



PEACEMAKING WOMEN'S STUDY

Living the Gospel in Relationships

with Tara Barthel

Study Guide and Journal

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This study guide is designed to provide general information on theology, biblical peacemaking, and various aspects of biblical change. It is not intended to provide pastoral, legal, or other professional advice. The reader is encouraged to seek the counsel and oversight of her local church leaders as well as any competent professionals relevant to her life situation.

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The design and graphics for this study were created by Amy Tedder (amy@atyourdesign.com), and Image Studios (www.imagestudios.net).

Video editing and post-production completed by Joe Adams (Media Director, Southside Fellowship Church, Greenville, SC).

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	5
How To Use This Guide.....	6
Session 1— What It Means to Live the Gospel	7
Session 2— The Gap between What I Believe and How I Live	15
Session 3— My Real Problem Is	23
▪ Video Clip (Included in the session): <i>Repentance</i>	
Session 4— Real Hope for Lasting Change	33
Session 5— A Biblical Response to Conflict	41
▪ Video Clip (Included in the session): <i>Slippery Slope - Denial</i>	
Session 6— Repenting and Confronting	51
▪ Optional Video Clip: <i>But I'm Really Sorry!</i>	
Session 7— Forgiveness and Mercy	59
▪ Optional Video Clip: <i>Why Not Rather Be Wronged</i>	
Session 8— Relationships that Show the World Jesus	69
A Few Closing Thoughts from Tara.....	79
Other Peacemaking Resources.....	80

With Thanks from Tara...

I humbly dedicate this project to the wonderful congregation of Southside Fellowship. Thanks, especially, to the many men and women who selflessly gave of their time to make this project a reality. Lori Johnson and Joe Adams—this project never would have happened without your brilliant gifts and tireless service. Thank you, Amy Tedder, for lavishing your phenomenal graphic design skills on the study guide. And thank you, Glenda, for leading the entire audience and crew with skill and grace: Pastor Charlie, Pastor Art, Barb, Caroline, Cynthia, Deb, Glenice, Gwen, Jim, Karen, Katie, Kim, Kristi, Laura, Laurie, LeAnn, Leslie, Lindsey, Marilyn, Paul, Raydell, Rex, Sharon, Sonya, Todd, and Tory.

Thank you to the many friends who reviewed and improved the rough drafts. Special thanks to my dearest friend, my husband Fred, for sacrificing hundreds of hours so that I could prepare and teach this material over and over again. Thanks, especially, for having such a heart for ministering the Gospel that you often joyfully carry the domestic load in addition to your work and diaconal service. You never complain and you are unfailingly helpful and encouraging. You are a model servant leader and I thank God for you.

Thanks, too, to my darling daughters, Sophia and Ella. You have both fallen asleep next to me typing away on the laptop more times than I can count. How I thank God for you and pray that you will lay hold of Christ at such an early age that you never remember a moment when you did not trust that He was already laying hold of you.

I truly pray that this project will help and encourage women everywhere to remember the sweetness and the power of the Gospel.

May Christ be lifted up! And may we all grow up into Him Who is our Head.

With joy,



Tara Barthel
www.TaraBarthel.com

Foreword

Sisters in Christ—

I am delighted that you are going through this study. By God’s grace, it will have a lasting impact on your life and relationships, and even overflow to bless your church.

At Relational Wisdom, we are passionate about reconciled individual relationships and about churches that demonstrate godly unity. We long to see churches develop a “culture of peace,” where each person—man, woman, and child—is inspired and equipped to respond to conflict in a way that preserves relationships and demonstrates the reconciling power of the Gospel. As Jesus says in John 17, this unity among believers is the way the world will know that the Father sent His Son Jesus!

Tara and I are convinced that a culture of peace won’t happen in your church unless you—the women of the church—become peacemakers.

Think about it this way: If the lives of the women in your church are marked by relational tension and unresolved conflict, your church will likely have those same struggles. But if the women display a sincere love for the Gospel and for each other—a love that perseveres even through difficult conflicts—then your church will probably have those characteristics, too.

Women, you have a great opportunity before you! As God works in your hearts during this study, you can influence the way people in your church respond to conflict. I encourage you to take full advantage of this opportunity.

I commend you for committing this time to dig deep into God’s Word as you study biblical peacemaking with Tara. May God bless you richly—may “your love abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.”



Ken Sande
President
Relational Wisdom

How to use this guide ...

Recognizing that each of us will have differing amounts of time and energy to devote to this study, this study guide has five different areas under each session:

1. Main Teaching Points from the Video (*for taking notes*)
2. Remember ... (*one paragraph to remember from the session*)
3. Three Questions to Think About (*for discussion in a class or group or for your personal application if you are working through the material alone*)
4. For Further Consideration ... (*longer study questions if you'd really like to do homework and dig into the material*)
5. Recommended Resources for In-depth Study

Some of you may be amazed that you found one hour a week to attend a women's study and you may be thinking, "I surely don't have any time to prepare or do further study throughout the week." We completely understand! If this is true for you, we encourage you to simply enjoy the *Main Teaching Points from the Video* each week and pray for the grace to remember the *Remember* at the end of each session.

