

A Vision for Peacemaking – A Biblical Perspective

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When we think of a vision or a visionary, we may think of something or someone utopian: something that doesn't exist or someone who may be considered a bit (or a lot) out of touch with reality. But I am going to suggest that a vision is actually very practical.

A vision is a leader's hope and guide. A vision is something that doesn't yet exist and is currently seen only in our imagination. It is rooted in values, spirit, and ideals. In our imagination we see images of people, programs, interactions, and procedures which incorporate these values and ideals. A vision is a desired state for the future. It is more intuitive than linear thinking.

Leaders and programs that don't have vision will likely find themselves floundering or flitting from here to there, or getting stuck in a rut. Vision gives us freedom to wander about, experiment, and make changes with less fear or threat. We can do this because we test our changes against our vision: Is the change moving us in the direction of our vision? Our vision needs to permeate all of our lives and programs.

Our visual image of our vision changes as we gain new insights and as reality around us changes. Yet the core values do not change. Justice and peace are core values in my vision but my visual images change as I gain new insights through study and life experience.

Vision is more than just a dream. It is that image of our desired state of affairs that reaches all the way back to our current action. It is vision that motivates us to do something and it is that same vision that guides us along the way.

My vision for Peacemaking is rooted in peace-*shalom* as described in the Bible. The Christian Bible, which relies very heavily on the Hebrew Scriptures, talks about Shalom with very specific and concrete word pictures. One of the hallmarks of *shalom* is an absence of fear of being harmed.

Leviticus 26:3-6 “³If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, ⁴I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. ⁵Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and the vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and live securely in your land. ⁶And I will grant peace-*shalom* in the land, and you shall lie down, **and no one shall make you afraid...**” (all quotations NRSV)

Isaiah 65:25 “²⁵The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent--its food shall be dust! **They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain,** says the LORD.”

Micah 4:3,4 “³He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; ⁴but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, **and no one shall make them afraid...**”

I love to imagine or envision a world, a community, a workplace, a school, a faith community, or even a family in which all experience "**and no one shall make you afraid**" and "**they shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.**" It does not suggest to me that there will be no conflict but that in the midst of the conflict the participants do not need to be afraid. Each would know that the other's intention would be constructive. Everyone could feel safe and the only question would be how to transform the conflict or violation into a just and peaceful way for everyone. Peace-*Shalom* is an incredible thought. We might even say it is almost unimaginable!

Yet this is exactly what I believe God wants us to imagine and to put into action. And from my perspective this is what Jesus incarnated. In the New Testament of the Christian Bible the vision of *shalom* continues with the Greek word *eirene*.

Ephesians 2:14 “For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.”

Matthew 6:25, 33 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Vision provides direction and guidance. What one does needs to be tested against ones vision.

Matthew 6:24 “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

Luke 12:34 “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Those who value peace-*shalom* will pursue peace-*shalom*. A peacemaking vision includes the hope that people can move from a desire for revenge and retaliation to a desire for love, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

The Biblical story demonstrates the need to be converted and make this fundamental shift.

I understand there are tensions in doing this but I am going to pull out some significant passages from throughout the Bible that I think demonstrate this movement. Please test my interpretation.

According to the Bible, very soon after the introduction of people on earth, there the problem of wrongdoing and violence emerged. In the first post-Eden story Cain killed his brother Able. God spared his life and made it clear that people were to care for one another but violence continued to escalate.

Gen 4:23 - Lamech said to his wives: 'Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. ²⁴If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.'

. In this passage Lamech is bragging to his wife about his revenge and note that he did not just get even, he killed a man for wounding him, and it was a young man and probably wasn't a very serious wound.

The violence continued and the escalation of violence was the cause of the flood. And God was shocked at the violence of the flood. God promised not to use a flood ever again. I think God realized that using violence to stop violence was a false hope. The rainbow is the reminder that God will never do that again.

In the last story of Genesis, we have a glimpse of what God prefers. Joseph had been treated very poorly by his brothers. Some wanted to kill him but others negotiated to sell him rather than kill him. It was certainly more of a violation than Lamech experienced. But Joseph's response was very different. He put all of his energy into bringing about a reconciliation rather than getting even or getting revenge. He revealed himself to his brothers after significant testing to see if they had changed. He cared for

his father, brothers, and their families. Then, in the last chapter of Genesis, after their father died, the brothers again feared that Joseph might want to get revenge.

Gen. 50: 15ff - Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, 'What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?' ¹⁶So they approached Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷"Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you." Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.' Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, 'We are here as your slaves.' ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.' In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Note that Joseph assured them that they didn't need to be afraid (a hallmark of peace-*shalom*) and treated them kindly. It was in this context they could realize together the full extent of wrong that was done and complete the mutual assurance of good will between them. This was the first mention of forgiveness in Genesis and in the Bible. I do not think that this is an accident. God's preference for responding to wrongdoing was now clear. It was not to respond with revenge or even in kind, but with restorative justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

But, as the Biblical story continues, wrongdoing and violations continued. The law was instituted to assist people in living peacefully together but violations and injustice continued. Habits don't change easily. Fear and retaliation re-emerged, or perhaps continued, as their attempt to control wrongdoing and violations. But note a significant difference between this response and Lamech's earlier response.

Deut 19: 20-21 ²⁰The rest shall hear and be afraid, and a crime such as this shall never again be committed among you. ²¹Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

While the false hope that violence would stop violence continued, “life for life, eye for eye, etc.” are actually a limitation on the possible response options. This limitation is an improvement on Lamech’s response but unfortunately it is still based on fear and retribution. It misses the spirit of forgiveness and restorative justice demonstrated by Joseph. In Micah 6:8 as in many other places we get a reminder of what God prefers.

Micah 6:8 ⁸He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

In Matthew Jesus reminds us that “an eye for an eye” is not what God prefers. Jesus then goes on to describe what God would prefer.

Matt. 5 38-45: ³⁸ ‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. ⁴²Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³ ‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The starting point for peace-*shalom* is to shift from hate and wanting to revenge to love and desiring to be constructive. This is the fundamental shift and one that each individual can make. Forgiveness and reconciliation require the other to respond but

love-*agape* and being constructive don't require the other to respond. Love-*agape* is what identifies one who loves God.

I John 4: 7-8, 18 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.

The hallmark of peace-*shalom* is an absence of fear. When one responds to wrongdoing with love-*agape*, a commitment to be constructive, there is no fear.

Punishment, which is based on fear, is anti-*shalom*.

Gal. 6:1 - My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.

Matt 18: 21,22 - Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' ²²Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'

In the story of Lamech, seventy-seven times, referred to the unlimited energy he was willing to invest in getting revenge. In this story, Jesus is telling his followers that Lamech had it wrong, God's people invest unlimited energy in pursuing forgiveness.

This book is designed to provide theory, models, skills and strategies to assist those leaders who wish to pursue a vision of peace-*shalom*.