

# **Resisting Authoritarianism Bible Study**

*for a time such as this!*

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# Contents

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[CROSSING CULTURES IN BIBLE STUDY](#)

[HOW TO USE THIS BIBLE STUDY GUIDE](#)

[SESSION 1: CONFLICT AS HOLY GROUND \(Exodus 2:23-4:17\)](#)

[SESSION 2: MOVING PEOPLE IN YOUR DIRECTION \(Esther 4:1-17\)](#)

[SESSION 3: A GRIEVING, ANGRY MOTHER RISES \(2 Samuel 21:1-14\)](#)

[SESSION 4: LOVING THE ENEMY THROUGH TRANSFORMING INITIATIVES \(Matthew 5:38-48 and 2 Kings 6:8-23\)](#)

[SESSION 5: HOLY NONCOOPERATION \(Exodus 1:15-22 and Daniel 3 & 6\)](#)

[SESSION 6: SYMBOLIC ACTIONS \(Luke 19:28-44; Isaiah 20:1-6; and Jeremiah 32:1-15\)](#)

[SESSION 7: OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD \(Romans 12:9-21\)](#)

[WHERE TO CONNECT](#)

[LEARN MORE – RESOURCES](#)

## INTRODUCTION

We are living in a time of rising authoritarianism. The democratic system embedded in the U.S. Constitution is being dismantled and replaced by authoritarianism and oligarchy. What are people of faith to do at a time such as this?

People of faith have lived under authoritarian regimes from the days of the Pharaohs and ancient kings, through the Caesars and feudal kings, to colonial powers and fascist regimes. Many people throughout the ages and even today around the world have struggled with what faithfulness looks like in terribly oppressive and repressive settings. Though Native Americans and African Americans have known repression in the U.S. for centuries, for many the new political era under President Donald Trump and his associates is bringing about a political change such as we've never seen before in such an immediate and intimate way.

What is a person of faith to do? This Bible study guide is set up for Christians and other interested folks to examine some Biblical stories and teachings that make ancient news seem like today's hot topics. We will read about, discuss, and explore how these ancient experiences and teachings might give us direction for today. Instead of being stuck in despair, we can become agents of hope through creative nonviolent challenges to the powers that exalt themselves.

Find a few people in your congregation, circle of friends, or community who share your concerns. Take a few weeks to study and discuss together—seven weeks for the sessions, or more if you want to go deeper or savor particular sessions a bit longer. Study, but then apply what you are learning and discussing to our context today. What would faithful living look like in light of these ancient experiences and teachings?

But don't just study. Connect to organizations (see "Where to Connect" at the end). Take a small action as an individual or as a group, or join in the larger actions of the networks that are already courageously at work across the country. As the book of James in the Bible says, we should be doers and not just hearers of the word (James 1:22). This study isn't finished until we take what we learned to the streets and communities, the institutes of education and workplaces, and the places of government that are part of our lives. May this study help ignite your

imaginations for action and give you a dynamic hope rooted in a faith through the ages. We'll see you in the struggle!

## CROSSING CULTURES IN BIBLE STUDY

Any time we engage in Bible study we are involved in a cross-cultural interaction. None of us live in any of the cultures in the Bible, for we are separated from those cultures by geography, time, and language. Furthermore, there is no single Bible culture. The biblical writings cover a span of more than 2,000 years, and Hebrew and Jewish culture changed dramatically through those centuries. The list of biblical cultures includes the nomadic culture of the Patriarchs, the rural/small town culture of the early tribal period of Israel, the centralized urban culture of the Davidic kings, the culture of the Jewish exile community forming an identity based on religion rather than place, and the cosmopolitan culture interacting with Greek and Roman dominance, to name a few of the cultural types.

Biblical stories are very particular as all human stories must be. They are clothed in the particularities of the cultural setting of that time, sometimes with an overlay of a later culture that tells the story that took place in an earlier or different culture. When we read that ancient story we should not just transfer the commandments and imagery to our time and place. Rather, we need to enter into the particular setting of that distant culture to grasp the principles, values, and spiritual dynamics that are revealed in the specific context of that culture. Teachers who have been to seminary or Bible school will need to draw from their training about biblical cultures. If the group leader can obtain resources on biblical history either through a seminary or college library, from a nearby pastor, or from the internet, then a little research about the historical and cultural context of a story can greatly enrich the work with the biblical passage. We have tried to provide some help in these matters in the Background section of each study session.

Once the lessons of the biblical story or teaching are understood in the original context, we then bring those principles, values, and spiritual dynamics to bear within our own contemporary cultural context. We ask what form those principles, values, and spiritual dynamics would take among us today in our own cultural setting. The same spiritual principle might take a very different form in a different culture. For example, teachings about modesty in dress might take very different expressions depending on the cultural norms regarding what is appropriate clothing.

In addition, your study group may have cultural diversity within it. Some differences might be obvious, but some may be more subtle and easy to overlook. Be aware of the unique ways people show up in the group and make space for

everyone to speak and share openly and honestly. (Don't call out a particular individual to speak for an entire group!)

This cross-cultural "translating" is especially vital in studying conflict and conflict transformation. Most conflicts are full of specific details of the problems and issues between the groups in conflict with each other. Those specifics can seem very alien to us, causing us to skip these passages and focus on biblical texts that are easier to understand. Taking a bit more time with passages, utilizing role plays to engage our emotions and minds in these distant but very human experiences can assist in opening stories that at first glance seem too complex and strange for our attention.

To facilitate cross-cultural Bible study we can ask the following questions:

1. What was happening in the Bible story?
2. What did those actions or events mean to the people who experienced them?
3. What were the spiritual lessons, including about conflict and dealing with those in power, that they learned through their actions and events?
4. What would those spiritual lessons say in our own context?
5. What could we do in our lives, our conflicts, and our relationships that would put those lessons into practice?

Biblical culture may not perfectly or easily translate into ours, but we can get a strong sense of what God is saying to us today. In the struggle to immerse ourselves in the Bible's stories we find God's story breaking into our own in new and fresh ways.

## HOW TO USE THIS BIBLE STUDY MANUAL

This manual may be used for a major course of study over time or to study just one of the passages given here, but it is specifically written for intense study during this particular moment in U.S. history. For each study, the leader should read the passage a number of times. The background notes can provide some assistance in understanding some of the cultural and linguistic issues or the larger context of the story in the Bible. Ask questions about crossing cultures from the Bible to your context. Go through the questions for the particular session in the manual. Note the “Points of Importance” with the “Lesson insights.” The lesson insights highlight matters that have been very useful in peacemaking struggles for justice. Go back over the passage again with those questions and points in mind. Be sure you feel familiar with the story and concepts.

Select the approach you will take in the study. Feel free to add to or adapt the lesson plan according to your own experience or the needs and interests of the group. Think about ways to increase the participation of all group members in the learning process, utilizing a variety of tools and teaching methods to aid every style of learning.

As you facilitate the learning process, keep in mind the key points that need to surface in the lesson. If the group raises those points from their own interaction with the biblical text, you can emphasize them by calling special attention to them and restating them. If the group does not raise them, you can mention them later in the session, perhaps by asking a question to prod the thinking of the group in that direction. It is best not to simply make these points at the end of the session, but rather to weave them in at appropriate places in the group discussion.

Trust the participants to come up with many good points, including things you had not seen or considered. In fact, expect the group to come up with insights, ideas, or ways of applying the biblical teaching that neither you nor the author of this guide thought of. You can be a learner as well! Affirm, encourage, praise, and thank group members for the wealth of wisdom they bring into this journey of discovery with the Bible.

Many of the sessions involve work in small groups. Some of the sessions involve roleplays or skits. The space should be arranged to more easily facilitate these activities. Moveable chairs are best. They can be set in a circle or semi-circles so dramatic activities can be in the center and easily seen by everyone. Chairs can

also be moved into three or four groups for small group studies, then returned to the circle when the entire class is together.

