to expose the ugliness of the political violence, only then did God bless the land. **Lesson insight: God's blessing is brought not by more violence but by ending the cycle of violence.**

SECTION 4:

NONVIOLENT TRANSFORMING INITIATIVES

Session 13: Loving the Enemy through Transforming Initiatives (Matthew 5.38-48)

Session 14: Feeding the Enemy (2 Kings 6.8-23)

Session 15: Holy Disobedience (Exodus 1.15-22)

Session 16: Dramatized Symbolic Actions
(Luke 19.28-44; Isaiah 20.1-6; Jeremiah 32.1-15)

Session 17: Overcoming Evil with Good (Romans 12.9-21)

SESSION 13

LOVING THE ENEMY THROUGH TRANSFORMING INITIATIVES

TEXT: Matthew 5.38-48

BACKGROUND:

Matthew 5-7 is a collection of the ethical teachings of Jesus which we call "The Sermon on the Mount." Jesus is teaching the way of life in the Kingdom of God, or under the Reign of God. This is a picture of how Jesus' followers should be living. Many of the passages are very familiar, including Matthew 5.44 in which Jesus commands us to love our enemies. However, with that familiarity comes many interpretations that do not come so much out of the original cultural context as the contemporary context of the reader.

Jesus gave these teachings in a situation of severe violence in which various Jewish people took very different options in response to the violence. The Roman Empire had conquered the region, imposing the "Peace of Rome" (*pax romana*) by the force of the Roman military legions. Threats to that peace were dealt with severely, including by crucifixion. During Jesus' adolescent years there had been a major revolt among Galileans. The Romans responded by crucifying thousands of rebels along the Galilean roadsides. Jesus probably saw these dying rebels, which made his command to "take up your cross" a dramatic exhortation even before Jesus' own crucifixion. The violence of the oppressive conquering power was the dominant context in which Jesus gave these ethical teachings.

Jesus' contemporaries provided a wide range of responses to the violence of Rome. King Herod (either Herod the Great at Jesus' birth or Herod Antipas at Jesus' death), the Sadducees who controlled the Temple hierarchy, and the tax-collectors were all accommodating to the Roman system. They did Rome's work and benefited from being part of the dominating system. On the other hand, the Zealots engaged in counter-violence, attacking Roman interests in the region. Eventually their efforts led to a major revolt in 66 A.D. which was crushed by Rome in 70 A.D. Some people withdrew from the conflicts in society, including the Essenes who established the Qumran community in the Judean desert and produced the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. Many of the Pharisees in Jesus' day engaged in a religious version of withdrawal. They had a high level of religious piety, but their piety did not connect to the sufferings around them (see the example of Jesus' clashes with them in Luke 6.6-11 and 13.10-17).

What Jesus says about "loving one's enemies" is not intended for some elusive ideal realm but for a very harsh and violent world. The shape love of enemies takes is sketched in some of the specific examples Jesus gives.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

If the class has participants who are serious students of the Bible and interested in details of the biblical text, then present the three translation options for "evil" in Matthew 5.39 (see Points of Importance below). Discuss this question: What are the different implications for our action whether this verse is translated "Do not resist evil (or the evil one)" or "Do not resist by evil means"?

Break into three groups. Give each group one of the sets of instructions for a verse in this passage (see following pages). Each group will study the cultural context for the passage. The groups should come up with a way to demonstrate the teaching and make comments on what they understand the passage to say. The group should provide a contemporary example that reflects the theme of Jesus' teaching in that verse, if possible. For each group copy the cultural background and questions that follow at the end of this session. The groups should have 20 minutes for their group work—allow a little longer if they need more time to develop their skit.

When everyone returns to the larger group, have each group make their presentation in order.

Following the presentations work with all the class participants to make a list of ways to "love one's enemy," including drawing upon the examples given in the group presentations.

