

Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians

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Study guide by Hal Shrader

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Threat to My Only Child

Discussion Starter: What did you want to be when you grew up? How does your answer reflect a sense of possibility and wonder?

1. What do you think of when you hear the word *peace*? What are different ways people often talk about peace? Might there be a distinctively Christian way of talking about peace?
2. Lederach writes, “Discussing the type of peace that refers to right relationships on a national or global level can feel threatening, or politicized, or simply beyond our capabilities to imagine” (page 21). Why is this?
3. A *dream* can refer to “a nice, non-real idea,” as well as “a vision of what might be possible.” Under which category might peace fall?
4. “Dreaming has to do with the simple act of connecting the present and the future” (page 22). Discuss what Lederach means by this.
5. The New English Bible translates Hebrews 11:1 as “Faith makes us certain of realities we do not see.” Clarence Jordan once translated this verse as saying, “Faith is turning dreams into deeds.” Give examples of people who are living (or have lived) as if things could be different rather than accommodating the way things are.

Chapter 2

Turning toward the Face of God: Jacob and Esau

Discussion Starter: Think about the worst fight you ever had with a sibling or childhood friend. What was it over? Was it silly or serious? How did it resolve?

1. Summarize the story of Jacob and Esau. Who are the main characters? What are the main plot points?
2. How does fear keep us from moving toward reconciliation?
3. What are some of the outcomes that we fear might occur if we engage in reconciliation?
4. Is it possible that your own journey toward reconciliation might begin with a struggle with God? What might that struggle look like?
5. We have a tendency to associate reconciliation with a single event. According to Lederach, how is reconciliation like a *journey*? An *encounter*? A *place*?
6. In your own story of reconciliation, was a specific time or space important for your journey? Share this with the members of your group.

Chapter 3

The Reconciliation Arts: Jesus

Discussion Starter: In an age of distraction, when do you feel most present to the people and places around you? When do you feel least present? What things keep you from being more present?

1. “To reconcile, *we must live into compassion*” (page 46). What does this mean?

2. What are the three core reconciliation arts of Jesus that demonstrate the concept of presence?
3. Who are those that are untouchable and invisible in your world?
4. Lederach says that self-reflection and self-care are not instruments in the work of reconciliation; rather, they *are* the work of reconciliation (page 54). What is the distinction, and why does it matter?
5. What are ways that Jesus practiced self-reflection and self-care?
6. Lederach introduces the term *alongsideness* (page 54) to describe the reconciliation art of accompaniment. What does this mean, and what does it have to do with loving God?
7. The author makes reference to a bumper sticker that you might have seen: *Know Jesus. Know Peace. No Jesus. No Peace.* What are some of the assumptions that follow from its message? Why might they be problematic?

Chapter 4

In the Beginning Was Conflict: Creation

Discussion Starter: Think about the context of your current discussion of this book (Sunday school class, small group, college classroom, etc.) What type(s) of conflict do you most often deal with in this setting?

1. Is it easier to describe who God is or what God is doing?
2. From the chapter, list the three steps in God's creation process. How do we embody these same creative abilities?
3. What are the three creation commitments? What is the significance of each?
4. We often think of conflict as the result of sin and inherently bad. According to Lederach, how might a closer look at the Genesis account change that idea?

Chapter 5

When Conflict Burns and We Cry for Help: Psalms

Discussion Starter: How is the phrase “Hate the sin; love the sinner” used in contemporary culture? Do you subscribe to this idea? Why or why not?

1. As a group, read aloud Psalm 58:6-8, 10-11, and 137. Why does the strong language of these psalms of lament make us uncomfortable? Imagine the horror were God to answer these prayers and literally bring the requests to fruition.
2. In the story of the riot in the baseball stadium, what did the author represent to the young Sandinista recruits? How were they cast in the role of the psalmist?
3. In the presence of those who wished to do him harm, how was the author like the psalmist?
4. What assumptions do we make about our “enemies” or even about those with whom we disagree?
5. Name the three ways that Lederach lists to create an enemy (page 79). What are some examples of each?
6. Return to the phrase “Hate the sin; love the sinner.” Why is enacting this concept more difficult and complex than the idea?