Many sessions have a special Application section to connect the Bible story directly to what is happening in the current political situation in the United States. We have a section at the end about how to connect to various activist groups and networks. However, we want participants to intentionally work with how the scriptural stories relate to our contemporary context. Be sure to leave enough time for this discussion as it is vital for the full value of the study to be experienced.

Pray before you start the preparation and before the class. You are not the ultimate teacher, rather the Holy Spirit is. Your role is to be a tool for the Spirit to use in opening the minds and hearts of the participants to what the Spirit has placed in the scriptures for their learning and growth. The Spirit will bring the “teachable moments” to your class, including those moments that may be unplanned and a surprise to you. Be open to God’s gift in those moments. Remember as well that the Spirit wants to teach you in the process. The one who teaches can learn the most, so be ready for the wonderful lessons God can teach you!

## **SESSION 1: CONFLICT AS HOLY GROUND (Exodus 2:23-4.17)**

### **BACKGROUND**

The descendants of Jacob had settled in Egypt to avoid a famine in Canaan at a time when Jacob's son Joseph was the Pharaoh's most powerful administrator. Over the decades and centuries the memory of Joseph's leadership in Egypt faded. A new dynasty was established in Egypt with no connection to Joseph or his legacy. Eventually the Pharaohs of the new Egyptian dynasty enslaved all the Hebrews. Fears about the increasing Hebrew population prompted the Egyptian Pharaoh to introduce increasingly harsh measures against them.

After a failed attempt to get the Hebrew midwives to kill Hebrew boy babies at birth (see Session 5 on Exodus 1:15-22), the Pharaoh ordered the massacre of the young Hebrew boys. The mother of Moses hid him in a basket along the riverside. Pharaoh's daughter discovered the child and raised him in the royal household.

As a man, Moses became concerned about the burdens of his own people. He witnessed an Egyptian slavedriver beating a Hebrew slave. Moses killed the Egyptian and hid his body. Shortly afterward, Moses intervened in a fight between two Hebrews, and it came out that they were aware that Moses had killed the Egyptian. Pharaoh heard about the killing and tried to seize Moses. Moses fled to Midian, in present-day Saudi Arabia, but probably broadened to include the Sinai region.

### **STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS**

Begin the class by writing the word "CONFLICT" on the board or newsprint. Ask class members: What words, feelings, or images come to mind when you think of "conflict"? Put all their words and phrases on the board or paper. Invite people to add cultural sayings or proverbs about conflict to the list. Allow plenty of time for people to think and go deeper in the process. When the group has developed a good list, ask people to look at the whole list. Perhaps read through each word, phrase and saying. Ask the group what they notice about the list.

In almost every situation the list will be made up mostly of words perceived as negative. Some positive words might be on the list, and you might want to acknowledge those as positive. After all, there are positive things to be gained in conflict experiences.

Then write the words “Holy Ground” over the list (using different colored markers can make this more vivid). Ask participants:

What does the phrase “Holy Ground” imply?

How might conflict be thought of as Holy Ground?

Does anyone know where the phrase “Holy Ground” first appears in the Bible?

If a participant identifies the story of Moses at the burning bush, invite the participant to share as much of the story as is remembered. If not, then tell the story briefly about Moses seeing the burning bush, approaching it, and hearing a voice call out from it, saying, “Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” Invite the class to take off their shoes for the rest of the Bible study session. Model this by taking off your own shoes. (Skip this if you are in a cultural context where everyone takes off their shoes before coming inside, or where this is culturally inappropriate.)

Divide the class into groups of five to six people. Ask them to study the passage in Exodus 2:23-4:17 for 20 minutes, answering these questions:

What were the smaller and larger contexts of conflict for this story?

(They might need to refer further back into chapter 2.)

What did Moses learn about God?

What did Moses learn about himself?

What did Moses learn about others (Pharaoh, Aaron, the Hebrew people)?

After the small group study, gather the class together again. Give a short summary of the basic story. Harvest what they learned and decided, taking turns about what Moses learned about God, about himself, and about others. Go around asking each group to give one (*JUST ONE!--enforce that to keep the interest and the discussion flowing*) thought or learning from the story. Go around until everything that members wanted to be shared has been said. When all groups have finished, the leader may raise any further points that might have been missed and provide a concluding summary.

Comment about revelation taking place on Holy Ground. As we see in this passage, in the middle of a severe conflict situation, Moses learned about God, about himself, and about others (enemies and allies). In our conflicts we can experience revelations or new insights about ourselves, about others, and about

God. Those new insights, which may have been possible only through the difficulties and challenges of a conflict, can help us grow as people and as communities.

Then ask participants what it was like to go through the Bible study without their shoes (if the group did this). Some may have enjoyed it. Others may say they felt strange or uncomfortable. If someone voices that they were uncomfortable having their shoes off, ask others in the group who were uncomfortable to raise their hands. (Feel free to raise your own hand!) Speak about how conflict can make us uncomfortable, referring to the list generated at the start of the session. Yet conflict also can be “holy ground” in which we can learn many things about ourselves, about others, and about God.

Draw the “Comfort Zone” diagram (see diagram at the end of the session). We tend not to learn much when we are in our Comfort Zone because everything is easy and safe. We also tend not to learn much when we are in the Alarm Zone. In the Alarm Zone we feel overwhelmed, in danger, and terrified. We tend to shut down and protect ourselves rather than open ourselves to new information. The Discomfort Zone is the place of greatest learning, for we are challenged, alert, and perhaps frightened just enough to give us energy. We are not satisfied, so we are looking for a new way to deal with the challenge before us. Conflict often moves us out of our comfort zones. Some conflict takes us into the Alarm Zone where we feel overwhelmingly threatened. But if we can work constructively and creatively with our conflicts, we can address them in the Discomfort Zone where we learn and grow. The Discomfort Zone is Holy Ground.

## **APPLICATION**

Ask the class to form into groups of two or three people. Invite them to share with each other three things they have gained through conflicts in their lives—perhaps an insight, a skill, an opportunity, or a friend. Then have them share one thing they would like to gain through a conflict we are experiencing in our nation at the present time. Just before closing the session do a brief “popcorn harvest” asking each group to share one or two positive things gained from their experiences of conflict. Follow with another “popcorn harvest” of one positive thing they hope we might gain as a nation through this conflict of rising authoritarianism.