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

* Bible scholars who translate the New Testament from the original Greek have three possible translation choices regarding the word "evil" or *ponero* in Matthew 5.39. The Greek grammar can be taken any of the three ways, so the decision needs to be made by looking at the context and meaning of what was said.

The **first option** would be to translate *ponero* as "evil" or "evil one," so the verse would read "do not resist evil" or "do not resist the evil one." Many translations take this choice, seeing *ponero* as in the Greek grammatical dative case. However, James 4.7 says, "resist the devil," and since James has many echoes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount this option does not seem consistent with what James says. Furthermore, 1 John 3.8 says, "The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil." Not resisting evil is far more passive than the explicit command of James to Christians or the very purpose of Christ's coming as portrayed by John.

The **second option** would be to translate the Greek word *ponero* as "in the area of evil" or "in the realm of evil," following the meaning as from the grammatical locative case. The translation would read, "do not resist in the area of evil." This translation is very cumbersome, and thus unlikely. It also has the same problems as the first option.

The **third option** is the Greek grammatical "instrumental" case which has to do with the means by which activity takes place. The translation of *ponero* would be "by evil means," making the passage read: "Do not resist by evil means." This has a quickly understandable meaning that is also consistent with the meaning of the surrounding verses. This translation option is also consistent with Paul's understanding in Romans 12.21 when he writes: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Lesson insight: Evil is to be resisted and even overcome, but the means used cannot be evil means, only good.

* Jesus is addressing the people who are perceived and who perceive themselves as powerless. His listeners are the people being slapped because they are of inferior status, the people sued for their coats because they are very poor, and the people being pressed into carrying baggage for the occupying army. Jesus tells them that they have choices they can make. They have the power to take action. **Lesson insight: All of us have power to act creatively even in situations of severe oppression.**

* Glen Stassen uses the phrase "transforming initiatives" to describe the option toward violence that Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus challenges his listeners to take the initiative, even in situations where they seem to be powerless. The followers of Jesus should act in new ways that do not follow the expectations of dominating powers (Walter Wink speaks of this as "Jesus' Third Way" in contrast to "fight" or "flight.>"). Their initiatives should also be transforming. Instead of continuing the cycles of violence, these creative actions should affirm the humanity of both the one suffering and the persecutor. Evil is exposed and resisted, but in a way that opens the door to repentance, reconciliation and justice. Relationships are transformed because love is at the core of the transforming initiatives, and all the actions Jesus taught give creative and surprising expression to that love. **Lesson insight: Our actions in repressive situations can bring positive change to relationships, even those that may seem the most hopeless.**

Group 1 Instructions: *“If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.”*

Cultural background: By specifying the blow coming upon the right cheek, Jesus is referring to a backhanded slap, as that is the only way one can hit a right cheek with one’s right hand. Hitting a person with a backhand slap was something done by a social superior to a social inferior. In Jesus’ day, that would have been a Roman slapping a Jew, a master slapping a servant, or a man slapping a woman. In contemporary Jewish legal writings there was a minor fine for hitting an equal with a blow from the fist. There was no fine for slapping a social inferior—that was one’s right as a superior. However, if someone gave a backhanded slap to a social equal, the offended person could sue for severe damages because of the insult to their status.

Study Questions: Who would be the one being slapped? What would be the message conveyed in the act of slapping? Does the person who turns the other cheek assume an inferior social position (Have group members carefully dramatize the actions so everyone can see what happens)? What claim is being made by refusing to be intimidated? Can the person who turns the other cheek now be easily backhanded again? What kind of physical assault can be done? What would be the underlying assumption about social status for such a physical assault? Does the person who turns the other cheek do anything to diminish the human worth of the one who slaps? What new possibilities for relationship are presented in this simple action?

Preparation for Presentation:

Develop a short drama or skit to present this teaching of Jesus. Be creative. You can provide either a setting from Jesus’ day or from your own context.