Others may want to dig a little deeper and discuss the teaching points in a group setting or process the material alone at home. That is why the *Three Questions to Think About* section was included. Hopefully, these questions and accompanying Scriptures will encourage you and help you to process the material.

If you are particularly convicted or challenged by a certain session, or if you are looking for even more biblical and practical help, the *For Further Consideration* and *Recommended Resources for In-depth Study* sections are for you. These questions and resources will take time to work through, but you will reap many benefits from your efforts to dig deeper.

For the Group Leader:

- With each video lesson lasting about 40 minutes, most groups should be able to complete a session in about 90 minutes, including time for discussion and prayer.
- Feel free to select discussion questions from both the "Three Questions to Think About" and the "For Further Consideration" sections. But for those questions that you don't use for discussion, encourage the ladies in the group to answer them on their own—these questions provide a valuable way to process and learn the materials. If time allows, you may even want to discuss their answers the following week before you start the next video session.
- This study may bring out some difficult emotional issues as you reflect on these important topics. Please be sensitive to your group's needs and take these opportunities to both encourage and model the humility of sharing from our weaknesses, the wisdom of trusting God's Word above our emotions, and the necessity of accountability within a local church. We will be praying for you as you minister God's grace and *live the Gospel in relationships* in your study group.

SESSION 1



What it Means to Live the Gospel

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 4:16

“Be so awash in the ocean of His love, my soul, that the shortcomings of all human love will, more and more, seem but a trifling thing.” —Andree Seu

Main Teaching Points from the Video

- *The Gospel* is the entire redemptive finished work of God. Consider the *Gospel/law distinction* when you read Scripture.
 - The law is the “should” of Scripture—the *imperative*. Any time you see words like “ought” or “must,” that is the *law*.
 - *The Gospel is the indicative—Who God is and what He has already done for us in Christ.*

- The law is good when it is used properly (1 Timothy 1:8), but only the *Gospel* changes our hearts (Luke 6:43-45, Romans 8:1-39).
 - The Gospel can be thought of narrowly as the Good News of Christ’s substitutionary atonement (Romans 5:8).
 - The Gospel can also be thought of more broadly as the entire finished work of God in Christ—His redemptive, historical plan to bring to fruition His promise of atonement through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus (2 Peter 1:3-4).

The Gospel is the indicative—
Who God is and what He has
already done for us in Christ.

But God demonstrates his own
love for us in this: While we
were still sinners, Christ died for
us. Romans 5:8

- It is *only* because of the indicative (the Gospel) that we can obey the imperative (the law).
 - For instance, in Colossians 3:12-14, the law tells us to *do something*: “clothe yourselves with compassion and kindness ...”
 - But it is the Gospel that tells us *Who God is and what He has done for us* by the finished work of Christ: He has made us “chosen, holy, and dearly loved.”
 - *In response to these great Gospel truths, we are compassionate, kind, and enabled to forgive.*

- Biblical and practical helps are important ...
 - But all of the training on biblical peacemaking in the world will never enable us to forgive.
 - *We must first remember who God is and what He has done before we ever try to change.*

We must first remember who God is and what He has done before we ever try to change.

- If we are living in a works mentality toward God, we are probably living in a works mentality toward others and ourselves (Matthew 18:23-35).
 - God’s grace calls us to remember that we are “holy and dearly loved” (Colossians 3:12)—and to share that grace with the people around us. (This is true even for our most difficult relationships!)
 - As we remember that *while we were yet sinners and enemies of God, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8-10), God’s grace enables us to be merciful and do good, even to our enemies.

- God is calling us to repent of our unbelief and trust that God has forgiven us and *is forgiving* us because the just punishment that we deserve has been put on Christ on the Cross.
 - Christ suffered, died, and descended into Hell for our sins. And His righteous record is now *our record*.
 - Remember the Cross—*where the justice of God and the mercy of God are fully satisfied.*

- *In general, we give grace to others to the extent we are daily experiencing grace ourselves.*
 - If we forget the doctrine of sin (our depravity) and the doctrine of God (that He is holy, just, *and* merciful), we will be caught in a performance-oriented mode.
 - Rather than living authentically with one another, we will invest our energy and time in “looking good.” We will be competitive and critical.

In general, we give grace to others to the extent we are daily experiencing grace ourselves.

- But when we compare ourselves to the perfection of God and see our desperate need for forgiveness and mercy, and when we trust in God’s grace toward us because of Christ—then we are enabled to “be real” with one another.
 - *Because we’re all a mess!* The Old Man (our natural sin nature because of the Fall of Adam) resides within us.
 - *We all need Jesus.*

- Jesus’ perfect life, His perfect obedience, His penal substitutionary death, *the punitive wrath of God poured out on Christ is sufficient.*
 - We cannot add to His sacrifice.
 - We deserve Hell and God gives us life—not because of what we do but because God is a saving God.
 - God delights in saving His children.

“At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.” Titus 3:3-8

God saves us—*not because of righteous things we do!*—but because of His mercy.