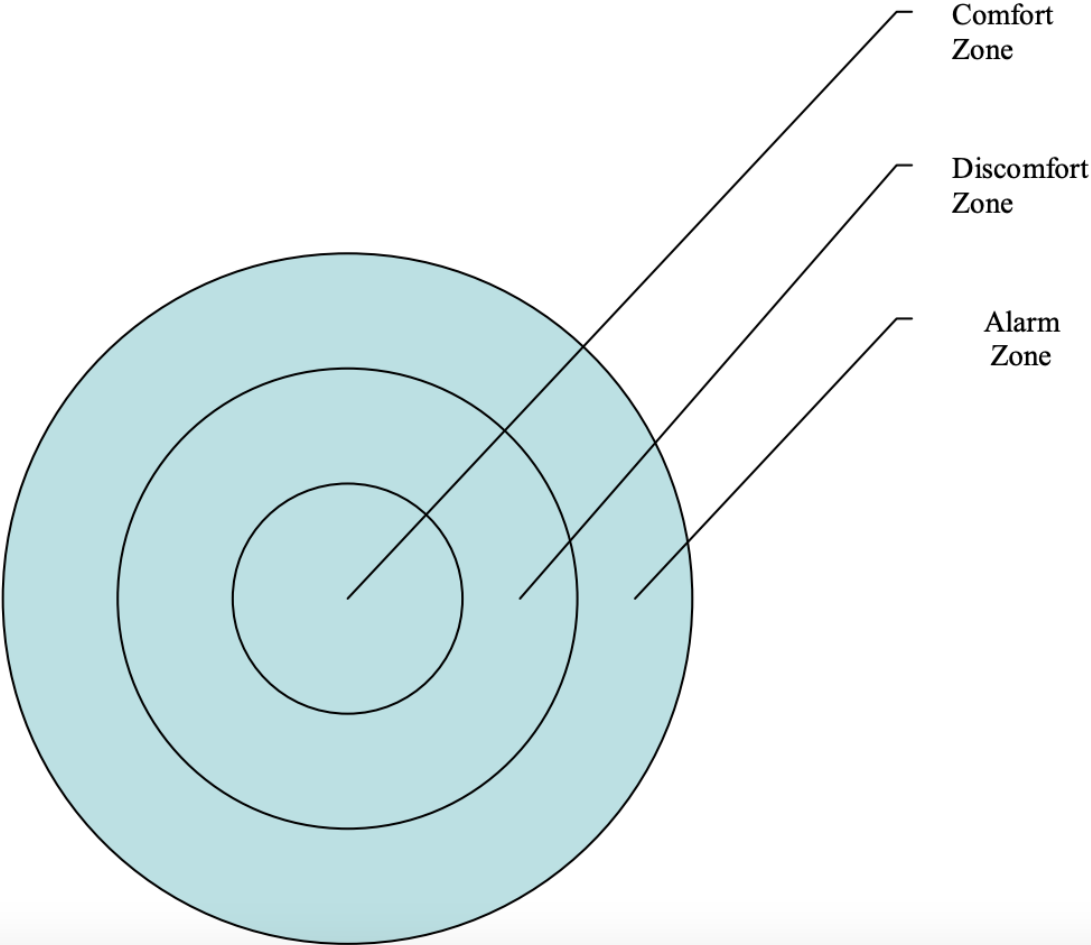
## POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:

\* Though many of our experiences with conflict raise negative feelings and produce negative consequences, there are positive things that can be gained through conflict. People can come to understand each other better. Problems can generate the energy and commitment for us to come up with workable solutions for everyone involved. We can also grow as individuals by being stretched and challenged in conflicts. **Lesson insight: Conflict can have positive elements to it which we can work toward and build upon.**

\* Christians often speak about how God is with us in our difficulties. The Bible speaks repeatedly about God being our “shield” or “defender” or about the blessings to the “one who overcomes.” These are all images of conflict. Conflict is within the scope of God’s care and activity. In fact, we could describe the entire salvation story as an epic of God’s creative, loving, redeeming, and judging engagement in conflict with humanity. Since all this is part of our faith, we need to recognize that the conflicts in our homes, communities, churches, and nations which touch us directly are also spheres of divine involvement. God is with us in conflict situations to act, guide, teach, liberate, challenge, find the ways to justice and peace, and so much more. **Lesson insight: All our conflicts can be Holy Ground where we encounter God and are changed as a result.**

\* Our greatest growth and learning takes place in contexts in which we are challenged to dig deep within ourselves and struggle with questions and challenges. Conflict can be a great teacher in taking us outside our Comfort Zone into situations where we need to learn and grow in order to reach a satisfying and successful resolution. Also in education, learning takes place not in feeding students the answers, but in presenting them with questions that challenge them to think deeper, interact with each other, and discover wisdom together. **Lesson insight: Learning takes place best in the Discomfort Zone, including amid the discomfort caused by conflict.**

Comfort Zone Diagram



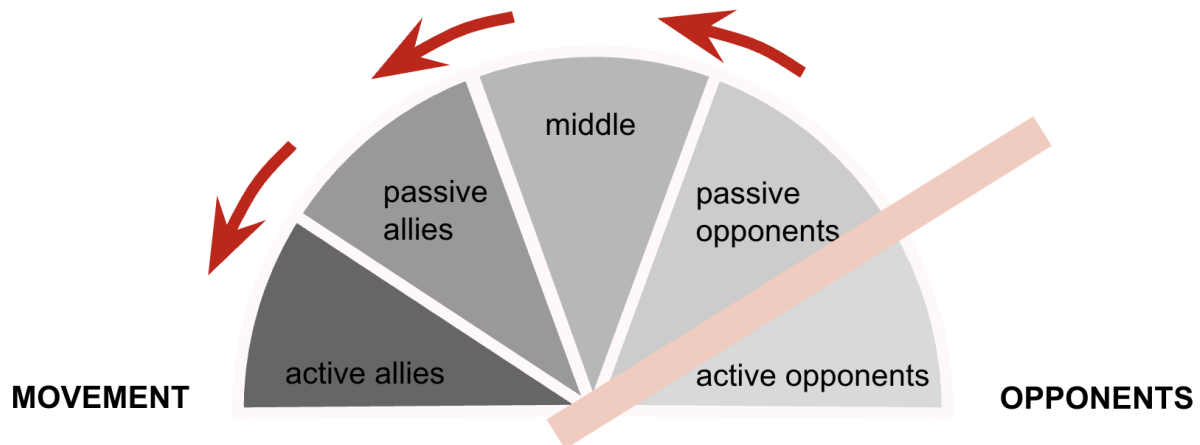
## SESSION 2: MOVING PEOPLE IN YOUR DIRECTION (Esther 4:1-17)

### BACKGROUND:

The Jewish people had been scattered following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. A large group of Jews had been carried off into exile in Babylon. Then the Persians conquered Babylon, establishing a kingdom that was supportive of many different religious groups. The Persian king Cyrus allowed Jews under Ezra and Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to rebuild. Many Jews chose to stay in Persia. The book of Esther tells a story out of the Jewish community in Persia. Esther was the queen of King Ahasuerus. Her uncle Mordecai had exposed a plot to assassinate the king. Mordecai refused to bow before Haman, an ambitious and vain official close to the king. In a rage at Mordecai Haman devised a plot to manipulate the king on the basis of false information to order the slaughter of the Jews.

To get an understanding of the Spectrum of Allies (sometimes known as the Social Barometer) and its application in the Esther story you can view these two short training videos (Sessions 16 and 17):

<https://globalpeacewarriors.org/resources/training-videos/section-4/>



## **STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:**

Introduce the Spectrum of Allies tool. Make copies of the page with this tool so everyone in the group can have one. Go over the tool perhaps using newsprint or a whiteboard to illustrate as you go (You can later use this to fill in about the Esther story).

For every issue you have a wide range of positions people may take toward the issue. For example, there are the Leading Activists/Movement (write this on one end of your half moon). These are the folks who strategize and lead in the efforts related to the issue. But, of course, there are also people on the opposite side who are the ones making the policies and key decisions related to that issue, people we call the Leading Opponents (write this on the opposite end).

There are also the people who help with the struggle, who show up, who act, and these folks we call Active Allies (write this at a 30 degree angle over the Leading Activists). But there are the folks on the other side who carry out and enforce the policies of the Opposition, namely the Active Opponents (write that on the other side of the chart).

There are also people who agree with you but don't do much. They might sign a petition, give a small donation, show up once at a demonstration, but not much else. We call them Passive Allies (write that with a 60 degree line on the Activist side). Of course, there are Passive Opponents as well, people who disagree with the concerns of the Activists and agree with the Opponents but don't do much.

Finally (draw with a 90 degree line on the chart) there are the Neutrals. They may be oblivious to what is going on. Or they may be too busy to be engaged (a single parent with kids just trying to make it, a student not doing very well, someone with a major health crisis), but they aren't one way or the other on the issue.

The key to this tool is that you will NEVER get everyone to agree with you. But if you can move people over just one slot, you can strengthen your movement (draw an arrow from one section to the next for each of the items below).

If you can get an Active Ally to become a leader, you strengthen your movement.

If you can get a Passive Ally to be more regularly involved so as to be an Active Ally, you strengthen your movement.

