

# Biblical Pacifism

by Dale Brown

A Study Guide created by the staff of On Earth Peace

## **Foreword “The Significance of the Historic Peace Churches”**

1. At the beginning of the foreword, Richard Deats quotes Mohandas Gandhi, “The only people on earth who do not see Christ and His teachings as nonviolent are Christians.” What are your thoughts about this? If you identify yourself as Christian, how does hearing this make you feel?
2. On pp. 6-7, Deats shares about the early beginnings of the historic peace churches, stating “Biblical pacifism was at the heart of the radical witness of Mennonites, Quakers, and Brethren.” As Church of the Brethren members in the 21st Century, what is our radical witness today? What would you like to see that radical witness be? What might your part be in making that happen?
3. After discussing how peace and nonviolence is moving to the center of many denominations’ life and witness, Deats challenges the historic peace churches “to find ways of sharing their biblical faith, their historical experience, and the avenues of witness and service they have developed,” as well as being “on the prophetic edge of this movement, seeking to live out the implications of the way of the nonviolent cross” (pp. 9-10). How might your congregation accept this challenge? What are some specific ideas?

## **Introduction “A Pacifist Sojourner: No Longer Strangers and Aliens”**

1. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. In reflecting on this text, Brown writes, “As a pacifist sojourner, I frequently have been aware how much I am an alien in a culture of violence, hatred, and the glorification of war” (p. 14). How does this relate to your experience?
2. On p. 15, we read about leading elders that were called to Washington after counseling COs to “refuse to drill or wear a uniform.” How might our denomination view our peace stance today, had they not withdrawn their statement?
3. Invite someone from your church that experienced WWII and the creation of Brethren Service (if possible, someone who was in Civilian Public Service). What stories do they have to share? What was it like to be a part of this? What does biblical pacifism mean to them?
4. “Have you thought about what you are going to do to make a more peaceful world?” (p. 17)

# Biblical Pacifism

by Dale Brown

A Study Guide created by the staff of On Earth Peace

## Chapter 1 "Resist Not Evildoers – Love Your Enemies: Biblical Nonresistance"

1. Thinking of this chapter as a whole, what was new information for you? Was there anything which surprised you?
2. Jesus' lament over Jerusalem is quoted on page 26: "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace" (Luke 19:41). Imagine that Jesus spoke those words over your community – what are the "things that make for peace" that your community needs to learn?
3. On pages 28-30, several different approaches to understanding the Sermon on the Mount are described. Which ones come closest to your own belief? Why?
4. At the end of page 31 is an ancient text describing the early church. How does that description compare with what a contemporary writer might say in describing the church today? What are the similarities and differences?
5. Pages 34-36 tell how the early church guided its members to respond to the demands of the state regarding military service. Try writing a description of how your congregation, or your denomination, guides members in the same choices today.
6. Dale Brown describes, near the bottom of page 37, two ways in which Christians respond to moral issues. Which way comes closer to your own approach to these issues?
7. The Church of the Brethren has been one of the few denominations which has sought to follow the nonviolent way of Jesus and of the early church. What has it meant for you as a part of the church? How has the church shaped your beliefs?

# Biblical Pacifism

by Dale Brown

A Study Guide created by the staff of On Earth Peace

## Chapter 2 “Overcome Evil with God: Nonviolent Resistance”

1. On p. 24, we read, “Rather than vengeance, Paul said that overcoming evil with good would ‘heap coals upon the heads’ of our enemies.” The paragraph continues to explain this quote by referring to Martin Luther’s Lectures on Romans. Think of your own life. Spend time visioning what it would look like to “overcome evil with good” first on a personal level, then on a community level, then on a national level.
2. Brown relates Sandra Cronk’s conclusion, “that the domino effect of hatred only can be stopped when one person or one people will absorb hurt and anger, yet still show forth love” on p. 49. When have you seen or read of this in action?
3. On p. 53, the “Jeremiah Shift” discovered in Jeremiah 29:7 by John Howard Yoder is discussed. What implications does “seek[ing] the welfare of the city” have for us as Christians in the world today?
4. Walter Wink’s analysis of “Jesus’ Third Way” is discussed on pp. 58-59, specifically Matthew 5:39-41. Wink interprets the passages on not resisting the evildoer, turning the other cheek, giving away one’s coat and cloak and going the extra mile in a new way. Drawing upon your knowledge and experience, discuss the examples in the text of “Jesus’ Third Way” and how you relate to Wink’s interpretation.
5. Both Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King sought to honor the humanity of their opponents (see: “Attitudes toward opponents,” p. 62, and principle #3 on p. 65). In your life, how do you honor the humanity of your opponents? How would you like to build and refine this attitude?