If possible, identify some contemporary example or story that reflects the same themes Jesus taught—either something people in your group have done, have witnessed, or have heard about.

Group 2 Instructions: *“If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well.”*

Cultural background: Read Exodus 22.25-27 and Deuteronomy 24.10-13. The rural economy of Jesus’ day was built upon large land-owners who had many poor tenant farmers working the land for them. The tenant farmers lived in near slave conditions. Many of the parables of Jesus reflect this economic system. For a person to take out a loan (for seed to plant the next crop, for example), a outer garment would be give as collateral to make sure the loan would be repaid as the poor person had very little other than the clothes on the back. This debt system was so severe that when the Zealots revolted in 66 A.D. their first action after capturing Jerusalem was to burn the debt records stored in the Temple. Debts had been carefully recorded in a legal setting as part of maintaining strict control.

Study questions: Who is being sued for their coat, a rich person or a poor person? Why would this action be taken? What does Jesus say to do? What would the person giving the clothes be left with? What would this action say about the underlying economic reality? Who bears the shame of nakedness in Jewish culture—the one who is naked, the one who witnesses the nakedness or the one who causes the nakedness? (Look at Genesis 9.18-27, Job 22.6 and Habakkuk 2.15 for examples of where moral blame and shame is placed related to nakedness.) What moral message is delivered by the shame of this act of nakedness? What choice does the one suing for the coat now face?

Preparation for Presentation:

Develop a short drama or skit to present this teaching of Jesus. Be creative. You can provide either a setting from Jesus’ day or from your own context.

If possible, identify some contemporary example or story that reflects the same themes Jesus taught—either something people in your group have done, have witnessed, or have heard about.

Group 3 Instructions: *“If anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.”*

Cultural background: The Roman occupying forces could compel civilians to carry their packs or baggage, but only for one Roman *milion* (a distance of approximately 1,000 paces, hence the English word “mile”). This action enforced the dominance of Roman military power, but the limitation of the action also emphasized the importance of Roman law. The particular law that limited forced portage by civilians was intended to keep hostility among the occupied population to a minimum, but the Jews viewed this as just another of the detested forms of Roman oppression.

Questions: Who would be forced to go one mile? What would it feel like for the soldier to compel someone to carry his baggage? What would it feel like for the one forced to carry the baggage? What is the nature of the relationship? How does the relationship change when the one forced to carry the pack begins to go the second mile? If the law limits carrying baggage to one mile, what dilemma is faced by the Roman soldier? How would the soldier feel? Who is in control of the situation? What is the relationship claim made by this action?

Preparation for Presentation:

Develop a short drama or skit to present this teaching of Jesus. Be creative. You can provide either a setting from Jesus’ day or from your own context.

If possible, identify some contemporary example or story that reflects the same themes Jesus taught—either something people in your group have done, have witnessed, or heard about.

SESSION 14

FEEDING THE ENEMY

TEXT: 2 Kings 6.8-23

BACKGROUND:

The people of Israel were divided following David and Solomon's reigns into two kingdoms: Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Elisha was the major prophet in Israel during the period of this story. Syria was to the north of Israel and was one of the regional powers that were often in conflict with both Israel and Judah.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

Break into small groups to read and discuss the passage with the following questions to guide their study. Allow 30 minutes for the group to work together. Then invite one group to report on what they learned. Ask other groups not to retell the entire story but to share insights from the passage. When all groups have finished the leader can raise any further points that might have been missed and provide a concluding summary.

Questions for use in the small group study:

What was the nature of the conflict?

What was God's miracle in this conflict?

After the Syrian army was blinded, what action did Elisha take that transformed the situation? How did Elisha's action break out of the expected range of behavior in such a conflict? What would have been expected actions to be taken against the Syrian army?

What was the result of Elisha's action?