If you can get a Neutral to consider the issue, agree, and perhaps do one simple thing so they are a Passive Ally, you strengthen your movement.

If you can stir up questions in the Passive Opponent so they back off a bit and become Neutral, you strengthen your movement.

If you can connect to and challenge the Active Opponents in such a way that major concerns are stirred up in them and they become Passive, you strengthen your movement. In fact, most nonviolent revolutions succeed when the Active Opponents (army or police) become Passive and refuse to carry out their orders from the Leading Opponent.

It's hard to really comprehend the dynamism of this tool without plunging into a specific issue. We have a great story in the Bible to see the dynamics of the Social Barometer in Esther 4. Form into groups of 5-6 or discuss as a whole group with the following questions.

What is the main issue in this story? (Extermination of the Jews)

Who is the leading activist? (Mordecai)

Who is the leading opponent? (Haman)

Where is Esther at the beginning of the story? (Neutral—she's oblivious)

Where would you plot the Jews in general (Passive Allies—they are mourning, but in private), the King (Active Opponent—it was Haman's idea, but the King issued the order), the Persian Court (Esther's maids and servants—they support the King generally, so Passive Opponents).

What initial action does Mordecai take? Could you call this a nonviolent public protest? Who is he trying to reach? (Maybe many, but especially his relative Esther, a queen!)

In what way does Esther respond at first? (Note that Mordecai has connected to Esther through their relationship, a critical action for Leading Activists to

do with Neutrals. Esther gives Mordecai fresh clothes—not a way to deal with genocide! Her first action shows how clueless she is.)

Once Esther hears about what is happening (Mordecai has educated her!), how does Esther move? (She moves from Neutral to Passive Ally, she agrees about the problem, but doesn't see how she can do anything.)

What does Mordecai then do to help move Esther from a Passive Ally to a Leading Activist? (He gives her a big vision of what God can do. He challenges her directly in a visionary way.) How does Esther respond?

Once Esther becomes a Leading Activist, how does she move the Jews from Passive Allies to Active Allies? How does she move the Persian Court from Passive Opponents to Active Allies? (Note, this is an *interfaith* prayer movement!)

How has the power balance shifted during the development of the story?

In the chapters that follow, after we've seen Esther shift the balance of the Spectrum of Allies her way, we see Esther approach the King, an Active Opponent. She commits an act of civil disobedience, entering the King's throne room uninvited, but does it in a way that is not aggressive. She steps just inside the door then quietly waits. Then she works on building the relationship with the King, having him over to her apartments for dinner. Finally she exposes the court intrigue by Haman behind his drive to destroy the Jews. Because of "the Law of the Medes and Persians" the King can't rescind his order to kill the Jews. So the King comes up with the idea to proclaim a new law that whoever kills a Jew will be killed. The King, once an Active Opponent, has now become an Active Ally. Politically, where is Haman now?

## **APPLICATION**

Invite people to form groups. If there are certain commonalities, such as teachers, health professionals, clergy, etc., they could form their own group.

Invite them to take the Spectrum of Allies and identify one issue related to today's context that is fresh for them. Sketch out people or groups/organizations on the Spectrum of Allies at this point.

Then brainstorm about ideas they might be able to do to help people in one point of the Spectrum of Allies to move one slot closer to the Leading Activists for the issue. Try to identify 3 specific ideas that could be taken.

Have a short time to report out from each group. Encourage people to follow through on these ideas in their networks or on their own!

### **POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:**

\* Esther courageously risked her life to speak before the king. She planned carefully about how to approach the king so that her request would get a fair hearing. Mordecai took public action in mourning the impending slaughter. Though he personally had no access to the decision-makers, he prepared himself through planning, gathering information (such as a copy of the king's decree), and placing himself in a position where his action would be noticed. **Lesson insight: Good planning and the courage to take risks are often critical ingredients to taking transformative action.**

\* One of the most difficult things for those in the margin to do is to find their voice and speak out, especially when they feel threatened. Those in power, the mainstream or the center, are often unaware of the problems their actions are causing as was the case with King Ahasuerus. Others may be outright hostile as was Haman. Esther needed both to gain knowledge about what was about to happen to her people and to be personally challenged to take a risk because only she was in a position to reach the decision-makers. **Lesson insight: Finding a way for marginalized people to effectively speak the truth of what is happening is critical for success in action.**

\* Note the different strategies used depending where a person or group is on the Spectrum. For Active and Passive Allies you are trying to help them be challenged to expanding what they are doing, something encouraging them for that next step. For Neutrals there may be education (as Mordecai did with Esther) and building connection to those in the struggle (again, as Mordecai did with Esther). For Passive and Active Opponents relationship building is key so that the seeds of doubt that are sowed aren't immediately rejected. **Lesson insight: Develop specific strategies that are related to the particular place and needs that the people or groups are on the Spectrum of Allies.**

## **SESSION 3: A GRIEVING, ANGRY MOTHER RISES (2 Samuel 21:1-14)**

### **BACKGROUND**

During the Israelite conquest of Canaan the Gibeonites secured a peace agreement with the Israelites by deceitful means. That story is recorded in Joshua 9:3-27. Joshua made a covenant with the Gibeonites to let them live, an agreement viewed as holy and not to be violated. Evidently there was a massacre of the Gibeonites under the reign of King Saul. Saul and three of his sons, including David's friend Jonathan, were later killed in battle by the Philistines. David became king and the protector of Jonathan's disabled son Mephibosheth. Saul's surviving concubine Rizpah had earlier been used as a possession symbolizing growing political power in a struggle between Saul's son Ishbosheth and his general Abner (see 2 Samuel 3:6-11). By the time of the story in 2 Samuel 21, David is well in control of his kingdom, having survived various wars of consolidation and a number of revolts.

### **STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS**

Break into small groups to read and discuss the passage with the following questions to guide their study. Allow 30 minutes for the group to work together. Then invite one group to report on what they learned. Ask other groups not to retell the entire story but to share insights from the passage. When all groups have finished, the leader may raise any further points that might have been missed and provide a concluding summary.

Questions to use in the small group study:

The original incident of violence of Saul against the Gibeonites is not told in the Bible except in its reference in this passage.

What do you think probably happened? (The Gibeonites had been pledged safety within Israel in Joshua 9.)

What bargain did David make to appease the Gibeonites?

Who was to suffer in the newest round of violence?

Is there any indication that these individuals were responsible for the initial incident of violence? (Some are grandsons, so they may not even have been born when the massacre happened.)

Why would the Gibeonites and David feel that such an action would make the situation "better"?

How is David in the mainstream in this story?  
How does he act toward the margins?  
Who is Rizpah?  
How is Rizpah in the margin in this story?  
What action did she take?  
Was this a public action?  
Was she doing more than grieving for her loss?  
How is her choice different from the choice made by Merab, the other mother in the story (some translations call her Michal)?  
What inner issues do you think Rizpah might have had to face to act as she did?  
What do you think gave her the energy and courage for her action?  
What impact did Rizpah's action have?  
How does David as a mainstream person respond to Rizpah as a person in the margin?  
What does it signify for David, who handed the men over for execution, to bury the bodies with royal dignity?  
Where is God in the story?  
Does God condone the deal made between the Gibeonites and David?  
When does the divine blessing return to the land?  
How is religion used to justify political actions?

After the reports from the small groups, ask if anyone can think of a modern example of someone like Rizpah. You might want to share the stories of mothers who have mobilized to act because of violence against their children (see below).

## **APPLICATION**

Have the class divide up into groups of two or three to discuss where Rizpah might rise up if she came back today.

Who would she be with?  
What might she do?  
How might people in this group as individuals or the group together act in support of the voice raised by this contemporary Rizpah?

