

# Operation 180

## Session 8: Ambassadors for Christ

### Home Group Edition

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## Session 7 review

- ❖ Daily meditations
  - Did any of the readings stand out to you?
- ❖ Prayer and meditation
  - Any praise reports?

## Introduction

Welcome to session 8! The season finale!

We will close out this series by looking at God's will for you in your ministry of reconciliation. We will see what peace has to do with our recovery, and we will see how God might be trying to use you as an ambassador for Christ.

## Series overview

Let's look at our theme passage for this series for one last time:

*44 He told them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.*

*46 He also said to them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day, 47 and repentance for forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

*48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high." (Luke 24:44–49)*

Let's review this passage and see how it provided an outline for this series:

- ❖ Verses 44-45: We began with hope in the Old Testament. Here we see Jesus “opening their minds to understand the Scriptures” in such a way that the disciples see the Old Testament as being *fulfilled* in Him. As we will see in this session, *hope*, as defined in Old Testament terms, was seen as *waiting* for God to act. With Jesus being the fulfillment of Scripture, the *waiting was over*. This is cause for great hope!
  - These verses correspond to Step 2 of a 12-Step program.
- ❖ Verse 46: We continued with hope as expressed in the New Testament. In this key verse, Jesus teaches that Scripture foreshadowed that He, as God's chosen agent on Earth to make all things new (the Messiah), would be a suffering servant and resurrected from the dead. As we saw, this is the centerpiece of hope in the New Testament - the Resurrection Power. We will see the Apostles preaching the power of the resurrection as proof of Jesus as Messiah throughout the Book of Acts.
  - This verse corresponds to Steps 2 and 3 of a 12-Step program.
- ❖ Verse 47: This verse formed the center of this series- the healing power of repentance and forgiveness *for all*. Luke, a physician, makes a great effort to document how Jesus had the authority to forgive sins on Earth and how much of that healing involved forgiveness. We also saw that we must do the hard work of repentance. But through this hard work, we will reap the benefits of hope, healing, and *peace* that only Jesus Christ can provide.
  - This verse corresponds to Step 1 (powerlessness over sin, our “bottom”), Steps 4 (a sin inventory), Step 5 (confession), Steps 6 & 7 (sanctification), and Steps 8 & 9 (forgiveness and amends).
- ❖ Verse 47-49: These verses describe discipleship under the Lucan Commission. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we have a message to proclaim to all nations: *The Good News of forgiveness in the repentance of sins*. We are to proclaim and witness this message to all *under the power of the Holy Spirit*. Of the four Gospels, the Gospel of Luke speaks most about Jesus and the disciples operating under the power of the Holy Spirit. In the Book of Acts, the Apostles are seen operating under the power of the Holy Spirit as the new church is expanding against resistance. We will end this series by seeing how God has gifted each of us in different ways through the Holy Spirit to carry the message of Good News to different people in different places.
  - These verses correspond to Step 10 (perseverance and resisting temptations), Step 11 (desiring the gifts of the Holy Spirit), and Step 12 (carrying the message).

In a 12-Step program, we now come to Step 12 - the step of service.

**Step 12 – Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.**

## Peace as a spiritual experience

Let's begin with the first phrase of Step 12, "*Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps.*" What does it mean to *have a spiritual experience*?

What, exactly, are we to experience?

The answer has been right in front of us the whole time through this series: *Peace*.

God's plan of reconciliation for all of us from the Fall in Genesis to Revelation is *restoring us to a condition of peace*.

*|Peace = A state of tranquility or wholeness; shalom.*

Peace is *the* pervasive concept that is woven like a thread throughout the Bible.

But peace is never meant to be experienced alone. Peace in the Bible is relational - it is based on relationships. As a part of God's creation, we are called to be at peace with *both* our Creator *and* the rest of creation.

In fact, peace in the Bible most commonly relates to a relationship of love and loyalty with God and one another. In other words, peace in the Bible is experienced through loyalty to both God and one another. That is worth restating and repeating:

*|Peace = a relational experience of love and loyalty with God and one another.*

Peace is *experienced* in and through our relationships with *both* God *and* others. This is why *betrayal* is such a traumatic experience - being betrayed by someone we expect to care about us is the opposite of experiencing loyalty from that person.

Experiencing peace with God but not others is to have an incomplete spiritual experience. We must experience peace in and through both God and others.

## Tactical peace

Paul says that when peace is experienced at its fullest, it is impossible to understand:

*“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7)*

But note that peace is not simply a feel-good emotion that makes us happy for a fleeting moment. Peace is powerful. Because peace guards us. Peace guards our hearts and minds.