- Do you ever ask, “How could God love me? You don’t even know how bad I am!” Our confidence is not in *ourselves* (not in our obedience or our ability to repent)! Our confidence is in this ...
 - God saves us—*not because of righteous things we do!*—but because of His mercy.
 - When we are at our *worst*, God says that He will never reject us! We can’t be good enough. We can’t. *Jesus* is good enough. He is!

Remember...

God does not merely give us commandments and guidelines to live by—He gives us His Son.

We are all prone to think that what we do is the basis for God’s acceptance of us. That is why we feel so proud and haughty when we’re doing well and so ashamed and unlovable when we’re “not good enough.” But remember! God does not merely give us commandments and guidelines to live by—He gives us His Son. So every time you are tempted to commend yourself to God or to despair because of your failures—run to Christ and remember the Gospel: *Who God is and what He has already done for you in Christ*. Yes, the Old Man is with us. Even though we are regenerated (born again!), sin remains in us and in the world. *But sin is no longer our master. Sin has been defeated and sin is being defeated*. Take heart! Though you may have failed again and again, you can be forgiven. There is hope! Trust in the finished work of Christ—nothing can thwart God’s work in your life. You *will* grow in grace because God’s compassion toward you is not dependent on your effort, but on God’s mercy (Romans 9:16). The Savior has come! And He saves you not only from Hell—but from yourself. Your sin. Your unbelief. God is a redeeming God—and we can trust Him.

Three Questions to Think About

1. In four or five sentences (one minute or less if you're in a group), share how you first learned about the Gospel. This won't be enough time to share your entire testimony—but it will hopefully give you a sweet reminder of God's saving grace in your life.

2. Consider the statement, "*In general, we tend to give grace to others to the extent we are experiencing grace ourselves.*" Do you think this is an accurate statement? Do you usually give grace to others or do you struggle with a critical and legalistic attitude toward the people around you? How does your attitude toward other people reflect how you think about your relationship with *God*?

3. Sometimes we struggle to believe that God's love and mercy are toward us *today*. We may be confident that our past sins are forgiven and our eternal future is secure in Heaven to come—but it can be very difficult to believe in the *present means of grace*. Read Psalm 103:10-14 and Isaiah 41:10. How do these passages encourage you to lay hold of Christ *this very day*? What resources do you *actually* have in Christ *today*?

For Further Consideration...

1. Remember your own testimony—from where have you come? Do you have any warped views about yourself and/or God? Read Titus 3:3-8 again. What biblical truths are you called to remember about God? Are you personally remembering and laying hold of these truths about God on a daily basis?

2. As you think about your day today, or just any typical day, *how much are you experiencing and trusting in the grace of God toward you?* Do you feel closer to God when you are being disciplined and godly? Even though you know it's not true theologically, do you ever think you have to earn back God's love by "being better" before He will want to be around you? How is this works / performance-oriented relationship with God reflected in how you treat the people around you? (i.e., how do you respond to them when they fail you? Do you withhold your love from them? Draw back from them? Judge and criticize them?) Read Galatians 2:21-3:3. What is the *truth? Why* does God love His children? Because of our human effort? Because we are "good enough?" Or because of God's covenant of grace and His gift of repentance and faith in the finished work of *Christ*?

3. Read Titus 2:11-14. What is the law in this passage? (Remember—the law is what we are called to do—the "ought, should, must" verses.) What is the Gospel in this passage? (The Gospel is what God has already done for us in Christ—Who God is and what *He* has done.) Are you prone to look at Scripture and mostly see *law* (what you are called to do)? Remember that growth in grace happens in the *heart*—and only the Gospel changes the heart. As we remember God, we don't obey because we have to, we begin to obey because we *want* to—out of gratitude for God's holy, yet merciful, love.

4. What are your relationships like? Do you sometimes live in a “performance-oriented” mode because you are so busy trying to look good for others? Are you critical and condemning? When someone talks about her sins and struggles with you, do you run to the law by telling her ten steps she ought to do? Or do you remind her that God is a forgiving God and His grace is toward her because of Christ? How does the Gospel free us to be vulnerable and authentic with one another so that our relationships can move beyond superficiality?

5. God is calling us to live out the Gospel in all areas of our lives. Keep a journal this week of the thoughts, motives, actions, and words that are repeatedly and habitually a part of your daily life. It may be easier to see the ones that are sinful or condemning, but don't forget to make a note of the faithful and God-exalting ones too! Practice Ephesians 4:20-24 and “put off” the Old Man of unbiblical thinking and acting and “put on” the New. As you work to see and remember God's work in your life and grow in righteousness, remember Romans 5:6-8. (You may want to even consider memorizing this passage.)

*Recommended Resources for In-depth Study**

- Jerry Bridges, *The Gospel for Real Life—Turn to the Liberating Power of the Cross ...Every Day* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002).
- Jerry Bridges, *The Transforming Power of the Gospel* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012).
- Bryan Chapell, *Holiness by Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).
- John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986).
- Ed Welch, *Shame Interrupted* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2012).

* Note: Some of these resources may be repeated in other sessions.