

Ben's story study guide

The Bible and War

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

Ask each student to name one biblical story or Scripture that relates to war/peace. After going around the circle, invite students to line up in a continuum across the room. One end represents: The Bible offers clear teaching against participation in war. The other end represents: The Bible offers clear teaching in support of participation in just wars. Invite explanation of the differing positions all along the continuum.

View the video clip: "The Bible and War" (6:12)

Questions for reflection

- Ask students to share what experiences they have had discussing biblical passages with people who disagree with them. How can we be clear and strong about what we believe, yet respectful of others who believe differently?
- What do students think of Ben Peters' encouragement to determine whether a biblical passage is prescriptive (telling us what we should do) and descriptive (telling us what happened)? Invite examples of each.
- Invite students to talk about what makes up a person's Christian identity and a person's U.S. or other national identity. Which identity is stronger? Are the two identities compatible or is there tension between the two? In what settings do they feel the tension?
- In the video, Ben states that it is never appropriate for a Christian to kill someone in war. Invite students to agree/disagree with this statement and explain why.

Biblical reflection

Read Romans 12:17-21 and 13:1-5. Invite discussion about how to understand these two passages. How might Christians who are subject to different governments who are at war with one another apply these passages?

Other resources

"Behind the Camouflage: A Primer on Military Enlistment for Youth Pastors, Mentors and Counselors," by Titus Peachey. See: mcc.org/media/resources/1128, pp. 16-19.

"What is Our Calling?" by Logan Mehl-Laituri (video clip, 5:20) See: civilianpublicservice.org/storycontinues/hotline#clip5

"Feeding the Enemy," by Paul Leatherman (video clip, 5:58) See: civilianpublicservice.org/storycontinues/hotline#clip5

"How I Became a Conscientious Objector," by Joshua Casteel (video clip, 9:37) See: mcc.org/stories/joshua-casteel-how-i-became-conscientious-objector

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