

# Living in Harmony with Earth and Each Other

## Bible Study Series for Baltimore Yearly Meeting

This Bible study series combines Quaker silence and reflection, contextual Bible study, historical and cultural background, partner sharing, and worship sharing. The goal is not to master Scripture academically, but to listen deeply together: to the text, to one another, to history, and to the Spirit.

### General Structure for Each Session (60 Minutes)

1. Opening Silence & Welcome (5 min)
  2. Historical & Cultural Context (10 min)
  3. Slow Reading of Scripture (10 min)
  4. Pair or Triad Sharing (10 min)
  5. Whole Group Worship Sharing (15 min)
  6. Closing Silence (5 min)
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## DAY 1 — Creation as Relationship, Not Possession

**Theme:** Creation is presented not as property to dominate, but as sacred relationship and responsibility.

**Bible Passages:** Genesis 1:26–31; Genesis 2:15; Psalm 104 excerpts

### Opening Query

Where do you feel most connected to the natural world?

### Historical & Cultural Context Notes

- Ancient empires like Babylon and Assyria often viewed land and people as things to conquer and control.
- Many surrounding creation stories described the world emerging through violence between gods.
- Genesis is strikingly different: creation comes through speech rather than violence, and creation is repeatedly called good.
- The command to have ‘dominion’ has often been interpreted as domination, but Genesis 2 balances this with the call to ‘till and keep’ the garden — words that can also mean serve and protect.
- Psalm 104 presents humans as part of an interconnected living world alongside animals, seas, weather, and land.

### Pair or Triad Sharing Queries

- What image or phrase stayed with you?

- What does harmony with creation mean to you?
- Where do we feel disconnected from the earth?

### **Closing Query**

What would it mean to live as caretakers rather than owners?

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## **DAY 2 — Jesus and the Politics of Neighborliness**

**Theme:** Jesus challenges systems of exclusion, violence, and tribal identity.

**Bible Passages:** Luke 10:25–37; Matthew 5:38–48

### **Opening Query**

When have you experienced unexpected compassion from someone outside your usual circle?

### **Historical & Cultural Context Notes**

- Jesus taught under Roman occupation, where taxation, military force, and public punishment shaped daily life.
- Crucifixion was political terror designed to discourage resistance.
- Jews and Samaritans deeply distrusted one another and often viewed each other as religiously impure.
- When Jesus makes the Samaritan the compassionate figure, he crosses a major social and religious boundary.
- The teachings about loving enemies would have sounded radical to people living under occupation.

### **Pair or Triad Sharing Queries**

- What boundary is being crossed in these passages?
- Who is difficult for us to see as neighbor?
- What makes enemy-love difficult?

### **Closing Query**

What kind of harmony do these teachings ask of us?

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## **DAY 3 — The Early Church as Alternative Community**

**Theme:** Economic justice, equality, and communities shaped by care rather than hierarchy.

**Bible Passages:** Acts 2:42–47; Acts 4:32–35; James 2:1–17

## Opening Query

What helps a community become trustworthy and life-giving?

## Historical & Cultural Context Notes

- The Roman world was intensely unequal, with enormous wealth concentrated among a small elite.
- Most people survived through patronage systems in which wealthy people provided protection in exchange for loyalty and service.
- Acts describes communities sharing possessions and ensuring that no one was in need.
- Early Christians often met in homes that included enslaved people, laborers, women, widows, merchants, and wealthy people together.
- James criticizes communities for giving wealthy people greater honor and status.

## Pair or Triad Sharing Queries

- What prevents genuine community today?
- Where do we unconsciously recreate hierarchy?
- What does equality require materially?

## Closing Query

What kind of community are we being called to become?

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# DAY 4 — Creation Groaning & the Peaceable Future

**Theme:** Hope, reconciliation, and healing for creation and humanity.

**Bible Passages:** Romans 8:18–25; Isaiah 11:1–9; Colossians 1:15–20

## Opening Query

Where do you see signs of healing or reconciliation in the world?

## Historical & Cultural Context Notes

- Many modern Christians imagine salvation as leaving earth behind, but biblical hope often focuses on restoration and healing.
- Romans describes creation itself as groaning and longing for liberation.
- Isaiah's vision of the wolf and lamb living together symbolizes a world transformed beyond violence and domination.

- Colossians speaks of reconciling 'all things,' presenting a cosmic vision of restoration.
- Rome promised peace through domination, while biblical shalom means wholeness, justice, flourishing, and right relationship.

### **Pair or Triad Sharing Queries**

- What kind of future do these texts imagine?
- Where do we already glimpse harmony?
- What does reconciliation require?

### **Closing Query**

What might harmony require of us now?