## POINTS OF IMPORTANCE

\* David sacrificed the lives of Saul's descendants while operating within the framework of mainstream political power. He was completely focused on solving the political problem of the Gibeonites, as well as perhaps protecting his own throne from possible threats from descendants of his predecessor, Saul. David evidently gave no thought to the impact of this massacre on the mothers of the dead or on the innocence of those being sacrificed for political expediency. Injustice is often a result of the blindness of the mainstream to the values, needs and concerns of the margins. Merab took no action to counter the injustice, so she remained part of the invisible, silent margins. Rizpah exposed the injustice for what it was, refusing to let the mainstream represented by David go on with business as usual. She made the injustice visible and poignantly plain. **Lesson insight: The mainstream will often persecute the margins, so the margins must stand up for themselves to challenge the unjust situation, structure or actions.**

\* Mothers have sometimes organized in the face of violence to speak against violations of human rights that have claimed or threaten to claim the lives of their children. Three examples stand out:

The Mothers of the Plaza del Mayo in Argentina organized in the 1970s during that country's "dirty war." Tens of thousands of young people "disappeared," seized by members of the military. They were never seen again. People were killed and buried without record or dropped from helicopters into the ocean. When the mothers received no explanations for the disappearance of their children they began to organize. They held silent vigils every week in the capital city, carrying photos of their missing children. In the face of severe repression they continued their actions, becoming a moral voice for the nation that eventually brought an end to the military's reign of terror.

The Mothers of the Disappeared in El Salvador organized to pressure the government for information about their missing relatives. They became one of the strong voices for human rights and an end to the war in that country.

The Naga Mothers Association began as a women's social group in Nagaland in Northeast India. They began going to Indian army bases and police stations to gather bodies of Nagas slain in the war that has gone on since 1955. Nobody else would openly claim the bodies for fear of being

harassed by the soldiers. The women came to bury the bodies properly according to their culture, wrapping each person in a newly woven shawl. As the number of Naga dead increased, the mothers then began raising their voices and engaging in political actions for an end to the violence. The Naga Mothers Association has become a consistent voice for human rights and peace.

**Lesson insight: The energy of a mother's love can become a powerful force for justice and peace when faced with actual or threatened violence against her children.**

\* Rizpah's action was a long-term public action. She kept her vigil from the barley harvest till the rains came (v.10), from roughly October to May. She kept the deaths of her sons before the people of Israel. When David came to Rizpah and buried her sons, David's action was public. He was publicly changing his policy, doing an action of repentance in response to Rizpah's witness. **Lesson insight: Public nonviolent actions can sometimes sway the hearts or at least the policies of the powerful.**

\* The political deal made by David and the Gibeonites was cloaked in religious language. The 7 young men were slaughtered "before the Lord" (v.6,9). Though in the story God raised the original problem of the unresolved massacre of Gibeonites by Saul as the cause of the famine (v.1), God does not respond to the slaughter of Saul's descendants by lifting the famine. Evidently David's action was not what God wanted. However, when David repented publicly in coming to Rizpah to bury her sons with honor after she had held a vigil for months to expose the ugliness of the political violence, only then did God bless the land. **Lesson insight: God's blessing is brought not by more violence but by ending the cycle of violence.**

## SESSION 4: LOVING THE ENEMY THROUGH TRANSFORMING INITIATIVES (Matthew 5:38-48 and 2 Kings 6:8-23)

### BACKGROUND:

Matthew 5-7 is a collection of the ethical teachings of Jesus which we call "The Sermon on the Mount." Jesus is teaching the way of life in the Kingdom of God, or under the Reign of God. This is a picture of how Jesus' followers should be living. Many of the passages are very familiar, including Matthew 5:44 in which Jesus commands us to love our enemies. However, with that familiarity comes many interpretations that do not come so much out of the original cultural context as the contemporary context of the reader.

Jesus gave these teachings in a situation of severe violence in which various Jewish people took very different options in response to the violence. The Roman Empire had conquered the region, imposing the "Peace of Rome" (*Pax Romana*) by the force of the Roman military legions. Threats to that peace were dealt with severely, including by crucifixion. During Jesus' adolescent years there had been a major revolt among Galileans. The Romans responded by crucifying thousands of rebels along the Galilean roadsides. Jesus probably saw these dying rebels, which made his command to "take up your cross" a dramatic exhortation even before Jesus' own crucifixion. The violence of the oppressive conquering power was the dominant context in which Jesus gave these ethical teachings.

Jesus' contemporaries provided a wide range of responses to the violence of Rome. King Herod (either Herod the Great at Jesus' birth or Herod Antipas at Jesus' death), the Sadducees who controlled the Temple hierarchy, and the tax-collectors were all accommodating to the Roman system. They did Rome's work and benefited from being part of the dominating system. On the other hand, the Zealots engaged in counterviolence, attacking Roman interests in the region. Eventually their efforts led to a major revolt in 66 A.D. which was crushed by Rome in 70 A.D. Some people withdrew from the conflicts in society, including the Essenes who established the Qumran community in the Judean desert and produced the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. Many of the Pharisees in Jesus' day engaged in a religious version of withdrawal. They had a high level of religious piety, but their piety did not connect to the sufferings around them (see the example of Jesus' clashes with them in Luke 6:6-11 and 13:10-17).

What Jesus says about “loving one’s enemies” is not intended for some elusive ideal realm but for a very harsh and violent world. The shape love of enemies takes is sketched in some of the specific examples Jesus gives.

## **STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS**

If the class has participants who are serious students of the Bible and interested in details of the biblical text, then present the three translation options for "evil" in Matthew 5:39 (see Points of Importance below). Discuss this question: What are the different implications for our action whether this verse is translated "Do not resist evil (or the evil one)" or "Do not resist by evil means"?

Break into three groups. Give each group one of the sets of instructions for a verse in this passage (see following pages). Each group will study the cultural context for the passage. The groups should come up with a way to demonstrate the teaching and make comments on what they understand the passage to say. The group should provide a contemporary example that reflects the theme of Jesus’ teaching in that verse, if possible. For each group copy the sheet with the cultural background and questions that follow at the end of this session. The groups should have 20 minutes for their group work—allow a little longer if they need more time to develop their skit.

When everyone returns to the larger group, have each group make their presentation in order.

## **APPLICATION**

Following the presentations, work with all the class participants to make a list of ways to “love one’s enemy” in today’s context of rising authoritarianism. Include drawing upon the examples given in the group presentations, but the discussion together might spark other ideas.

## **POINTS OF IMPORTANCE**

\* Bible scholars who translate the New Testament from the original Greek have three possible translation choices regarding the word "evil" or *ponero* in Matthew 5:39. The Greek grammar can be taken any of the three ways, so the decision needs to be made by looking at the context and meaning of what was said.

- The first option would be to translate *ponero* as "evil" or "evil one," so the verse would read "do not resist evil" or "do not resist the evil one." Many translations take this choice, seeing *ponero* as in the Greek grammatical dative case. However, James 4:7 says, "resist the devil," and since James has many echoes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount this option does not seem consistent with what James says. Furthermore, 1 John 3:8 says, "The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil." Not resisting evil is far more passive than the explicit command of James to Christians or the very purpose of Christ's coming as portrayed by John.
- The second option would be to translate the Greek word *ponero* as "in the area of evil" or "in the realm of evil," following the meaning as from the grammatical locative case. The translation would read, "do not resist in the area of evil." This translation is very cumbersome, and thus unlikely. It also has the same problems as the first option.
- The third option is the Greek grammatical "instrumental" case which has to do with the means by which activity takes place. The translation of *ponero* would be "by evil means," making the passage read: "Do not resist by evil means." This has a quickly understandable meaning that is also consistent with the meaning of the surrounding verses. This translation option is also consistent with Paul's understanding in Romans 12:21 when he writes: "Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good."

