
A Light to the World is the Missio Dei

Practical Ways to See Shalom as the Mission of God

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Missio Dei and Shalom...What does that mean?

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)

As we reflect on the life of Christ filled with healing the sick and disabled, helping the poor, and protecting the helpless, it is easy to see that the broken world which Jesus lived is the same broken world we live in today. Around me I see sick people not getting help, poor left on the streets, and helpless people pushed further and further from societies. “The world has been living in brokenness for a mighty long time – so long in fact, that we can’t even imagine what our existence would be like without it.”¹ Jesus uses the opportunity he has on this earth to be the light to the lost and left out, and as Disciples of Christ, we are called to carry on that light and continue the work of Jesus peacefully, simply, together.

Peace is an unattractive word to many people. People have associated this word negatively whether or not they are in the church. Most negative thoughts of peace birth from the notion of it being way too unrealistic. Although peace does have challenges, a more appropriate way to refer to this goal is to use the more inclusive Hebrew term: *Shalom*. By referring our mission to *Shalom* we confirm the origin of peace to the beginning of humankind², the vision God has for humankind³, and the lifestyle Jesus asks his disciples to have/give⁴.

¹ Krabill, 2005 p. 46

² Genesis 1:31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

³ Genesis 26:29, 31 “sent you away in peace. You are now blessed of the LORD”.... And they departed from him in peace.

⁴ Luke 10:5-6 Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house! And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you.

We know several things about *Shalom* from scripture. Several times when *Shalom* is translated in English, it is not translated as peace⁵ and therefore, we know that *Shalom* is more inclusive than the English word for it: Peace. The word means human flourishing⁶, safety⁷, and a blessing from God⁸. “Peace (shalom) describes human life in creation as it was meant to be: a life of flourishing and prospering in which our relationships with God, with one another, and with the nonhuman creation are luxuriant, thriving, and wholesome. A world of (shalom) is characterized by justice, love, and thankfulness.”⁹ So when we think of the word peace, I am not jumping to the conclusion that we should picket the White House and lay down in front of a tank. Instead I am talking about building a full relationship first with ourselves (and God), second with our communities and our neighbors, and finally with the world, and to shine a light with our love.

“Jesus asks us to lead a life of Peace.”¹⁰ “If Jesus really is the one God has designated as the primary *Shalom*-maker, then it should not surprise us to discover in his life and ministry the clearest picture we will ever get of God’s big project.”¹¹ Our job is not to ignore the problems that make our world broken, but rather to embrace our conflicts, listen to the problem, and work to reconcile from all those effected. “The people of God living in God’s new world of justice

⁵ Genesis 41:16, Genesis 43:23, Deuteronomy 23:6, Deuteronomy 29:19, Luke 11:21, etc.

⁶ Luke 2:29, Genesis 15:15, 28:21, 44:17, Exodus 4:18, Numbers 6:26

⁷ Deuteronomy 2:26, 23:6, 29:19, Luke 11:21

⁸ Luke 7:50, 24:36, John 14:32

⁹ Goheen, 2011 p. 92

¹⁰ Goheen, 2011 p. 92, John 14:27

¹¹ Krabill, 2005 p. 51

and shalom cannot be a people oblivious to these problems but must see ways of embodying and seeking justice in keeping with the gospel.”¹²

Missio Dei is the Mission of God. The base of Missio Dei come in the seed form from Genesis 12 and God’s covenant with Abraham to bring a blessing to a nation (A light to the nation)¹³, and this nation turns to the whole world when Christ comes and redirects (or clarifies) that mission saying that He is the light, and the nations are the whole world¹⁴. Therefore, to bring the light (Christ) to the nations (the world), we turn to the life of Christ. Christ taught peace and spent his life trying to fix this broken world, *Shalom* is our focus of the Missio Dei. “[Shalom] It is a plan for the transformation of human life and relationships under God’s leadership where “old things are passing away” and “all things are becoming new””¹⁵ We must treat Peace as the Missio Dei in its whole and not accept it as a set aside committee or group of our church. *Shalom* is the Missio Dei and should be a focus of ministry.