In reporting the story dramatize what the scene must have been like for Elisha to lead an army of blind people all the way from Dothan to Samaria (a distance of about 18 kilometers). Help the class feel the strangeness of one unarmed prophet leading hundreds if not thousands of helpless soldiers for such a long distance. Perhaps they were in a long line, each one with their hand on the shoulder of the man in front up to the beginning of the line where Elisha was in the lead. Use imagination to make vivid the surprise of the Syrians opening their eyes to find themselves disarmed, in the enemy's capital city, and surrounded by a hostile army and a king ready to slaughter them. Don't just talk about this scene, but act it out!

(If the teacher needs to cut down the number of sessions, sessions 14 and 15 may be combined into one session. Have separate groups study each of the passages and report to the whole class, with the teacher adding any additional comments following the small group reports.)

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

* The bloodless victory against the Syrian army was accomplished both by a divine miracle and by the action of Elisha to feed the enemy. God acts, and people act. History can contain surprises that no one can predict, but also human choices are made that determine whether outcomes of conflicts will be positive or negative. Compare this story to Proverbs 25.21-22 and Romans 12.19-21. **Lesson insight: Acts of mercy and compassion can disarm the heart of the enemy.**

* Verse 23 says, “The Syrians came no more on raids into the land of Israel.” Then verse 24 goes into the next story about another war between Syria and Israel. Because these two stories are placed next to each other it is easy to miss the full impact of the generous and merciful action of Elisha. His action brought a halt to the series of raids that had been going on. Peace was achieved for a significant period of time. The period of peace is not recorded other than in these brief words. Periods of peace can be relatively boring to some writers of history, but those peaceful years are very significant and appreciated by the people who live through them. **Lesson insight: Don’t hurry too quickly to the next story, but appreciate the time of peace that was achieved.**

SESSION 15

HOLY DISOBEDIENCE

TEXT: Exodus 1.15-22

BACKGROUND:

The descendants of Jacob had settled in Egypt to avoid a famine in Canaan at a time when Jacob's son Joseph was the Pharaoh's most powerful administrator. Over the decades and centuries the memory of Joseph's leadership in Egypt faded. A new dynasty was established in Egypt with no connection to Joseph or his legacy. Eventually the Pharaohs of the new Egyptian dynasty enslaved all the Hebrews. Fears about the increasing Hebrew population prompted the Egyptian Pharaoh to introduce increasingly harsh measures against them.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

Break into small groups to read and discuss the passage with the following questions to guide their study. Allow 30 minutes for the group to work together. Then invite one group to report on what they learned. Ask other groups not to retell the entire story but to share insights from the passage. When all groups have finished, the leader may raise any further points that might have been missed and provide a concluding summary.

Questions for use in the small groups study:

What was the situation of the Hebrew people?

What were Shiphrah and Puah instructed to do? What dilemma did they face?

What actions did Shiphrah and Puah take? How did their actions relate to the mandates of the governing authorities?

How did Shiphrah and Puah utilize the prejudices of the Egyptians to support their actions? Are there ways the blindness of those who dominate can be useful in transforming initiatives?

What do you think of the ethics of Shiphrah and Puah lying to the Pharaoh? Why then would God "deal well" with them (see v. 20,21)?

A debate could be held between two sides: One supporting that the midwives were moral to lie to Pharaoh to prevent a crime of genocide, and the other supporting that the midwives should not have lied as lying is an immoral action itself.

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

* Shiphrah and Puah were put into a personally and morally dangerous situation. They would either become killers of the babies of their own people or they would disobey the explicit commands of the mightiest ruler known at that time. In what seemed to be an impossible dilemma they found a creative way to avoid participating in murder or incurring the wrath of Pharaoh. They saved the lives of many Hebrew children. **Lesson insight: When there seem to be no options, think again, and look for the creative solution beyond the assumptions of the dilemma.**