Peace in the Bible is not just a fleeting feeling - peace has a *tactical* purpose - it guards our spirituality.

And it guards our relational experience with Jesus Christ. As we will see later in this session, when we experience the peace of being reconciled with God through Jesus Christ, we can then call others to experience the same peace when they get reconciled through Jesus.

This is what *tactical peace* means - peace is God’s strategy, His tactic, for reconciling the world to Him through Jesus.

Being the Ultimate Tactician, God gives us the tools to carry out His strategy.

## Peace as a promise

Circling back to the first session of this series, peace is one of the first promises that Luke records in his gospel. It is part of the Christmas narrative:

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!” (Luke 2:14)*

This is also part of Luke’s narrative that peace is for *all*, *peace on earth*.

But peace is not just for us as individuals. Peace is a gift to the *church*.

*“So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.” (Acts 9:31)*

Peace strengthened and increased the church.

This is what Jesus came to proclaim

*“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!” (Luke 19:38)*

Notice the reference to Jesus as “King” in this passage.

Recall back in session 5, we discussed the Kingdom in relation to our sanctification.

## Kingdom power revisited

Recall that Isaiah prophesies in Isaiah 9:6-9 that the Messiah will do the following:

- Establish peace;
- Uphold that peace with justice and righteousness;
- The peace that is established will be forever;
- He will have the authority to do all the above.
- God will make sure this happens.

Putting this all together for our purposes in this session, Kingdom power looks like this:

*Kingdom power = the power and authority to establish and uphold peace.*

Jesus tells us this much in the Sermon on the Mount:

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”  
(Matthew 5:9, NRSV)*

We are to be peaceMAKERS, establishing and upholding peace in the midst of the world.

When we walk as Jesus walked, we are walking and talking peacemakers.

In the recovery context, *sanctification equips us to establish and uphold peace in others' lives.*

You may already be doing this. After all, recovery meetings establish and uphold peace. It is in small groups all over the world that forgiveness of sins is proclaimed, and healing happens.

Recovery meetings can be a place where *pain becomes a portal to peace.* It is in small groups that the connection of *feeling felt makes pain tolerable.*

Putting this all together:

*Pain becomes a portal to peace when other people are present*

*It is the supernatural transformation of us through sanctification that equips us to be present for others.*

When Kingdom power is viewed as the means to bring the end result of peace, we can see that our sanctification is just one tactic of God's strategy to bring the healing power of peace to all.

## Justice

But the enemy places many obstacles in our collective roads to recovery. This is where the Biblical concept of justice comes in and is very different from the world's concept of justice.

Isaiah says the Messiah will “uphold peace with justice.” What does this mean?

Let's see how Biblical justice is yet another tactic not just to bring, but uphold, peace.

Recall this quote from church father Thomas Aquinas on Biblical justice that also perfectly encapsulates many concepts running through this session:

*“Peace is the work of justice indirectly, insofar as justice removes the obstacles to peace: but it is the work of charity directly, since charity, according to its very nature, causes peace.”*

Biblical justice means *removing obstacles to peace*. And this is done through *the work of charity*. We continue to uphold that peace through ongoing charity, continuing to remove obstacles to peace as they appear.

Charity is yet another tactic in God's strategy to bring peace to all.

Walking others through the Steps of recovery helps them remove their own obstacles of self-destructive behavior, thereby establishing peace in their own lives. Continuing service at church and recovery groups is the charity that helps establish and maintain that peace in the local community.

## Unity

And when there is peace, there is unity.

And that is Jesus' prayer. In fact, it is one of the very last prayers that Jesus lifts up to the Father immediately before He is betrayed in the hands of those that will lead Him to the cross.

Jesus prays this:

*“I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me.” (John 17:23)*

Jesus prays that we are to be made *completely one*, that is, in *perfect unity*. It is in this unity that the world sees Jesus in and through Christians. It is through this unity that others are drawn towards Jesus as a source of unity and peace that cannot be found in the world. This is because it is through our unity that others see that *God loves us just as much as He loves His Son*.

Unity is the best evidence that we are experiencing peace in and through both God and others. It is Jesus’ personal metric that God’s tactical peace strategy is taking hold.

And for someone experiencing the despair of addiction and trauma, this is hope. We proclaim God’s healing through forgiveness *in and through our unity as Christians*.

To tie all this together:

*We are sanctified in our own recovery so that we can create unity by proclaiming healing for all through God’s Word and forgiveness.*

We are to proclaim this message of peace

*“He sent the message to the Israelites, proclaiming the good news of peace through Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all.” (Acts 10:36)*

Finally, in our series passage, we are told how to do this:

*48 You are witnesses of these things.*

We are to be witnesses “of these things,” those being God’s Word and His forgiveness.