Even though brokenness runs as deep as the earliest days or human origins, and it may seem that *Shalom* will never be fully met, we know that Christ wants us to strive for it, he died while working on bringing it, and we know that people who strive to bring this change for *Shalom* do succeed. Before us is a compilation of stories of peacemakers, and strategies of working towards a life of *Shalom*. Let us reflect on some of these stories of peace.

¹² Goheen, 2011 p. 209

¹³ Tenent, 2010 p. 77

¹⁴ John 8:12

¹⁵ Krabill, 2005 p. 51

Shalom Starts with Forgiveness

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come unto your kingdom." He replies, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:42-43)

Luke 15 is an essential collection of stories of *Shalom*. Jesus shares three parables about a shepherd (probably a Gentile), a widow, and two lost sons and a humiliated Father who have all lost something. These stories end with these people finding what is lost after they have looked for it, and including the community in celebration. Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners (who were all pushed out from society), and the Pharisees and scribes question why Jesus would sit with the lowest of the lowest. "The Charge that Jesus 'welcomes sinners and eats with them' illumines another dimension of Jesus' associations with the needy outcasts of his day. "Sinners" includes those who suffered from human affliction, else why would they be in that condition? Their condition, moreover, was contagious and to eat with them put one in danger of contracting their plight. To the surprise of the established religion of the day, Jesus concentrated his ministry on those who were despised."¹⁶ The first story is about a shepherd who has 100 sheep, and he loses one of them. The shepherd then leaves the 99 sheep in search for the lost sheep. The shepherd searches for this sheep endlessly until it is found and brings it back. Once the shepherd brings the sheep back, there is a celebration with others.

The second story is about a widow who has a dowry of 10 coins and loses one of them. Once she finds the one coin, she calls her friends and neighbors to celebrate. The third story is

¹⁶ Kysar, 1999 p. 53

about a father who has two sons. One son makes himself an orphan, and leaves his family to live life on his own with his early inheritance. Once this son leaves and spends everything, he realizes that he would rather be working for his father in the lowest of lowest worker positions, and eating the pigs' slop! On his way back home, he prepares a speech to give to his father about his repentance and his father (who was waiting for him, saw him from afar, and runs after him) cuts him off in mid-sentence with a huge hug. A third time, a celebration is thrown with the community, but this time there is hostility with the other son who does not think the father should be as easy on his brother. This second brother then leaves the party making himself the second orphaned son. "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

These stories are about God continually searching for the lost, and the ones who turn away from Him no matter how proud they are. God searches for them until they are found, forgives them, and in the end there is always a celebration. Two things come out of these stories. First, *Shalom* only happens when you work tirelessly to find the lost and forgive them in your heart. Not only did this father forgive the first son, but also he was willing to make himself a fool in his society to stick up for that type of love and forgiveness. We know that God is not only willing to forgive us when we turn around (repent), but God will forgive us with big open arms. Secondly, *Shalom* only happens when community is present. In each of these stories we saw the community present in the celebrations. When Jesus was telling these parables, there was not *Shalom* because there was tension between the Pharisees/Sadducees and Jesus with the sinners

and tax collectors. We know from this example that God accepts everyone, and this act of love is the first step to *Shalom*.

“Forgiveness is not to be understood simply as the amnesia or leniency of God, how are we to understand it? First we should note that its purpose is more than the psychological or spiritual release from anger or resentment, although it does include that. The goal of forgiveness as Jesus illustrated it in his parables is reconciliation and restoration of peace between alienated parties. It may not restore the status quo ante... but where there is openness it can create the possibility for a new beginning.”¹⁷

So many times we find situations when we think that if we give people what they need, there is peace, but in reality, reconciliation needs to happen in order for peace to be present.

