

Ben's story study guide

Is Violence Redemptive?

Ben's story

Iraq War veteran Benjamin Peters reflects on war, peace and the call to follow Jesus.

Taped at Mennonite Church USA Convention, July 2015.

Opening exercise

Invite the students to each write one sentence that describes the U.S. (or their own country of origin) and its role in the world. Share the sentences with one another. Discuss the similarities and differences. Note both the positive and the negative elements in their descriptions.

View the video clip, "Is Violence Redemptive?" (4:33)

Questions for reflection

- Do students agree or disagree with Ben Peters' description of our nation's narrative? Why?
- Ask students for examples of the "myth of redemptive violence" that they see in their school setting, in movies, computer games or current events. From their perspective, does redemptive violence "work?" Why/why not?
- Ask students to say what they know about the "peace heroes" mentioned in the video clip: Glen Lapp, Vincent Harding and Peggy Faw Gish. Supplement their answers with information from the resources below.
- What additional "peace heroes" can the students identify? Invite them to name and describe as many as they can. What impact have these "peace heroes" had?
- Invite the students to respond to Ben's comment that we need an alternative narrative to "redemptive violence." What would that look like?

Biblical reflection

Read Luke 9:51-56. Note how the disciples wanted to enlist Jesus' help in harming (killing) people (Samaritans) who had insulted them. Explain that Jesus tells the story of the "Good Samaritan" just a couple days later (Luke 10: 25-37). How do these two stories connect? Taken together, what do they mean?

Other resources

"Remembering Glen Lapp," by Marla Pierson Lester. See: mcc.org/stories/remembering-glen-lapp

"Historian who Made History: Vincent Harding, Civil Rights Pioneer and King Confidant," by Ken Butigan. See: juancole.com/2014/05/historian-vincent-confidant.html

"Realizing the dream: A conversation with Vincent Harding," by Lucy Duncan. See: afsc.org/friends/realizing-dream-conversation-vincent-harding

Peggy Faw Gish. See: plough.com/en/authors/g/peggy-gish

Malala Yousafzai. See: malala.org/malalas-story

Leymah Gbowee. See: leymahgbowee.com/about.html; emu.edu/peacebuilding/leymah-gbowee

"The myth of redemptive violence," by Walter Wink. See: goshen.edu/~joannab/women/wink99.pdf

"The King philosophy," by Martin Luther King Jr. See: <http://www.thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy>

Through All the Plain, by Benjamin John Peters, Cascade Books, 2014