We are to witness *tactical peace*.

## Practice these principles

Besides being a witness, we are to “practice these principles in all our affairs.” What are these principles? There is no reference to any “principles” in the previous eleven steps.

This answer lies in the witness of Jesus during His earthly ministry - how did He witness to others? What principles did he abide by? John has an answer:

*“Indeed, we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness, for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:16–17)*

Grace and Truth are the principles we practice as we witness to others.

Putting this all together, we get the following:

*We proclaim healing for all through God's Word and forgiveness through grace and truth.*

## Carrying the message

Recall from session 6, we discussed how we had to *reframe our people-view*.

Recall that Paul gives us an example of what it means to completely change how we view others:

*“From now on, then, we do not know anyone from a worldly perspective. Even if we have known Christ from a worldly perspective, yet now we no longer know him in this way. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:16–17)*

The term “know” implies *consider, perceive, see, understand*, and the term “new” implies a *refreshed creature or building*. Putting these together, we see that Paul is saying that *if we consider ourselves a new creation, we must then see others as new creations, too*. It works both ways. No excuses. *Everyone and anyone who is in Christ must be treated as a new person, not who they were at their worst behavior*.

In other words, the hard self-work here is developing the ability and discipline *to see others for what they can be, not as who they used to be*.

*We must see others for what they can be in Christ, not as who they used to be in the world.*

But this is exactly what the New Covenant is all about. Recall this passage from the Prophet Jeremiah:



*[T]his is the LORD's declaration. "For I will forgive their iniquity and never again remember their sin." (Jeremiah 31:34)*

When God forgives, He chooses not to remember our sins. We must do the same thing with others - we must choose not to remember the sins of those around us.

*Reframing our people-view is the key tactic in tactical peace*

We can only reframe our people-view of those around us if we start with a blank slate, and that slate sees everyone around us as new creations in Christ.

Instead of seeing everyone at their personal worst and replaying their perceived harm against us over and over, we must begin to see those around us as needing our prayer and assistance. As mentioned previously, Kingdom Power is the authority and ability to establish peace in others' lives. We establish that peace through *forgiveness*.

Paul gives us an example of how he put this concept into practice.

*"Although I am free from all and not anyone's slave, I have made myself a slave to everyone, in order to win more people. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law—though I myself am not under the law—to win those under the law. To those who are without the law, like one without the law—though I am not without God's law but under the law of Christ—to win those without the law. To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some. Now I do all this because of the gospel, so that I may share in the blessings." (1 Corinthians 9:19–23)*

Paul approaches everybody from a spiritual and life perspective *right where they are at*. This is a powerful concept in today's world, where tribalism seeks to obliterate the possibility of showing compassion for anyone who disagrees with your position. Tribalism has no place in recovery or the Bible.

Note the important point that Paul makes in stating, "so that I may by every possible means save some." Note the use of the word *some*. We are not held responsible for saving everyone we encounter. But we are commissioned and held accountable to *try*. Hence, Step 12 states, "we try and carry the message." That is our part, to try.

Why even try?

Paul answers that question in the last verse quoted above - “so that I may share in the blessings.”

Sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ is a blessing not to be missed.

## Ambassadors for Christ

Paul puts this all together in this powerful passage:

*“From now on, then, we do not know anyone from a worldly perspective. Even if we have known Christ from a worldly perspective, yet now we no longer know him in this way. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf, “Be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:16–20)*

First, note that Paul begins with the people-view reframing passage we have already looked at. But next, he tells us that it is through this reframed people-view that God uses us. We can only be useful to God if we live in a permanent state of forever-forgiveness.

*Living in a state of forever-forgiveness is a key tactic of tactical peace*

In fact, God not only seeks to use us, but He also gives us both a *ministry and a message of reconciliation specific to our giftings.*

We are to plead with others - on Christ’s behalf - for them to come to Christ and become reconciled themselves, so that they might experience the peace that comes from the healing power of God’s Word and forgiveness.

Our hard work in developing the ability and discipline to see *others for what they can be, not as who they used to be*, comes to fruition.

Here is the end game for tactical peace:

*We see others for what they can be in Christ, not as who they used to be in the world, so that we can lead them to become reconciled with God.*

You may not consider yourself worthy or qualified to engage in such a ministry.

But recall from the last session, you are equipped by God to do exactly this.