**Lesson insight: Evil is to be resisted and even overcome, but the means used cannot be evil means, only good.**

\* Jesus is addressing the people who are perceived and who perceive themselves as powerless. His listeners are the people being slapped because they are of inferior status, the people sued for their coats because they are very poor, and the people being pressed into carrying baggage for the occupying army. Jesus tells them that they have choices they can make. They have the power to take action. **Lesson insight: All of us have power to act creatively even in situations of severe oppression.**

\* Glen Stassen uses the phrase "transforming initiatives" to describe the option toward violence that Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus challenges his listeners to take the initiative, even in situations where they seem to be powerless. The followers of Jesus should act in new ways that do not follow the expectations of dominating powers (Walter Wink speaks of this as "Jesus' Third

Way” in contrast to “fight” or “flight.”). Their initiatives should also be transforming. Instead of continuing the cycles of violence, these creative actions should affirm the humanity of both the one suffering and the persecutor. Evil is exposed and resisted, but in a way that opens the door to repentance, reconciliation and justice. Relationships are transformed because love is at the core of the transforming initiatives, and all the actions Jesus taught give creative and surprising expression to that love. **Lesson insight: Our actions in repressive situations can bring positive change to relationships, even those that may seem the most hopeless.**

### **OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL STUDY: 2 Kings 6:8-23**

This can be done in the same session if you have time, done in a separate session, or given to the group as homework to see another biblical example of a transforming initiative.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The people of Israel were divided following David and Solomon’s reigns into two kingdoms: Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Elisha was the major prophet in Israel during the period of this story. Syria was to the north of Israel and was one of the regional powers that were often in conflict with both Israel and Judah.

### **STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:**

Invite someone to read the story aloud. Then ask the following questions:

What was the nature of the conflict?

What was God’s miracle in this conflict?

After the Syrian army was blinded, what action did Elisha take that transformed the situation?

How did Elisha’s action break out of the expected range of behavior in such a conflict?

What would have been expected actions to be taken against the Syrian army?

What was the result of Elisha’s action?

In reporting the story dramatize what the scene must have been like for Elisha to lead an army of blind people all the way from Dothan to Samaria (a distance of

about 18 kilometers or 11 miles). Help the class feel the strangeness of one unarmed prophet leading hundreds if not thousands of helpless soldiers for such a long distance. Perhaps they were in a long line, each one with their hand on the shoulder of the man in front up to the beginning of the line where Elisha was in the lead. Use imagination to make vivid the surprise of the Syrians opening their eyes to find themselves disarmed, in the enemy's capital city, and surrounded by a hostile army and a king ready to slaughter them. Don't just talk about this scene, but act it out!

### **POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:**

\* The bloodless victory against the Syrian army was accomplished both by a divine miracle and by the action of Elisha to feed the enemy. God acts, and people act. History can contain surprises that no one can predict, but also human choices are made that determine whether outcomes of conflicts will be positive or negative. Compare this story to Proverbs 25:21-22 and Romans 12:19-21. **Lesson insight: Acts of mercy and compassion can disarm the heart of the enemy.**

\* Verse 23 says, "The Syrians came no more on raids into the land of Israel." Then verse 24 goes into the next story about another war between Syria and Israel. Because these two stories are placed next to each other it is easy to miss the full impact of the generous and merciful action of Elisha. His action brought a halt to the series of raids that had been going on. Peace was achieved for a significant period of time. The period of peace is not recorded other than in these brief words. Periods of peace can be relatively boring to some writers of history, but those peaceful years are very significant and appreciated by the people who live through them. **Lesson insight: Don't hurry too quickly to the next story, but appreciate the time of peace that was achieved.**

**Group 1 Instructions:** “If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.”

**Cultural background:**

By specifying the blow coming upon the right cheek, Jesus is referring to a backhanded slap, as that is the only way one can hit a right cheek with one’s right hand. Hitting a person with a backhand slap was something done by a social superior to a social inferior. In Jesus’ day, that would have been a Roman slapping a Jew, a master slapping a servant, or a man slapping a woman. In contemporary Jewish legal writings there was a minor fine for hitting an equal with a blow from the fist. There was no fine for slapping a social inferior—that was one’s right as a superior. However, if someone gave a backhanded slap to a social equal, the offended person could sue for severe damages because of the insult to their status.

**Study Questions:**

Who would be the one being slapped? What would be the message conveyed in the act of slapping? Does the person who turns the other cheek assume an inferior social position (Have group members carefully dramatize the actions so everyone can see what happens)? What claim is being made by refusing to be intimidated? Can the person who turns the other cheek now be easily backhanded again? What kind of physical assault can be done? What would be the underlying assumption about social status for such a physical assault? Does the person who turns the other cheek do anything to diminish the human worth of the one who slaps? What new possibilities for relationship are presented in this simple action?

**Preparation for Presentation:**

Develop a short drama or skit to present this teaching of Jesus. Be creative. You can provide either a setting from Jesus’ day or from your own context.

If possible, identify some contemporary example or story that reflects the same themes Jesus taught—either something people in your group have done, have witnessed, or have heard about.

**Group 2 Instructions:** “If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well.”

**Cultural background:**

Read Exodus 22:25-27 and Deuteronomy 24:10-13. The rural economy of Jesus’ day was built upon large land-owners who had many poor tenant farmers working the land for them. The tenant farmers lived in near slave conditions. Many of the parables of Jesus reflect this economic system. For a person to take out a loan (for seed to plant the next crop, for example), an outer garment would be given as collateral to make sure the loan would be repaid as the poor person had very little other than the clothes on the back. This debt system was so severe that when the Zealots revolted in 66 A.D., their first action after capturing Jerusalem was to burn the debt records stored in the Temple. Debts had been carefully recorded in a legal setting as part of maintaining strict control.

**Study questions:**

Who is being sued for their coat, a rich person or a poor person? Why would this action be taken? What does Jesus say to do? What would the person giving the clothes be left with? What would this action say about the underlying economic reality? Who bears the shame of nakedness in Jewish culture—the one who is naked, the one who witnesses the nakedness or the one who causes the nakedness? (Look at Genesis 9:18-27, Job 22:6 and Habakkuk 2:15 for examples of where moral blame and shame is placed related to nakedness.) What moral message is delivered by the shame of this act of nakedness? What choice does the one suing for the coat now face?

**Preparation for Presentation:**

Develop a short drama or skit to present this teaching of Jesus. Be creative. You can provide either a setting from Jesus’ day or from your own context.

If possible, identify some contemporary example or story that reflects the same themes Jesus taught—either something people in your group have done, have witnessed, or have heard about.

**Group 3 Instructions:** “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.”

**Cultural background:**

The Roman occupying forces could compel civilians to carry their packs or baggage, but only for one Roman *milion* (a distance of approximately 1,000 paces, hence the English word “mile”). This action enforced the dominance of Roman military power, but the limitation of the action also emphasized the importance of Roman law. The particular law that limited forced portage by civilians was intended to keep hostility among the occupied population to a minimum, but the Jews viewed this as just another of the detested forms of Roman oppression.

**Study Questions:**

Who would be forced to go one mile? What would it feel like for the soldier to compel someone to carry his baggage? What would it feel like for the one forced to carry the baggage? What is the nature of the relationship? How does the relationship change when the one forced to carry the pack begins to go the second mile? If the law limits carrying baggage to one mile, what dilemma is faced by the Roman soldier? How would the soldier feel? Who is in control of the situation? What is the relationship claim made by this action?

**Preparation for Presentation:**

Develop a short drama or skit to present this teaching of Jesus. Be creative. You can provide either a setting from Jesus’ day or from your own context.

If possible, identify some contemporary example or story that reflects the same themes Jesus taught—either something people in your group have done, have witnessed, or heard about.