* Was lying to Pharaoh ethically wrong? On the one hand that may be a judgment that could be made on the midwives. On the other, telling the truth would have likely resulted in their deaths and perhaps their replacement as midwives by women willing to kill the boy babies. The Bible clearly says that through their actions the midwives “feared God,” and they were blessed with families themselves, a sign of divine favor. So what are the values affirmed in this passage? **Lesson insight: Doing what is right in the middle of oppressive situations may be more complex and less pure than a moralist at ease might think.**

SESSION 16

DRAMATIZED SYMBOLIC ACTIONS

TEXT: Luke 19.28-44; Isaiah 20.1-6; Jeremiah 32.1-15

BACKGROUND:

Prophets were best known for speaking God's word to their contemporary settings. Sometimes prophets used symbolic actions or public dramas to convey their messages. Their actions would speak to the particular circumstances, bringing a message of judgment or hope or calling people to alternative ways of living. Sometimes their actions spoke about what people should do, and at other times their actions spoke about God's action toward the nation.

Isaiah prophesied during a time when Judah was threatened by the superpower Assyria to the north. Judah was tempted to seek a protective alliance with the other superpower, Egypt to the south. Isaiah and other prophets often discussed the issue of whether Judah or Israel should look to the Lord or to the military umbrella of a great power for their protection.

Jeremiah was facing impending national disaster. The Babylonians were besieging Jerusalem, and the city was about to fall. The situation looked completely hopeless. Babylonians would usually carry off into exile most of the captured population, as the Assyrians had before them. Because of these common practices the people under siege expected either death or to be carried off to a distant land to live.

Jesus lived during a time when the Jews were under Roman rule and military occupation. There had been a number of armed revolts against Rome, all of them brutally crushed. Social ferment against Roman authority was strong, fueled by expectations that a Messiah would come to fulfill the prophecies that one of David's descendants would again sit on the throne and bring in an age of peace, freedom, security and justice. Zechariah had prophesied about a king coming in peace to Jerusalem, humbly riding on a young donkey (see Zechariah 9.9-10). Opposition to Jesus had been growing, and Jesus had predicted his own death to take place in Jerusalem.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

Divide the class into three groups, giving each group one of the following passages:

Luke 19.28-44
Isaiah 20.1-6
Jeremiah 32.1-15

Ask each group to discuss and answer the following questions related to the passage they have:

- What is the context or conflict setting in which the passage takes place?
- What action does the prophet or Jesus take?
- What is the symbolic meaning of the action?
- What responses, if any are noted? What responses do you imagine people might have had?

Following the group sessions, the spokesperson for each group should report to the whole class. After the reports ask class participants to identify some of the things they heard in common in these three stories. List the common characteristics on a board or large paper. Invite participants to tell any stories of something they may have seen, heard about, read about or participated in that involved a public symbolic action that spoke to a conflict situation.

Discuss together:

- What can symbolic actions accomplish?
- What risks must be faced in taking such an action?
- What gives power to symbolic actions?

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE

* Sometimes a symbolic action can be spontaneous as a person responds creatively to a situation. However, in these three stories planning and on-going activity was required. Jesus had set up the arrangement to get the donkey before he enter Jerusalem, even to the point of establishing a code phrase so the owner of the donkey would know the disciples taking the donkey were coming from Jesus. Jeremiah had to arrange the details for the purchase of the land, including the legal documentation. Isaiah kept up his action of public nudity for three years. **Lesson insight: Planning and perseverance can give symbolic actions powerful focus and heightened attention.**

* Each of these actions, though involving other people, were initiated and carried out by one person. **Lesson insight: One person can make a difference!**

* Each prophet (including thinking of Jesus in his prophetic role) spoke verbally or wrote as part of delivering the message. These were actions with multiple forms of communication. However, the action itself was the dramatic message that people most clearly remembered. **Lesson insight: Actions speak louder than words, so find ways to act that will speak your message with clarity and force. However, accompanying words, whether written or spoken, can help interpret the meaning of the action for those who witness it.**

SESSION 17

OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD

TEXT: Romans 12.9-21

BACKGROUND:

Paul's letter to the Romans is the apostle's greatest theological statement. Chapters 12 and 13 are the centerpiece of his understanding of Christian ethics. The teachings about law, Christ, grace, justification, salvation and new life have implications for how we live. So chapter 12 begins with "I appeal to you, therefore...." Because of what God has done for us in Christ, the way we live needs to reflect Christ. Chapters 12 and 13 show us how to live consistent with what God has done in Christ.