“When we allow ourselves to be open and vulnerable to those who are hurt or marginalized in our society, the power of love makes it possible to bridge the barriers of fear and hostility, and to see that we are brothers and sisters. [One way to bring peace in a situation like this is to] Seek circles of friendship that include the poor and people of other races and religions. Their children learn to be peacemakers by watching the adults around them and by participating in peacemaking activities.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Kraus, 2011 p. 82-83

¹⁸ Gish, 2014 p. 11

Listening

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

Julio Diaz has a daily routine. Every night, the 31-year-old social worker ends his hour-long subway commute to the Bronx one stop early, just so he can eat at his favorite diner. But one night in February 2008, as Diaz stepped off the No. 6 train and onto a nearly empty platform, his evening took an unexpected turn. He was walking toward the stairs when a teenage boy approached and pulled out a knife. Diaz said, “Here you go,” handing the teen his wallet. Just as the teen was walking away Diaz told him, “Hey, wait a minute. You forgot something. If you’re going to be robbing people for the rest of the night, you might as well take my coat to keep you warm.”

The would-be robber looked at his would-be victim and said, “like what’s going on here? Why are you doing this?” Diaz replied, “If you’re willing to risk your freedom for a few dollars, then I guess you must really need the money. I mean, all I wanted to do was get dinner and if you really want to join me... hey, you’re more than welcome.” They both went to the diner and sat in a booth. The manager comes by, the dishwashers come by, and the waiters come by to say ‘hi’ to Diaz. The kid said, “You know everybody here. Do you own this place?” “No, I just eat here a lot,” Diaz told the teen. “But you’re even nice to the dishwasher.” Diaz replied, “Well, haven’t you been taught you should be nice

to everybody?” The teen answered, “Yea, but I didn’t think people actually behaved that way.”

Diaz asked him what he wanted out of life, and the teen couldn’t answer. He just had a sad look upon his face. When the bill arrived, Diaz told the teen, “Look, I guess you’re going to have to pay for this bill ‘cause you have my money and I can’t pay for this. So if you give me my wallet back, I’ll gladly treat you.” The teen didn’t even think about it and returned the wallet. When departing, Diaz gave the teen a \$20 bill in exchange for the teen’s knife and the teen handed the weapon to Diaz.¹⁹

The *Shalom* threaded throughout this story is an example of the next step in this process of healing this broken world. Not only does Diaz give the troubled teen more than he initially asks for, but he invites him for conversation and offers a listening ear. Many people agree that free hand outs to those in need will not completely solve any problem; this is why the conversations are so important. If we are not willing to sit and talk with people about their problems, and encourage them, how will we know how to fix issues in our society that will prevent people from being marginalized?

“Person’s who feel good about themselves are able to be more vulnerable, flexible, and open. They listen better. Paul consistently practiced this principle. Most of his letters begin with a word of commendation, even when he had to correct his hearers. Serious efforts at conflict management are focused as much on the other as on the self.”²⁰ When Diaz offers the teen his coat, he is acting out of love and against the norm. He is telling this teen that he *is*

¹⁹ (Garofalo, 2008)

²⁰ Byers, 2002 p. 190

important. Through this love, he was able to start a relationship with this person, and was able to help him make the first steps to change: taking away his weapon, and the sense that his decisions are important. On my way to school this week, I came across this very issue. Even though this study has been on the top of my mind for a long time now, I failed to practice the very values that I cherish and teach. Getting off the exit in Harrisonburg, VA, I stopped at a red light right next to a homeless woman whom was standing in the median holding a piece of cardboard that read “Homeless and Hungry.” I can share all the excuses I was telling myself when I was trying to decide whether or not I should help her: in a hurry to get to the study room to work on a group project, not having a job or much money myself, etc. Just as the light turned green and my car started to creep forward without this woman, I started to feel a pain in my gut and I knew I did something horrible. I felt I failed this test to practice what I preached because at this very light there was a Subway, and two gas stations that offer a hot menu. I regret not inviting this woman to sit down with me as I treated her to a hot meal and conversation in which I could show love the very way Diaz did.