Chapter 6

Truth, Mercy, Justice, and Peace: Psalm 85

Discussion Starter: Without thinking too deeply about it, which virtue appeals to you most: *Truth, Mercy, Justice, or Peace?*

1. Think about a particular conflict in which you have been engaged. Which concept from Psalm 85:10—Truth, Mercy, Justice, or Peace—did you pursue most vigorously in that conflict?
2. Reflect on that same conflict. Which of these same four values do you think undergirded the perspective of your “opponent”?
3. How can each of these four values be misused?

4. As a group, identify a current conflict. (This conflict can be in a family, a congregation or denomination, a community, a country, or among nations). How can space be given for each of the four voices to be heard?

Chapter 7

Where Two or Three Meet: Matthew 18

Discussion Starter: When have you most felt the presence of God? Did it occur when you were alone or with people? What is the difference, if any, in the two experiences?

1. Read Matthew 18:20. How have you heard it used in the past? What does it mean to you?

2. What issues are at the center of conflicts among people in the church? Are they the same issues now as they were in the past? Even if the issues are different, are there still some things they have in common with conflicts of the past?

3. Despite the practicality of Jesus' instructions about conflict in Matthew 18, why are they rarely followed? What has been your experience?

4. What is the role of vulnerability in peacemaking?

5. According to Lederach, what is the difference between "passive avoidance and retreat" and the "active spiritual discipline" of nonresistance (page 100)?

6. The author defines accountability as "the engagement of Truth that fosters growth in individuals, in their relationship, and their understanding of God" (page 103). What does this mean, and how is it different from more conventional definitions of accountability?

7. Most people have taken the fourth step Jesus mentions in Matthew 18:17—"let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector"—to mean separate from the offending person. Lederach makes a case for the opposite. What is it? How does that challenge the way you understand reconciliation?

Chapter 8

Keep Silent and Listen: Acts 15

Discussion Starter: Make a list of issues in the church that have been as hotly debated as circumcision was in the early church. What are these issues during your lifetime? During that last century? During the last millennium? What did people fear was at stake? What was the result? How has the church fared after each conflict?

1. What is the difference between “knowing” and “acknowledging” conflict (page 111)?
2. At first, acknowledging may cause “confusion and distress” (page 111). Why then is it so important in the process of dealing with conflict?
3. What does it mean to define or “map” the conflict (page 112)? Why is it so important?
4. “How the conflict will be dealt with is of equal or more critical importance than what eventually is decided” (page 113). What does this mean? Do you agree or disagree?
5. What is meant by “analysis paralysis” and “perpetual process” (page 116). Why are they so tempting?
6. What happens when people don’t feel heard in a process of conflict resolution? How might this impact the outcome?
7. What are the implications of the concept that there is “that of God” in each of us? What does reconciliation have to do with the idea that “God moves and speaks to each of us, whether we are aware of it or not” (page 121)?
8. Review all six steps for handling conflict (page 116). How might you implement each in your own context?

Chapter 9

Reconciliation *Is* the Gospel: Paul’s Letters

Discussion Starter: There is a lot of discussion in the larger Christian community about what constitutes the *gospel*. What is your understanding of what the gospel is, and how you have heard it described by others in the past? Why do you think there is such lack of agreement on such a central tenant of the faith?

1. What does it mean to speak of reconciliation as the gospel?

2. For Paul, what is the connection between *atonement* and *reconciliation* in Ephesians and Colossians? What images and metaphors does he use?
3. Read John 17:11 and Romans 12:2. What have you understood these passages to mean in the past? How have they been used to cause communities of faith to isolate themselves from the outside world? Do you agree or disagree with this interpretation? Why or why not?
4. When seen through the lens of the incarnation, what is a different way to think about these scriptures?
5. If atonement and holiness are not about proper ritual and individual purity, what are they about?
6. How does 2 Corinthians 5 define the role of the church in the mission of God in the world? What responsibilities have we been given? According to Lederach, how does the ministry of reconciliation relate to true atonement (pages 130–31)?