



# Being a Safe Harbor: How Churches Can Be a Space of Wholeness & Healing

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## A Bible Study Reflection

### **Missional Vision of Shalom in Ephesians: Identity, Belonging, and Purpose**

- 1) **Read Ephesians 1:22-3, 2:14,19.** Paul says we are gathered together in Christ as a new creation, a new family, citizens of a new Kingdom. We gain a new collective identity in Christ. We become a family united with Triune God and each other. This implies a responsibility we have to care and love one another as Christ loves us.
- 2) **Read Ephesians 3:14-21, 4:12, 16, 24, 5-6.** As a new family, we belong together as one, to equip and build one another up. We are a new body that is Christ's body in the world. We each participate toward a shared vision. To live that vision, we must care for and support one another. We would not willingly sever an arm because we think our head is most important. Each of us matters. All of our relationships are transformed and interconnected.
- 3) **Read Ephesians 6: 10-23.** Our collective purpose is to be peacemakers in the world. The paradox of warfare in the armor of God is enacting peace (Shalom) on earth. We are called to bring Shalom into the world by upholding truth and righteousness, sharing the gospel of peace (which unites and brings wholeness), guarding each other's faith against evil, being covered in salvation and the Spirit, and constantly praying awake for all the saints. We do this together—never alone. Those who go in mission are a small part of the kingdom mission. The church body still fights for peace through guarding, attending, praying, and upholding those whose feet are fitted to carry the Good News. Mission is a group effort 100% of the time, and we each are called to this purpose.

## **Reflection**

When we send out missionaries, we are sending out our arms and legs. We remain attached. When we send representatives, we are sending our very body. How has God gifted you to serve your family, your body, and your purpose of being a peacemaker? What natural abilities has God given you to contribute to his Kingdom?

*"The Church is to become a living embodiment of God's peacemaking good news in Christ."*

*Shalom means healing and wholeness, including peace with God and with others, even with the rest of the created order. Shalom is the absence of chaos, conflict, oppression and broken relationships" (Michael Gorman, Becoming the Gospel, p. 143)*

The opposite of peace and Shalom is chaos, destruction, malformation, lies, deceit, and broken relationships. Anything that aims to steal, kill, and destroy God's creative agency in the world is our enemy.

We were created to co-create with God, not to de-create. Peacemaking is about creating life, making pathways for healing, wholeness, creativity, and human flourishing. This is the power we fight against.

Our war is against powers that desire to break apart God's Shalom that brings right relationship, peace, healing, joy, love, and hope. No one person can do this alone; that's why Christ gathers us into **ONE BODY**. The good news is God brings peace in Christ as he makes us interconnected with each other and the Trinity. Good News wants more to join; that's where we partner with God in peace-making.

Jesus brings us into Shalom by transforming our identity, belonging and purpose so we can be Shalom for each other and the world. Churches have a responsibility to be safe harbors for their cross-cultural workers so they too can be safe harbors out in the world. Missions are the work of interdependency.

## **Questions**

1. Why do you think Paul emphasizes Christ gathering all things under heaven and earth under himself? What might be the implications of this in the world? (Eph. 1: 9-14)
2. Paul prays for the eyes of our hearts to be enlightened (Eph. 1: 18-23). What do you sense God wants you to see with your heart? What do you envision your inheritance and place in the body to be?
3. If Christ is our peace, and peace is linked to our being unified as one new body, through one Spirit, into one holy temple in the Lord, why is it important that we have healthy, loving relationships with other Christians (Eph. 2:11-22)? What does that imply about how peace is to be established on earth?
4. Paul prays a powerful prayer in Eph. 3: 14-21. Imagine him praying that prayer for you. What do you notice about it? What do you long for? How can you make this prayer on behalf of others?
5. In Ephesians 4- 5:21, Paul gives a vision of what it looks like to live as the family of God—as one Body of Christ in the world. Name all the aspects and characteristics of this body that you notice. Where is your community living this way, where is it not? Pray for the graces you need from God to be this vision of community?
6. Christ creates a new family system with Christ as our center point (Eph. 5: 21-6:9). Paul uses the dynamic of ancient family life, Wives/Husbands, Children/Parents, Slaves/Masters, as a metaphor for how we ought to live in relationship with one another as a spiritual family. How do you notice God transforming us to live in peace together? What feels different, more life-giving?

7. As a new spiritual family, God clothes us with particular items and encourages us to be centered in prayer (Eph. 6:10-19). How does this new outwear and prayer posture cultivate peace even though it is described as warfare? Can you list the aspects of our spiritual family calling? Where do you sense God is calling you, your gifts, strengths, and natural abilities in this family vocation to bring peace into the world? How can you encourage others in their distinct calling in the peacemaking vision?
  
8. Where are you fighting against powers that aim to de-create, steal Shalom, and make chaos? We have battles within us that steal our human flourishing, battles among our family that need prayer and attention, and battles in the world that aim to keep people from faith, hope, and love. Take a moment to notice the battles waging in your spheres of life. Where do you need God's armor, where do you need your spiritual family, where do you need to support your spiritual family, and where do you need to pray? Spend time talking with God about this.