Peggy Faw Gish is a *Shalom* worker for Christian Peacemaker Teams and has been working mostly in Iraq with the marginalized people who do not feel noticed in the middle of the wars in the last 13 years:

In the Middle East, when we’re told certain people are our enemy or even “terrorists,” we go and live among them, listen to them, and even work alongside them to deal nonviolently with the problems at the root of their violent acts. Here, when we are told certain people are dangerous, lazy moochers on our society, or other derogatory labels, we can spend time with them, learn about their lives, and allow ourselves to be

vulnerable to the same dangers or oppressive forces that they face. Then together we can find ways to speak out and work for changing those conditions. In Iraq, we make space for building trust and reconciliation by bringing people from different ethnic groups to listen to each other share about the strengths and suffering of their group. Here, we may bring people from different faiths or races together to do joint social services projects in the community.²¹

The listening process is critical in reconciliation. If we are open to having these conversations with those who are hurt and on the bottom of society, we are not only working on transforming that individual, but we are transforming ourselves and others around us to be multi-cultural, inclusive, and ecumenical.

Confront Conflict

“We must work in the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:4-5).

Before our conflicts overcome us once again, under God’s ways, we must confront the issues that destroy us. One hard part about bringing *Shalom* is confronting conflict. Sometimes it is easier to deal out a quick fix, or to ignore problems all together. A warning comes to us as noted in *A Culture for Peace*: “where conflict is not acknowledged, where people fear conflict or think it is wrong, the whole situation will get very ugly and unhealthy. The results will be thoroughly unpleasant: anger, depression, explosions, broken relationships, people damaged and

²¹ Gish, 2014 p. 9

alienated from the church.”²² We not only see this in the world, but in our congregations and our families. Without bringing conflicts to the surface, we are not whole in *Shalom*, and more problems will emerge. “Most congregations...need a much greater capacity to deal openly and constructively with the inevitable differences in perspective and tensions in relationships. They need to recognize that the absence of apparent conflict is not the same thing as peace.”²³

In Mark 11:15-18 Jesus brings conflict to the table (quite literally) in a non-destructive way when he upset the tables and exposed the injustice.²⁴ Jesus also says in Matthew 10:34 that he comes not to bring peace, but division. In order to bring *Shalom*, we must expose the unjust in our world. “Conflict becomes an opportunity for conflicting parties to transform...”²⁵ In our homes, in our churches, we must include this daunting task of communicating our stories. Through this practice we will be bringing the light to the world.

How to Start:

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14-16)

We should not be afraid of being this light to the world. Sometimes we need to realize we need to set the pace for those around us to work for *Shalom*. The best way to have *Shalom*, is

²² Kreider, Kreider, & Widjaja, 2005 p. 71

²³ Kreider, Kreider, & Widjaja, 2005 p. 74

²⁴ Kreider, Kreider, & Widjaja, 2005 p. 74

²⁵ Kreider, Kreider, & Widjaja, 2005 p. 69-70

to work for justice. Once we notice the brokenness in the world around us, listen to those effected, and confront the conflict, it is time to start turning things around. The following story is from a fellow peace worker, Samantha Carwile, who, like my wife Pamela, volunteered in Belfast, Northern Ireland for two years in volunteer service at the Quaker Cottage.

The Primary goal of Quaker Cottage is to support and empower mothers and their children and improve their livelihood. It is a cross-community center where both Catholic families and Protestant families come together. I was primarily a childcare worker, dealing with infants up through preteens and sometimes teens. In the mornings, mothers and their children who were too young to attend school would join us at the Cottage. The mothers would go into their tea room for group counseling and fellowship while their children were with us in the nursery. One of my biggest challenges was coping with the many heartbreaking stories the families would share about their situations. I often felt overwhelmed learning of the burdens and injustices thrown upon the children with whom I worked. Many of the families are poor and have experienced domestic violence, sexual abuse, isolation, substance abuse, and mental health issues.

