

*The Friends Peace Testimony:
Blessed are the Peacemakers*

Getting Started

Focus: Just as important as sharing information in this group is the sharing of Christian fellowship. As your group continues to meet, make intentional effort to provide a climate where every participant feels comfortable and identifies with others in the group. You may want to consider planning a gathering for your group members in addition to the regular group meetings. Here are some suggestions for such a gathering:

- A service project in which all could participate
- A meal or a party in a home or restaurant
- A “road trip” visiting IYM Quaker sites of historical significance (Surrounding Friends Churches, Levi Coffin House, FUM offices, etc)

Getting Started Ideas

- Have a prize ready for any group member who can recall the names of all other group members and how long they have participated in your Friends Meeting (see Session 2 “Getting Started ideas”). If no one can recall this, review names/backgrounds again.
- Discuss a possible gathering for your group (see sample ideas listed above) in addition to your regular meetings.
- Give opportunity for praises and/or prayer requests. Pray together.

Conclusion

While there is room within the Society of Friends for differing levels of outward pacifism, we believe that our relationship with Christ will eventually lead us to seriously pursue peace, often at great personal cost. Not all peace activists are Christians, but all Christians will be led to follow the path of peace.

Introduction: The Friends Peace Testimony

Focus: In recent years many have been drawn to Friends because of our peace testimony. This includes some who do not share our foundational Christian beliefs, yet resonate with our anti-violence stance. It is also true that in recent years many have been drawn to Friends because of our Christian message, but struggle with our peace testimony. This session focuses on the peace testimony as a Christian testimony, not just a distinctive of a few small groups including the Friends.

Discussion Questions

- In the teachings of Jesus recorded in the New Testament, what examples can you recall of teaching that would promote peace and non-violence?
- Can you cite any teachings of Jesus that might promote or condone the participation of Christians in warfare?

The Peace Testimony in Action

Focus: The Peace Testimony is not primarily negative (i.e. being against violence/warfare) but a positive affirmation of what we actively work toward.

For Friends the peace testimony is not just a theory; it is a deeply held personal conviction shaping how we live our lives. Examples of how this was lived out by George Fox and William Penn help us understand this testimony. In this section group members are being asked to identify how the peace testimony is being (or could be) lived out today.

Discussion Questions

- In your opinion, why were early Friends like George Fox and William Penn inclined to resist participation in military efforts?

- Can you cite other examples in Friends history of efforts to live out the peace testimony?
- Read Matthew 5:9. What are some ways that we can be “peacemakers”?

The Struggle for Peace

Focus: Friends have generally agreed that the pursuit of peace is a noble Christian goal. We have not always agreed, however, on how this can best be done. Some Friends resist paying war taxes, pursue “conscientious objector” status when faced with military conscription, and generally might be described as “peace activists.” Other Friends have at times voluntarily enlisted in the military, seeking to win or keep peace through military efforts. How Friends should live out our peace testimony is not as simple as it might seem.

Discussion Questions

- The above focus section describes opposite perspectives on how to live out the Friends peace testimony. What are the strengths and weakness of each position?
- Romans 12:18 instructs Christians to live at peace with everyone “if it is possible, as far as it depends on you.” What do you think this means?
- Case study; In the 19th century Friends in America faced a dilemma. Some felt it was necessary to participate militarily in the civil war as a means of defeating slavery. Others, while opposed to slavery, could not justify participation in the military. What would you have done?
- Case study; During World War II many Friends performed alternative service rather than participate in the military. Other Christians, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, chose to assertively become involved in defeating the forces of Adolph Hitler and ending the holocaust. What would you have done?