

## Enduring Principles Series

**Pursuit of Peace (Shalom)**

by Adam R. Wade

**God wants shalom for all of creation.**

As I prayerfully began to consider the pursuit of peace, an image came to mind of a donkey, gently plodding along, chasing a carrot dangling from a stick, just out of reach.

I began to consider the metaphor. Is the pursuit of peace this constant chase, the quest for something always slightly out of reach that never fulfills our hunger? Is sharing God's message of peace this blind trust in where we are being led? Is it about suffering along the journey for that potential future moment when we may be filled?

I vividly recall a friend at lectern number 6 in the Auditorium's main chamber at the last World Conference. He spoke for what would become Section 163 in the Doctrine and Covenants. In essence, he stated:

"I stand in approval for this motion, but as I do, I want to make mention that I feel this is a dangerous document. If we are to vote this in as scripture today, as a church we will be making a stance on things that must be followed through on."

I believe he referred to verse 4. This calls me to recognize that my own welfare resides in the welfare of the poor. To give attention to human greed raping the planet. To rise against the oppression and destruction of humankind. To speak for those dying of disease or natural disasters because we spend massive amounts "protecting ourselves" with military muscle, rather than helping poorer nations and doing research to feed the hungry, heal the sick, end war, and reduce global warming.

Our world community discerned that God calls us to the pursuit of peace in the places where we live out our discipleship. This community dedicated its Temple to this cause. Our symbol is "peace," as a child stands with the lion and the lamb, embodying the vision of the Old Testament in Chapter 11 of Isaiah.

Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's shalom (peace), reveals the meaning of God's peace in all aspects of life.

The Hebrew word shalom is becoming widely used throughout the church, and for good reason. Shalom is much stronger and bigger than the English word for peace. Shalom is all-encompassing peace, peace with justice, a world where everyone lives with enough and with dignity.

Shalom includes peace with God and the planet. Shalom is holistic peace, which includes healing. The best definition of shalom peace is Zion—a people of one heart and one mind, dwelling in righteousness with no poor.

Yet, many live through the opposite of shalom. They live in constant fear, doubt, unhappiness, and distress. Even those deeply engaged and committed face suffering at some point. Many Christians respond with, "Well, we suffer only in this life, so it's worth it." That's a simplistic, almost-selfish response where the purpose of discipleship is about the end place in another realm where there are no sticks and plenty of carrots.

I recently read a couple of books that say the foundation of discipleship is suffering, analogous to Christ's suffering on the cross. They claim one suffers the pain of this world for the hope of the peaceable kingdom and their own salvation.

For me, basing discipleship in suffering seems an incomplete thesis. I believe it needs to go deeper.

In the peaceable kingdom, suffering will end. Thus, if one says suffering is foundational to discipleship, it suggests that in the reign of God, discipleship will end with suffering.

Further, a focus on suffering cancels the joy, hope, love, and peace clearly expressed by followers of Jesus in the Gospels, throughout the generations of this faith tradition, as well as my experience of the Spirit. That sense of Spirit overrides any suffering.

Additionally, as a faith body that believes in a God that still speaks and calls us, basing discipleship in suffering suggests God calls us into this condition. An Enduring Principle holds that "God graciously reveals divine will today as in the past...inspires and provides witness to divine truth." So it makes sense to me that God's inspirational will would call us to make sacrifices, not suffer.

I do not wish to suggest our understanding of discipleship excludes suffering. Suffering occurs in many peoples' discipleship. I do, however, believe it is not the pinnacle. Sacrifice should be our overriding discipleship ethic.

**For Further Reflection,  
Discussion, and Discernment**

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**About this Series**

The Enduring Principles are at the heart of how we express ourselves. When they become the descriptors of our behaviors—rather than mere ideals—we truly will become the Community of Christ that God is calling us to be. Follow the Commentary Series, August 2009 to April 2010, in the *Herald* and e-Herald, online and by e-mail.

God suffered in Jesus. But we know suffering did not have the last word through the resurrection. Suffering still may occur. But the gospel message, shalom, joy, hope, and love that supersede and inspire sacrifice make us determined not to inflict suffering on others.

Even today, the Spirit calls us to follow the Christ and see one another, see the world, with new eyes. Said Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a theologian killed in a World War II concentration camp: “We have been conditioned to look for God in ‘the beyond’; we are unaccustomed still to looking for ‘the beyond in the midst of life.’”

As we seek shalom we “have been assured that the Spirit that calls you will also accompany you” (Doctrine and Covenants 162:3a). But often this is where the conversation about the pursuit of peace ends. The struggle arises because while it is easy to talk about, the pursuit is not as simple as a task methodically planned, performed, and completed.

We courageously and generously share the peace of Jesus Christ with others.

So how do we begin? We look with new eyes. We empty our hands. We take the first step of the beatitudes and become poor in spirit, discounting our own egos so we can begin to inherit—to witness—the peaceable kingdom.

It starts with me. It begins with you.

The first step is about self-emptying and God-filling. To pursue peace, I first need to seek peace with myself. Peace comes through reconciliation of myself with God, with those I’ve hurt, and with those who have hurt me. Peace brews in worship and gathering as a community. Peace shines through when we pierce the darkness of oppression, hunger, and injustice.

All of that must start with an individual: you. We are the leavening influence to create just and peaceful communities! We are the pursuit of peace!

And as we move into the community, seek healing, show compassion, and uphold the worth of all persons, the same Spirit will move others. It’s up to me. It’s up to you.

As we share the shalom of Jesus Christ, we look to Christ, who made the ultimate sacrifice. To pick up the cross and follow Christ, we first must empty our hands.

We are called to sacrificial discipleship, using our entire being generously for the pursuit of peace. But to do so, God’s love and compassion must capture us. Once we receive them, we no longer require the tightly held superficial, which we sacrifice to follow the Christ. This is the sacrificial response, the call to discipleship and life formation that sends us to work for peace and justice. Sharing with the world cannot occur without first letting go.

In the scriptures we almost always find Christ engaging people first by meeting them at their need. Significantly, instead of assuming how he needs to minister, Jesus first seeks understanding from them. An example is in Matthew 20:32 (NRSV) with the blind men. Jesus asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” They asked “their eyes be opened.” Jesus healed them, and immediately they followed him.

Not only did he restore their physical sight, but their spiritual eyes, too. Otherwise why would they need to follow Jesus? Something captured them to begin the journey of discipleship. Something about Jesus inspired them to leave their previous life and pursue peace.

I have seen shalom happen. It happens at World Church gatherings as two people from different continents share deeply and listen honestly about a sacrament’s meaning theologically, contextually, and experientially.

We glimpse it at reunions as we challenge and nurture faith. It occurs within people as their repentance is accepted with love at the Communion table. We sense it as our voice fills the air, singing praise. It happens as we offer peace to others who feel little of it. Shalom happens.

I interpret the word “pursue” as “to carry on, engage in, and work at.” It is not some unattainable, slightly out of reach goal that we constantly strive toward, yet can never achieve.


Consider not that the donkey is never fed; rather at many points along the journey, the rider stops and feeds the donkey. The animal then would have a choice. It could remain still and be satisfied, refusing to continue. Or, perhaps this taste of something wonderful, something special, something fulfilling would compel it to journey further, deeper.

The opportunity for peace is dangling right before our eyes. Ask Christ to open them, and help you to pursue it urgently.\

Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from

speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. —Psalm 34:12–14 NRSV.

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