One afternoon at Quaker Cottage, I was leading a group craft activity with our 8-10-year-old after-school group. The children were to create a utopian village on poster board with magazine cutouts, markers, and other craft supplies. One boy drew a church in a village. "What does the church represent?" I asked. He responded with one word: "peace." How incredibly compelling. I thought, for this boy who is living in the midst of sectarianism,

violence, and poverty to know the sanctity peace can bring through the church. I found inspiration and hope through the wisdom shared by this child.²⁶

Although Samantha was not counseling the mothers in their conflicts, she used her gifts to work with children and was able to be a *Shalom* worker in the midst of destruction. This story reminds us of four things. First, in order for us to be peacemakers, we must be creative in how God will use us in every situation we find ourselves in. Second, it is important to create a safe environment for reconciliation to begin. Thirdly, we will be surprised how God works in everyone when effort is given to building *Shalom*. Lastly, in order to secure hope for shalom, we must not forget working with children.

J. Lorne Peachey focuses on the seriousness of peacemaking for our children (in our families and our congregations). Some suggestions he has for this are:

- Joining a parent support group in the church or community
- Provide a good example that children will want to become
- Help children experience forgiveness so they know how to forgive others
- Avoid violent toys, games, and entertainment
- Deemphasize possessions so children grow up with less jealousy, and more care for genuine relationships
- Talking about war, racism, and discrimination

²⁶ Carwile, 2014

- Tell stories of peacemakers to give children a sense of history and importance
- Provide international or diverse experience to create an ecumenical understanding
- Send peace cards and letters to legislators, both locally and nationally²⁷

Sometimes we are called to bring peace right where we are without going anywhere.

Look around. It is not hard to find bullying in schools, thefts, domestic violence, or other injustices in our neighborhoods. “Intervention for us here might take the form of firmly but lovingly interrupting a racist or sexist remark or joke. It might mean having a prayer vigil or sit-down inside the offices of an institution or agency to protest or disrupt hurtful practices.”²⁸

Sometimes we are called to leave where we are to work for God’s mission. Ahmed Ali Haile took a journey from being Muslim in Somalia to ultimately an educated Christian who returns to Somalia to bring warring clans together to find new paths of *Shalom*. He says, “We may be called to step out of the norm for his mission “Jesus promised that those who leave family and land for his sake will receive a hundred times what they have sacrificed as well as eternal life. Indeed that promise was being fulfilled for me (Matthew 19:29).”²⁹

It was a cold evening in Hebron as I sat shivering on the sidewalk. Ziad, an eighteen-year-old Palestinian youth, had been sitting there for three or four hours. After a difficult confrontation with the Israeli soldier who was detaining Ziad, I decided to take off my

²⁷ Peachey, 1981 p. 11-19

²⁸ Gish, 2014 p. 10

²⁹ Haile, 2011 p. 53

hat, coat, sweater, and shirt, and suffered with Ziad until the Israeli soldier agreed to release him.³⁰

“None of these actions or methods will stop or interpret violence in every instance or automatically deal with the underlying problems that perpetuate it. That’s why these methods go hand in hand with the slower work of dialogue and educating ourselves and others, building relationships of trust, with longer campaigns to change entrenched structures and institutions, and with providing communities of healing for victims of violence and those who perpetrate violence out of their own woundedness and fear.”³¹

Is *Shalom* is Practical?