# Biblical Pacifism

by Dale Brown

A Study Guide created by the staff of On Earth Peace

## Chapter 3 “Justice and Peace Will Kiss: Just Peacemaking”

1. Read the full text of Isaiah 30:18. What does the concept of “waiting” for God mean for your work as a peacemaker?
2. The first sentence of this chapter says, “Historic peace churches have been accused of “establishment pacifism” (p. 67). What do you think this means? In what ways is this true of the Church of the Brethren in general? Your local congregation? How do you think the 2003 Annual Conference resolution “Call to be a Living Peace Church” affirms or denies any truth in this statement?
3. At the bottom of p. 69, Brown writes of Walter Brueggeman’s “two biblical expressions of shalom.” As the church in North America, we are most certainly part of the “haves.” How do you feel about being called one of the “haves?” How do we reconcile that truth with our desire to be companions and peacemakers? What is our responsibility to the “have-nots” beyond the suggestions in the chapter? What is the local congregations’ responsibility? How is your congregation fulfilling or not fulfilling that responsibility?
4. Read the Sermon on the Mount. Do you see these passages as containing “practical advice that is easy to follow” in today’s world (p. 71)? How so or not so?
5. On p. 72, Brown discusses ideas from Glen Stassen’s book, *Just Peacemaking*. Brown writes, “Pacifist churches teach their members to imbibe Jesus’ way of love and prepare to be conscientious objectors. Just-war churches teach their members that participating in war is acceptable if the war conforms to the standards of just-war theory. If they do not, members can become selective conscientious objectors to a war.” What perspective is your church teaching youth today? Are there subtle messages in your church that contradict what you want to be teaching? Is teaching about conscientious objection a part of the youth curriculum? What materials are available to teach youth about conscientious objection?
6. “And peacemakers always hope for a miracle” (p. 76). What is the miracle that you hope for, individually and as a church body? What do you hope to accomplish in your work for peace? What is your vision of a peace-filled world?

# Biblical Pacifism

by Dale Brown

A Study Guide created by the staff of On Earth Peace

## Chapter 4 “Our Forefathers Were Told: Violence and the Hebrew Bible”

1. Before reading this chapter, how did you reconcile the holy war narratives of the Old Testament with the peace messages of the New Testament? How did this chapter inform your thinking?
2. Of the various interpretations of the Old Testament given on pp. 84-91, which could you most relate to? Which did you have the most difficulty with? In thinking of Brethren theology, which interpretation fits the best?
3. As you think about the work that you do and the conscious choices you make in your life, how are your work and your choices helping you be in proper relationship with our Creator, others, and good creation (p. 83)? Discern together this same question as you think about the choices made by the church, both at the local and denominational level.
4. How does this statement from p. 92, “It has been said that it is difficult for North Americans to understand the New Testament because it is a book written about, by, and for the poor,” fit with your experience? What do you find true in this statement? What do you struggle with?
5. On p. 93, Brown talks about scapegoating. Do you have any scapegoats? How about the church? Who is the scapegoat for the U.S.?
6. Brown shares examples of family members making public appeals to not use the death of a loved one to take the lives of more innocent people. What stories do you know such as these? (SueZann Bosler is deeply committed to sharing her journey from anger to forgiveness. If you’d like to invite SueZann to your congregation, visit [www.brethren.org/oepa/journey.html](http://www.brethren.org/oepa/journey.html).)
7. Brown ends this chapter stating, “Old ways can change.” What are other biblical examples that fit with this? What are both positive and negative examples of how this has happened in the church? How has this been a part of your experience?

# Biblical Pacifism

by Dale Brown

A Study Guide created by the staff of On Earth Peace

## Chapter 5 “Repent, for the Kingdom ... Is At Hand: Apocalyptic Hope”

1. In this chapter about the in-breaking of God’s kingdom, what stood out for you? What caught your interest?
2. Several New Testament calls to repentance are quoted on page 98. Repentance was often seen in those times as a corporate act – can a whole nation repent? Can a local community repent? ...a congregation?
3. Brown speaks on page 101 of times he has gathered with other Christian peacemakers in lament, and other gatherings infused with joy. Are both lament and joy appropriate in these times? Which do you most often feel, and when?
4. Pages 105 through 109 speak to the current resurgence of interest in premillennialism. Brown affirms some aspects of this apocalyptic view, but also offers several critiques. Which of these critiques concern you most? As a class, you might choose a few of these points to discuss in more depth.
5. Beginning at the bottom of page 110, two paragraphs describe Jesus’ life and ministry in the world. Considering this description, what do you see as central themes in Jesus’ ministry and teaching? Consider and discuss these characteristics of Jesus:
  - a. “He insisted that love for people was more important than principles...”
  - b. “He preferred to live out his religion in the world.”
  - c. “He believed that evil would never ultimately be overcome with evil but with good.”
6. Brown speaks of the kingdom of God as “the future breaking into the present” and as “now but not yet” (p. 112). Where have you seen God’s kingdom breaking into the reality of today’s world? How have you seen God’s spirit moving in unexpected ways?
7. Dale calls for “apocalyptic hope” or “kingdom hope” in which the believer lives with an awareness of the realities of the present and at the same time an expectation of the in-breaking of God’s new order. Have you experienced this kind of hope?
8. This chapter ends with a passage from Romans 8. Verse 19 of that passage says, “The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons [and daughters] of God coming into their own.” What is your own vision of what that “wonderful sight” would look like?