## **SESSION 5: HOLY NONCOOPERATION (Exodus 1:15-22 and Daniel 3, 6)**

### **PART 1: Exodus 1:15-22**

#### **BACKGROUND:**

The descendants of Jacob had settled in Egypt to avoid a famine in Canaan at a time when Jacob's son Joseph was the Pharaoh's most powerful administrator. Over the decades and centuries the memory of Joseph's leadership in Egypt faded. A new dynasty was established in Egypt with no connection to Joseph or his legacy. Eventually the Pharaohs of the new Egyptian dynasty enslaved all the Hebrews. Fears about the increasing Hebrew population prompted the Egyptian Pharaoh to introduce increasingly harsh measures against them.

#### **STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:**

Break into small groups to read and discuss the passage with the following questions to guide their study. Allow 20 minutes for the group to work together.

Questions for use in the small groups study:

- What was the situation of the Hebrew people?
- What were Shiphrah and Puah instructed to do?
- What dilemma did they face?
- What actions did Shiphrah and Puah take?
- How did their actions relate to the mandates of the governing authorities?
- How did Shiphrah and Puah utilize the prejudices of the Egyptians to support their actions?
- Are there ways the blindness of those who dominate can be useful in transforming initiatives?
- What do you think of the ethics of Shiphrah and Puah lying to the Pharaoh?
- Why then would God "deal well" with them (see v. 20,21)?

Give a short summary of the story. Harvest what they learned and decided. Go around asking each group to give one (*JUST ONE!--enforce that to keep the interest and the discussion flowing*) thought or learning from the story. Go around until everything that members wanted to be shared has been said. When all groups have finished, the leader may raise any further points that might have been missed and provide a concluding summary.

## **PART 2: Daniel 3 and 6**

Daniel 3 with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and Daniel 6 with Daniel offer two stories of similar repressive decrees regarding mainstream religious dominance from those in power and acts of noncooperation by these Jewish men who were in the margins. The passages are long, but participants might be able to sketch out the stories adequately as they are so well known in churches.

Here are some questions to dig deeper into the stories:

What were the repressive religious decrees given?

What threats were put in place to force compliance?

How did these 4 men engage in noncooperation?

Did they do anything to show respect for the society in general while refusing to cooperate regarding religious practice?

These 4 men were all saved by miraculous intervention, but what were they prepared to suffer as they engaged in their noncooperation?

What are possible losses or penalties we might experience if we engage in noncooperation (assuming we won't be thrown into a fiery furnace or a den of lions!)?

## **APPLICATION FROM BOTH PARTS**

What are some actions of noncooperation you have witnessed or heard about? Are their actions of noncooperation you have participated in? How was that experience?

What could be done to provide support for those in our communities who engage in noncooperation?

## **POINTS OF IMPORTANCE:**

\* Shiphrah and Puah were put into a personally and morally dangerous situation. They would either become killers of the babies of their own people or they would not cooperate with the explicit commands of the mightiest ruler known at that time. In what seemed to be an impossible dilemma they found a creative way to avoid participating in murder or incurring the wrath of Pharaoh. They saved the lives of many Hebrew children. **Lesson insight: When there seem to be no options,**

**think again, and look for the creative solution beyond the assumptions of the dilemma.**

\* Was lying to Pharaoh ethically wrong? On the one hand that may be a judgment that could be made on the midwives. On the other, telling the truth would have likely resulted in their deaths and perhaps their replacement as midwives by women willing to kill the boy babies. The Bible clearly says that through their actions the midwives “feared God,” and they were blessed with families themselves, a sign of divine favor. So what are the values affirmed in this passage? **Lesson insight: Doing what is right in the middle of oppressive situations may be more complex and less pure than a moralist at ease might think.**

For the 4 men featured in Daniel, they engaged in noncooperation as an act of faith. Government decrees had religious aspects that in good conscience they could not comply with. As we engage with rising authoritarianism there may be issues that arise which challenge or even directly attack our religious and ethical convictions and practices. **Lesson insight: Noncooperation may be a religious act either directly or because of the ethical issues at stake.**

## **SESSION 6: SYMBOLIC ACTIONS (Luke 19:28-44; Isaiah 20:1-6; and Jeremiah 32:1-15)**

### **BACKGROUND:**

Prophets were best known for speaking God's word to their contemporary settings. Sometimes prophets used symbolic actions or public dramas to convey their messages. Their actions would speak to the particular circumstances, bringing a message of judgment or hope or calling people to alternative ways of living. Sometimes their actions spoke about what people should do, and at other times their actions spoke about God's action toward the nation.

Isaiah prophesied during a time when Judah was threatened by the superpower Assyria to the north. Judah was tempted to seek a protective alliance with the other superpower, Egypt to the south. Isaiah and other prophets often discussed the issue of whether Judah or Israel should look to the Lord or to the military umbrella of a great power for their protection.

Jeremiah was facing an impending national disaster. The Babylonians were besieging Jerusalem, and the city was about to fall. The situation looked completely hopeless. Babylonians would usually carry off into exile most of the captured population, as the Assyrians had before them. Because of these common practices the people under siege expected either death or to be carried off to a distant land to live.

Jesus lived during a time when the Jews were under Roman rule and military occupation. There had been a number of armed revolts against Rome, all of them brutally crushed. Social ferment against Roman authority was strong, fueled by expectations that a Messiah would come to fulfill the prophecies that one of David's descendants would again sit on the throne and bring in an age of peace, freedom, security, and justice. Zechariah had prophesied about a king coming in peace to Jerusalem, humbly riding on a young donkey (see Zechariah 9:9-10). Opposition to Jesus had been growing, and Jesus had predicted his own death to take place in Jerusalem.

## **STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:**

Divide the participants into three groups, giving each group one of the following passages:

Luke 19:28-44

Isaiah 20:1-6

Jeremiah 32:1-15

Ask each group to discuss and answer the following questions related to the passage they have:

What is the context or conflict setting in which the passage takes place?

What action does the prophet or Jesus take?

What is the symbolic meaning of the action?

What responses, if any, are noted?

What responses do you imagine people might have had?

Following the group sessions, the spokesperson for each group should report to the whole class. After the reports ask class participants to identify some of the things they heard in common in these three stories. List the common characteristics on a board or large paper.

Invite participants to tell any stories of something they may have seen, heard about, read about or participated in that involved a public symbolic action that spoke to a conflict situation. Discuss together:

What can symbolic actions accomplish?

What risks must be faced in taking such an action?

What gives power to symbolic actions?

## **APPLICATION**

Brainstorm ideas for symbolic actions that could be taken by an individual or small group such as your own. Choose one action then plan for how to carry it out. How can that action be publicized to maximize its impact?

## POINTS OF IMPORTANCE

\* Sometimes a symbolic action can be spontaneous as a person responds creatively to a situation. However, in these three stories planning and on-going activity was required. Jesus had set up the arrangement to get the donkey before he entered Jerusalem, even to the point of establishing a code phrase so the owner of the donkey would know the disciples taking the donkey were coming from Jesus. Jeremiah had to arrange the details for the purchase of the land, including the legal documentation. Isaiah kept up his action of public nudity for three years! **Lesson insight: Planning and perseverance can give symbolic actions powerful focus and heightened attention.**

\* Each of these actions, though involving other people, were initiated and carried out by one person. **Lesson insight: One person can make a difference!**

\* Each prophet (including thinking of Jesus in his prophetic role) spoke verbally or wrote as part of delivering the message. These were actions with multiple forms of communication. However, the action itself was the dramatic message that people most clearly remembered. **Lesson insight: Actions speak louder than words, so find ways to act that will speak your message with clarity and force. However, accompanying words, whether written or spoken, can help interpret the meaning of the action for those who witness it.**

## **SESSION 7: OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD (Romans 12:9-21)**

### **BACKGROUND:**

Paul's letter to the Romans is the apostle's greatest theological statement. Chapters 12 and 13 are the centerpiece of his understanding of Christian ethics. The teachings about law, Christ, grace, justification, salvation, and new life have implications for how we live. So chapter 12 begins with "I appeal to you, therefore..." Because of what God has done for us in Christ, the way we live needs to reflect Christ. Chapters 12 and 13 show us how to live consistent with what God has done in Christ. Verses 9-21 are a quick list of commands or exhortations. They cover a wide range of topics in just a few words. The underlying theme is living the transformed life set forth in verses 1 and 2. These verses also echo with the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, which should not surprise us since Matthew 5-7 are the most concentrated ethical teachings of Jesus in the gospels.