Verses 9-21 are a quick list of commands or exhortations. They cover a wide range of topics in just a few words. The underlying theme is living the transformed life set forth in verses 1 and 2. These verses also echo with the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, which should not surprise us since Matthew 5-7 are the most concentrated ethical teachings of Jesus in the gospels.

STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:

Divide into small groups to read the passage and discuss it with the following questions:

What is Paul doing in this passage?

What kinds of conflicts so you think could be going on that Paul's words might address?

What specific peacemaking actions does Paul write about?

In what ways would those actions transform conflict situations?

For a group that is more familiar with the Bible you might want to challenge them to come up with as many similar teachings as they can from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. What does Paul say in Romans 12.9-21 that Jesus says in a very similar way in Matthew 5-7?

Allow 20 to 30 minutes for the discussion, the longer period for groups working on comparisons to the Sermon on the Mount. Gather the groups back together, and have a presenter from each group share their findings.

Then give a brief review of all the lessons studied in the course. Make particular note of some of the more memorable experiences of the class. Invite the class to make a list with you of some of the things they have learned.

Tell the group that the most important part of the course is coming up: What participants do with the knowledge they have gained in the context of their own conflicts. Ask people to close their eyes and call to mind and think of an important conflict they are currently facing. Ask them:

- Who are the people or groups involved in the conflict?
- What are the issues in the conflict as you understand them?
- What are the concerns of the other side in the conflict?
- How are people acting toward each other?
- How are people communicating with each other?
- What is at stake in the conflict?

Then review the list of lessons learned in the course. Ask participants to open their eyes and reflect in silence for at least 5 minutes on at least three specific actions they could take in that conflict that would move the conflict in a positive direction. Urge the participants to be as specific and detailed as possible so they will be clear on exactly what they can do.

Have the participants gather in groups of 3 or 4 to share what they have thought of doing related to the conflict. If there is something so deep or personal that a person does not feel like sharing, respect that person's desires. Invite them to share as much as they feel comfortable sharing in the small group. Allow 3 minutes for each person. Call out the time half-way through the small group sharing.

Invite the small groups to spend 5 minutes praying for each other. Invite them to pray for the conflicts they are each facing and for the commitments each person has made to take transformative action.

Close the session by forming a circle. Express your thanks to the group for their work throughout the study. Then go around the circle, starting with the person on your right. Ask each person to say in one word or one phrase something they gained in the class, whether it was a specific lesson, an idea, an inner quality, a new insight, or whatever they might want to say in that one word. As facilitator you may conclude with the last word in the circle. Then give a brief blessing of peace to the group.

POINTS OF IMPORTANCE

* Verse 20 is a quote from Proverbs 25.21-22. Doing good to one's enemies is not just a New Testament teaching, but a teaching with roots in the Old Testament. "Heaping burning coals" on a person's head is a phrase with its roots in the ancient Near Eastern custom of carrying a pan of hot coals on one's head as a sign of shame, contrition or sorrow. Wearing "sackcloth and ashes" is a similar image. The actions of feeding the hungry enemy and providing drink to the thirsty enemy bring shame upon the enemy, resulting in a change of heart. That is how evil is overcome by good. **Lesson insight:**

One way evil is overcome is by bringing about an inner change within the enemy through actions of love.