# Biblical Pacifism

by Dale Brown

A Study Guide created by the staff of On Earth Peace

## Chapter 6 “Disarming the Powers and Principalities: Political Pacifism”

1. For many, “powers & principalities” is common language in the church. Did this chapter provide a new perspective for you about these terms?
2. On p. 120, Brethren elder John Kline’s definition of patriotism is provided. How does this compare with your own definition of patriotism?
3. Brown indicates a fundamental difference between world views on p. 121: in one view, the nation takes the place of God, while in the other view, the nation is under God. Can you see these world views around you?
4. “Biblical realism calls us to recognize the fallen nature of all the powers” (p. 123). Is this a necessary corrective to a too-positive humanism?
5. In what way is the Church of the Brethren a power? In what way is your congregation a power? What difference does it make to think about ourselves this way?
6. Anabaptist vs. Reformed perspective (p. 126) – which are you? Why?
7. On p. 127, sinfulness is related to our subjection to rebellious powers of a fallen world. Normally, sin is talked about as a very personal thing. What are your responses to this perspective about sin? What difference does grace make in this context?
8. Hope is described as coming from God, not the powers (p. 128, 130 – note quotes from Jacques Ellul). What does this mean in your setting and in your life?
9. P. 131: Review the list of ways to be servants of culture. What stand outs here? What are you already doing? What does this framing do for what you are already doing?

# Biblical Pacifism

by Dale Brown

A Study Guide created by the staff of On Earth Peace

## Chapter 7 “Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Shalom Spirituality”

1. In the “Spirituality of Lament” section, Brown writes, “Lament is a necessary ingredient for catharsis, penitence, and realistic acknowledgment of our own sins, the sins of our culture, and of our enemies” (p. 141). Where is there room for lament in your life? What does that look like? Is it important for the church to provide this opportunity?
2. The “Spirituality of Humility” section begins with the story of Dale Aukerman’s admission that “he possessed some measure of the evil attributed to Hitler.” What do you think of this statement? What about the woman caught in adultery? Who do you identify with in that story? What role does the church play in that story?
3. The last paragraph in the section on “Spirituality of Humility” reminds us of the story of Martin Niemoller who was able to look into the eyes of his German prison guards and see the face of humanity (p. 143) and Martin Luther King, Jr., who did not return the violence done to him, time after time. In this time of conflicted beliefs in the Church of the Brethren about peacemaking (and a host of other issues!), how do we respond to those who seek to destroy us (i.e., believe differently than we do)?
4. Jacques Ellul believes that “Corporate and government operations now control society more than any individual persons and groups can control it. The advertisements of corporations, not dieticians or parents, mostly determine what children eat and the toys they receive” (p. 147). What challenges does this present for the church? For the work of Christian peacemaking? Do you think Christian peacemakers should adopt some of these same “corporate advertising” strategies or present a completely counter-cultural message?
5. Henri Nouwen believed that “Peacemaking necessitates community. Whatever we do we need to feel sent by the community rather than working as isolated individuals” (p. 152). What strengths are there in working in community? What challenges does it present?
6. In the last section, “Spirituality of Redemptive Love,” Brown presents examples of redemptive love that changed the world after WWII. Using your creative imagination, what would have been your plan for redemptive love following September 11? How could we have responded (as a nation) to love our enemies? Try to be specific with your ideas and plans.
7. Close by reading and reflecting on the prayer from the Democratic National Convention preacher on p. 139.

# Biblical Pacifism

by Dale Brown

A Study Guide created by the staff of On Earth Peace

## **Epilogue      “‘What If?’ Questions Asked of Pacifists” and Wrap-up**

1. On p. 164, Brown writes “Institutionalized violence to persons can be more vicious than overt physical violence; for the former is perpetuated by the power structure in the form of psychological slavery, high infant mortality rates, poor medical care, ghetto-type living, and low life expectancy.” Where do you see forms of institutional violence in the United States?
2. Dale concludes, “Americans and others have more faith in violence than nonviolence” (p. 165). What evidence do you find to support this? Discuss your reaction to this statement.
3. The book concludes, “...we will study and be about the things that make for peace.” Based upon your reading of this book, what are you inspired to do for peace?