### **STUDY PROCESS AND QUESTIONS:**

Divide into small groups to read the passage and discuss it with the following questions:

What is Paul doing in this passage?

What kinds of conflicts do you think could be going on that Paul's words might address?

What specific peacemaking actions does Paul write about?

In what ways would those actions transform conflict situations?

For a group that is more familiar with the Bible you might want to challenge them to come up with as many similar teachings as they can from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.

What does Paul say in Romans 12:9-21 that Jesus says in a very similar way in Matthew 5-7?

Allow 20 to 30 minutes for the discussion, the longer period for groups working on comparisons to the Sermon on the Mount. Gather the groups back together, and have a presenter from each group share their findings.

Then give a brief review of all the lessons studied in the course. Make particular note of some of the more memorable experiences of the class. Invite the class to make a list with you of some of the things they have learned.

## **APPLICATION**

Tell the group that the most important part of the course is coming up:

What will participants do with the knowledge they have gained in the context of their own conflicts?

Ask people to close their eyes and think about our current context of rising authoritarianism. Ask them:

Who are the people or groups near at hand where this conflict is being expressed?

What are the issues of this particular manifestation of authoritarianism as you understand them?

What are the concerns of the local people on the other side in the conflict?

How are people acting toward each other?

How are people communicating with each other?

What is at stake in the conflict?

Then review the list of lessons learned in the course. Ask participants to open their eyes and reflect in silence for at least 5 minutes on at least three specific actions they could take in this current context that would move the conflicts in a positive direction. Urge the participants to be as specific and detailed as possible so they will be clear on exactly what they can do.

Have the participants gather in groups of 3 or 4 to share what they have thought of doing related to the context of rising authoritarianism. If there is something so deep or personal that a person does not feel like sharing, respect that person's desires. Invite them to share as much as they feel comfortable sharing in the small group. Allow 3 minutes for each person. Call out the time half-way through the small group sharing.

Invite the small groups to spend 5 minutes praying for each other. Invite them to pray for the conflicts they are each facing and for the commitments each person has made to take transformative action.

Close the session by forming a circle. Express your thanks to the group for their work throughout the study. Then go around the circle, starting with the person on your right. Ask each person to say in one word or one phrase something they gained in the class, whether it was a specific lesson, an idea, an inner quality, a new insight, or whatever they might want to say in that one word. As facilitator you may conclude with the last word in the circle. Then give a brief blessing of peace to the group.

## **POINTS OF IMPORTANCE**

\* Verse 20 is a quote from Proverbs 25:21-22. Doing good to one's enemies is not just a New Testament teaching, but a teaching with roots in the Old Testament/ Hebrew Scriptures. "Heaping burning coals" on a person's head is a phrase with its roots in the ancient Near Eastern custom of carrying a pan of hot coals on one's head as a sign of shame, contrition, or sorrow. Wearing "sackcloth and ashes" is a similar image. The actions of feeding the hungry enemy and providing drink to the thirsty enemy bring shame upon the enemy, resulting in a change of heart. That is how evil is overcome by good. **Lesson insight: One way evil is overcome is by bringing about an inner change within the enemy through actions of love.**

\* This is the last session in this study. It is important that participants apply the lessons they have learned to the conflicts in their own lives and to the larger context of rising authoritarianism. The time taken to think about how to apply the lessons from the course is very important. It may also be a difficult time for some participants as the conflicts they are thinking about may be very personal and very painful. Respect the desire of anyone not to share, but encourage everyone to work hard at thinking about their own conflicts, personal and political, and applying to those conflicts what was learned in the class. **Lesson insight: What the Bible says about conflict can be applied to the everyday conflicts we experience, no matter how severe they might be, and even to the current conflict of rising authoritarianism.**

## WHERE TO CONNECT

No Kings ([www.nokings.org](http://www.nokings.org)) a national network of committed Americans who believe we are a country with no Kings. Find organizing resources and connections to networks around the country.

## CONNECTING ACTIONS

- Sing hymns and hold public worship services in strategic locations. [Mennonite Action](#) is requesting that their affiliates conduct 40 public worship services in this period around the theme “God’s Love Knows No Borders.”
- Engage your congregation - build connections, establish common cause, share experiences and concerns. This can create power for what may come.
- Join Faith for Black Lives every Friday at 12pm ET for [Freedom Friday: A Call to Prayer and Prophetic Action](#)
- Sojourners Faithful Witness Wednesday - Vigil at the Capitol - 12pm
- [Watch Franciscan Action Network/Pace e Bene webinar: Using Our Power: Nonviolence & Noncooperation in History](#)

## LEARN MORE – RESOURCES

### TRAINING

Freedom Trainers ([freedomtrainers.net](http://freedomtrainers.net)) – a network of trainers offering regular trainings to support your group or network with skills in noncompliance and noncooperation

No Kings, One Million Rising training videos:  
<https://www.nokings.org/rise#library>

Training for Change ([www.trainingforchange.org](http://www.trainingforchange.org)) – a training and capacity building organization for activists and organizers.

### FOR FURTHER READING

- ★ [When authoritarians take power, faithful leaders fight back](#), by Chris Crawford and Maria Stephan
- ★ [Advocating for a multiracial democracy](#), by Barbara Williams-Skinner
- ★ [Building bridges across difference](#), by Mary Ellen Giess
- ★ [Protecting Cyber and physical security](#)
- ★ [Defending religious liberty](#), by Amanda Tyler
- ★ [Organizing and training for collective action](#), by Deth Im
- ★ [Providing and advocating for mutual aid](#), by Shailly Gupta Barnes
- ★ [Welcoming the stranger](#), by Tamara Upfal
- ★ [Practicing non-cooperation and civil disobedience](#), by Rev Stephen Green and Maria Stephan
- ★ [Protecting government of the people](#), by Maggie Siddiqi
- ★ [Daughters of Rizpah: Nonviolence and the Transformation of Trauma](#) by Sharon Buttry and Daniel Buttry

### Horizons Project

- [The Faithful Fight: Toolkits for Countering Authoritarianism](#) (with Protect Democracy)
- [THE PILLARS PROJECT: The Faith Community](#)
- [Case Studies of How Faith Actors have Challenged Authoritarianism in the](#)

## US & Globally

### Sojourner's Magazine

- [10 Ways to Stay Grounded During Trump's Second Term](#)
- [Faith & the Authoritarian Playbook](#)

### Choose Democracy

- [What can I do to fight this coup?](#)

### Franciscan Action Network/Pace e Bene

- [Using Our Power: Nonviolence & Noncooperation in History & Today](#)

### Kairos Center

- [Songs in the Key of Resistance: A Movement Songbook](#)
- [A Matter of Survival](#)

## VIDEOS

Teachable movies about noncooperation and how people have overthrown unjust regimes:

- 1-hour [Bringing Down a Dictator](#) - story of Otpor's overthrow of dictator Milosevic in Serbia (*translated into many languages*)
- 30-minute views [A Force More Powerful](#) - case studies of nonviolent resistance in Chile, Denmark, South Africa, and more... (*translated into many languages, has study guide for classrooms*)
- 4-minute video explaining [Pillars of Support](#)
- 2-minute video explaining [4 paths to resist Trump](#) (*Protect people | Disrupt | Defend civic institutions | Build alternative*)

Short videos related to Bible studies on conflict transformation and resisting authoritarianism: <https://globalpeacewarriors.org/resources/training-videos/>