* This is the last session in this study. It is important that participants apply the lessons they have learned about conflict transformation to the conflicts in their own lives. The time taken to think about how to apply the lessons from the course is very important. It may also be a difficult time for some participants as the conflicts they are thinking about may be very personal and very painful. Respect the desire of anyone not to share, but encourage everyone to work hard at thinking about their own conflicts and applying to those conflicts what was learned in the class. **Lesson insight: What the Bible says about conflict can be applied to the everyday conflicts we experience, no matter how severe they might be.**

SOURCES

The material in this Bible study manual has been influenced by many people, and in the following cases contributions from others have been included.

As noted in the Introduction the material on the ways people learn and remember, the styles of learning, the concept of mainstream and margin, and the concept of comfort, discomfort and alarm zones was adapted from Training for Change, a social activist training organization based in Philadelphia. Most of the inspiration and insight I have used in developing the format of this manual was developed in experiences I had in Training for Change programs.

The concept of conflict as Holy Ground I first heard from Mennonites and the Mennonite Conciliation Service. John Paul Lederach developed the “7 steps of the Social Transformation of Conflict” found in the *Mediation Training Manual* produced by the Mennonite Conciliation Service. The studies of Jacob and Esau are adaptations of material first developed by John Paul Lederach. I learned this particular format from Marinetta Cannito Hjort when we were training co-facilitators in Italy; she had modified the material she had learned from John Paul.

Clarence Jordan’s *Sermon on the Mount* was the initial source of the understanding of Greek grammar in interpreting *ponero* in Matthew 5.39. The term “transforming initiatives” came from Glen Stassen, which he presents in his book *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace*. Much of the cultural background in Session 13 comes from Walter Wink’s *Violence and Nonviolence in South Africa: Jesus’ Third Way*.

Trainers and Bible study leaders are always on the lookout for ways to expand and improve what they can offer students. A good teacher is first a good student. Many people have taught me along the way. Two people introduced me to characters who appear in this Bible study: Gustavo Parajon introduced me to “Abigail,” and Cindy Weber introduced me to “Rizpah.” The stories of these two women have enriched my own peacemaking and have been dramatic inspirations to many people in my workshops.

A SHORT BOOK LIST

If you have access to a bookstore or a library at a seminary or university, the following books expand on the theme of peace.

To study more about the Bible and peace, try some of these books:

Buttry, Daniel L., *Christian Peacemaking: From Heritage to Hope* (Judson Press, 1994).

Cupit, Tony, *Peace I Leave With You: Bible Studies for Churches on the subject of Peace* (Baptist World Alliance, 2001)

Munayer, Salim J., editor, *Seeking and Pursuing Peace: The Process, the Pain and the Product* (Musalaha, 1998)

Stassen, Glen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992)

Wink, Walter, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Fortress Press, 1984)

Wink, Walter, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Fortress Press, 1986)

Wink, Walter, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Fortress Press, 1992)

Wink, Walter, *Violence and Nonviolence in South Africa: Jesus' Third Way* (New Society Publishers, 1987)

These books provide stories from around the world about people building peace. Many of the stories are about Christians. These books also provide very helpful practical tools and theoretical frameworks for engaging in peacemaking:

Baum, Gregory and Wells, Harold, editors, *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches* (Orbis Books, 1997)

European Center for Conflict Prevention, editors, *People Building Peace: 35 Inspiring Stories from around the World* (European Center for Conflict Prevention, 1999)

Gracia, Ed, editor, *Pilgrim Voices: Citizens as Peacemakers* (Manila University Press, 1994)

Herr, Robert and Herr, Judy Zimmerman, editors, *Transforming Violence: Linking Local and Global Peacemaking* (Herald Press, 1998)

McManus, Philip and Schlabach, Gerald, *Relentless Persistence: Nonviolent Action in Latin America* (New Society Publishers, 1991)

Schrock-Shenk, Carolyn and Ressler, Lawrence, editors, *Making Peace with Conflict: Practical Skills for Conflict Transformation* (Herald Press, 1999)