In looking for evidence for our work for *Shalom* actually working, consider this:

One solitary life can make a big difference in steadfastly dedicated to truth and love in the midst of an ocean of hate and fear. In your research, study well the peace of pioneers such as frail Ghandi standing alone against the mightiest power of his day, Great Britain. Study Mexican American Cesar Chavez among downtrodden farm workers in the San Joaquin Valley of California. Study Nelson Mandela in a South African prison as he later forgave his guards and brought whites and blacks into one government. Study Lech Walesa, who led the common workers to freedom in Poland. Study Martin Luther King Jr., as a young pastor serving Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, a block down the street from the Montgomery, Alabama, state capitol where segregationists ruled. Consider

³⁰ Gish A., 2002 p. 1

³¹ Gish P. F., 2014 p. 11

SueZann Bosler, a young Brethren woman who witnessed the murder of her father, Bill, and was herself attacked and left for dead. She worked for years to save her father's killer from the death penalty...³²

Greg Davidson Laszakovits made the decision to register as a Conscientious Objector while he was a kid after balancing the pros and cons. On one hand he would lose financial aid for college and be disqualified from government employment. On the other hand, he grew up knowing that to kill was simply wrong. Here is a part of Greg's letter to future shalom-makers:

Today, the decision to be a Christian peacemaker and disciple of Christ may be as hard as ever. But the path we walk as Christian peacemakers is not a solitary one. Many have walked before us and worn this path well, showing us the way. The world around us offers a road that may seem easier to follow – an eight-lane superhighway with more travelers, yet perhaps more potholes. And still new trails will be blazed by Christian peacemakers, people just like you who see a hurting world, but also a world that is full of potential. The paths lie before us all. Which will you choose?"³³

Scripture calls us to a very *real* service. "The bible reveals a God who hates false peace. The prophets regularly denounces places of worship that proclaimed "shalom shalom" where there was no shalom (e.g., Jeremiah 6:14; Ezekiel 13:10)."³⁴ This process is not only an individual one, but the church should know that our attitude must always be love first, and they will know we are Christians by our love. We do not have to be telling others about our light, but

³² Zunkel, 2002 p. 2-3

³³ Laszakovitz, 2002 p. 2

³⁴ Kreider, Kreider, & Widjaja, 2005 p. 74

let it shine for itself. Actions speak louder than words, and of course, we are not called to be prideful in our actions³⁵.

“Christian Theology has always understood the importance of Isaiah 53 for Jesus and his mission, and more recently 61:1-2a for Jesus’ self-understanding in the mission of his life-and death-ministry. Unfortunately they leave out the expression of the servant’s call to “bring forth justice to the nations” (42:1d), to “faithfully bring forth justice” (42:3c), “until he has established justice in the earth” (42:4b). The threefold strategy of gospelizing peace; self-sacrifice (living for others); and bringing good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, with Jubilee practice – all this is Jesus’ means – and ours – of proclaiming the kingdom of God.”³⁶
Bringing the light to the Nations.

There are many ways to work for *Shalom*, but we must not forget, that we work for *Shalom* because that is what God desires. If we lose track of the life Jesus shows us among our work, we are not carrying the light or the *Missio Dei*. So is *Shalom* possible? I will leave you with one more story:

Consider this German parable. It’s a conversation between two birds. One is a dove, the other is a sparrow:

The sparrow speaks first and says to the dove, “What is the weight of a snowflake? The dove thinks for a moment and responds, “The snowflake weighs almost nothing, even less than nothing.” The sparrow replies, “in that case, let me tell you a story. Not long

³⁵ Matthew 6:2

³⁶ Swartley, 2007 p. 199-200

ago I happened to be sitting on the branch of a fir tree when it began to snow. The snow did not come in a blizzard fashion with wind and raging. Rather, it fell gently and heavily in large flakes. Since I didn't have anything to do I decided I would count the flakes that fell on my branch. I had counted 1,357,452 snowflakes, all of which weighed nothing or less than nothing as you said. However, when the 1,357,453rd snowflake fell on my branch, the branch collapsed and dumped me onto the ground.” Having said that the sparrow flew away. The dove has been an authority on peace ever since Noah's time. The dove sat and thought awhile and finally said to herself, “Perhaps we need only one more voice to speak for peace, and we can bring peace about.”

What do you think? Can we have peace? Can the church make a difference? I believe we can. We may not turn the world around in our time. But we can make a difference. We can be faithful.³⁷

³⁷ Kidwell, 2013 p. 15

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