Paul promises that God equips those *He* calls:

*“Such is the confidence we have through Christ before God. It is not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God. He has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Corinthians 3:4–6)*

You have been made *competent* and *qualified* to be a minister of the new covenant, the Good News of Jesus Christ. In other words, *you are equipped to proclaim forgiveness and healing for all.*

You need not be perfect, you only need to be *adequate* or *sufficient*. You just need to try. That is all Jesus asks of you.

You are *empowered with the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit gives life. Yes, you can give life to others.*

Jesus chose you to bear fruit, and *He will ensure your success by making you an adequate and competent minister of the Gospel.*

Recall the promise of how God will use your life experiences to help comfort others:

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4)*

You have now reached the point of your recovery and restoration, where God will begin to use your experience to help others. You will find new hope and purpose in your life as you come alongside others. And He does this through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

## Spiritual gifts

Spiritual gifts are defined as *Ministries or abilities that the Holy Spirit gives to Christians for the edification of the Church.*

Spiritual gifts are abilities given to individual believers by the Holy Spirit in order to equip God’s people for ministry. This is how the *equipping* happens discussed above. These gifts flow *in and through us*, uplifting and edifying those around us, especially those in a need of comfort.

We will deal separately with ministry gifts and abilities. First, here is a table of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are abilities that the Holy Spirit gives each of us uniquely:

Gift	Description
<b>Message of wisdom</b>	An utterance from the Holy Spirit applying God's word or wisdom to a specific situation
<b>Message of knowledge</b>	An utterance from the Holy Spirit revealing knowledge about people, circumstances, or biblical truth.
<b>Faith</b>	Supernatural faith imparted by the Holy Spirit, enabling a Christian to believe God for the miraculous
<b>Healing</b>	Restoring someone to physical health by divinely supernatural means
<b>Miraculous powers</b>	Divine supernatural power to alter the course of nature, including driving out demons
<b>Prophecy</b>	A special temporary ability to bring a word, warning, exhortation or revelation from God under the impulse of the Holy Spirit
<b>Distinguishing between spirits</b>	Special ability to judge whether prophecies and utterances are from the Holy Spirit
<b>Speaking in tongues</b>	Expressing oneself at the level of one's spirit under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit in a language he or she has not learned and does not know
<b>Interpretation of tongues</b>	Special ability to interpret what is spoken in tongues

Much of the Scripture that discusses the spiritual gifts is from Paul. He has several points and cautionary warnings for us.

- First, the Spirit gives gifts in order to empower the church for God's mission. The gifts serve the mission and *should therefore be received in humility and for service.*
- Second, the gifts are not given to affirm any person's power, prestige, or personal superiority. Rather, they highlight the beauty of diversity in the body of Christ and the necessity of a corporate ministry. No hero can be singled out in God's kingdom since the gifts are spread among God's many people.
- Third, the very nature of any gift is that it is unearned and is to be received with a posture of gratitude (1 Cor 4:7). The Spirit is the giver of the gift, while the human recipient is only a steward (1 Tim 4:14). *Always desire the Giver, not the Gift.*

- Finally, the giving of gifts by the Spirit reassures believers that God will empower them for his calling. It is God himself who bears the weight of the world's needs, and it is God who will address everyone. Although he calls his children to accomplish his mission, *the power and the ability to do so come from him alone.*

## Ministry gifts

There are ministry gifts that are alive and well today. When Jesus ascended to heaven, He left the ministry gifts behind: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers:

*“The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things. And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.” (Ephesians 4:10–13)*

These are gifts to equip us for the work of ministry. They are to help us build up the *church*. As such, many see these gifts as *gifts to the church*. That makes you a gift to the church.

The ministry gifts also help *build unity* in the church. Each of us is empowered with different gifts, but the gifts should all be used in service to the church.

## Your spiritual gifts survey

To help you discern your unique gifting, I have included a Spiritual Gifts Survey.

This survey asks many questions about *your experience* in several different scenarios and examples.

Recall from above

*Peace = a relational experience of love and loyalty with God and one another.*

Peace is *experienced* in and through our relationships with *both God and* others.

This survey seeks to find your current giftings by seeking to identify those areas where you experience peace and joy when you are working within God's will for you, whether in your relationship with God or when working with others.

# Daily Meditations

*Theme: Carrying the message of peace through reconciliation*

## Day 1

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7)

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Day 2

“So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.” (Acts 9:31)

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Day 3

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!” (Luke 19:38)

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## Day 4

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5:9, NRSV)

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## Day 5

“Indeed, we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness, for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:16–17)

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## Day 6

“From now on, then, we do not know anyone from a worldly perspective. Even if we have known Christ from a worldly perspective, yet now we no longer know him in this way. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:16–17)

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Day 7

You are witnesses of these things. (Luke 24:48)

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