

Seeking Shalom for All

Part Two of a [Two-Part](#) Study on Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Light + Life Group Conversation and Study Guide

Based on the [article](#) by Bishop Linda Adams
in Light + Life Magazine, May 2021



As with the [first lesson](#), begin your group gathering prayerfully singing or praying these lyrics:

“Open the eyes of my heart, Lord,
Open the eyes of my heart.
I want to see You, I want to see You.”¹

Made for Oneness

Collaboration is essential to being human. Why? Because even God is not solitary but exists in a perfect community of three-in-one. Being made in God’s image — as we all are, completely, equally — means we are made for relationships of love and mutuality. God’s design is for shalom, “a peaceable interrelatedness that actively seeks the wellbeing of others” (Free Methodist World Missions’ [“Theology of Mission”](#)).

God wants all people to experience this shalom. Tragically, the earliest chapters of Genesis show terrible division resulting from the fall of the human race, beginning with enmity between the man and the woman, then between their sons Cain and Abel, ultimately involving all human society. The rest of the story of the Bible reveals God’s long game to reverse the curse and recreate shalom. Along the way, God

invites people to co-labor with Him in this epochal redemptive work of repairing the breach, creating oneness among all peoples under the lordship of Christ.

How beautifully Jesus shows us how to cross over barriers to discover and experience community! Imagine His conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well in the fourth chapter of John’s Gospel. She clearly understands the dividing wall of hostility between them: culturally and religiously, He is Jewish; she is a Samaritan. (John explains in verse 9 to make sure we outsiders know — “Jews do not associate with Samaritans.”) He is a man; she is a woman. (In Jesus’ culture, His disciples were shocked to see Him dialogue with her.) He is a holy rabbi; she has had quite a history. (Even conversing with her taints His reputation!)

¹Paul Baloche. © 1997 Integrity’s Hosanna! Music (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing (Integrity Music, David C Cook)

Yet Jesus tells her of God's expansive plan for the human race. The true worshippers the Father seeks are not only from among the Jews — she can be a true worshipper! He reveals that He is the long-awaited Messiah for both His people and hers. The scene ends with a whole Samaritan village believing in Jesus, telling her: "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

As Jesus' disciples watched, He challenged them to open their eyes and see the fruitful harvest among the Samaritans. The work of convincing them that God's mission extends to all people groups had just begun. Kingdom collaboration took a baby step forward. Jesus had collected a diverse band of disciples — Jewish men whose politics and livelihoods would never have blended into a community of oneness without Him. As they followed and learned, He not only invited them to see these Samaritans as candidates for His movement; He showed mercy to a Roman centurion,

an enforcer of the hated oppressor. He surprisingly welcomed women to travel with them and provide financial support. He touched lepers and accepted a woman with a less-than-pristine reputation's offer to wash His feet. He ate in the homes of tax collectors and sinners. He fearlessly, graciously overcame the barriers that divide people into in-groups and out-groups.

In terms of our stereotypes, He blended the Waffle House crowd with the Starbucks crowd — blue collar with white collar; Right, Left and leave-me-out-of-politics people; all in one Jesus movement. He walked with them for three years, proclaiming and demonstrating the kingdom through His miracles and teaching. Then He sent them out two by two so they could experience His amazing power as they took the Good News to new towns and villages. Through these astonished apostles, people were healed, and demons cast out. God's kingdom had come to the here and now.

The *Theology of Mission* document from Free Methodist World Missions states that God's design for shalom is "a peaceable interrelatedness that actively seeks the wellbeing of others." As a group, discuss the implications of each portion of this statement to the overall definition.

1. Peaceable interrelatedness
2. Actively seeks
3. Wellbeing of others

Bishop Linda takes us to the story of Jesus interacting with the Samaritan woman at the well. She points out three "crossings" that Jesus does with great intentionality, even though they were culturally inappropriate in His day. Let's look at the...

1. Wall of hostility. Jesus crosses over into Samaria. What "Samarias" should we be crossing over into today?
2. Issues of gender. Jesus talks with a woman. What issues of gender should we be crossing over today?
3. Holy/unholy. Jesus interacts with a woman scarred by sin. In what ways can we minister to people scarred by sin without fear or apprehension?

How Did We Get From There to Here?

The book of Acts shows the breathtaking spread of the church from one people group to another. The Day of Pentecost in Chapter 2 marked the Holy Spirit's collaborating toward this grand goal as people from all over the known world heard the message of Jesus in their own language. As persecution scattered the believers, the message spread like wildfire, but hit some firewalls of culture along the way. For instance, in Chapter 6, a dispute arose because Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jewish widows were being discriminated against in the distribution of food. The matter was settled by choosing seven deacons with the right culture and language to attend to these neglected women's needs. Barrier crossed.

Chapter 8 describes Philip, one of these deacons, experiencing a tremendous turning to Jesus among Samaritans, with signs and wonders demonstrating God's healing power. Right after this, an angel sends Philip to meet an Ethiopian government official who was leaving Jerusalem by chariot. Philip simply obeys, and a most amazing conversion ensues. Philip baptizes the official and then miraculously disappears. The plot has thickened! The Ethiopian takes the Good News of Jesus back home to Africa.

Chapter 10 tells the story of the Jew Peter overcoming a lifetime of prejudice against Gentiles as God orchestrates an encounter with the Roman centurion named Cornelius. Complete with parallel confirming visions and a powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit on a whole Gentile family, the wall between Jew and Gentile is breached. The book of Acts carries the story onward, with the message crossing barriers all the way to Rome.

This begins to fulfill God's Old Testament promises that through the Israelites, God would ultimately bless the whole earth. From the Creation of all things in Genesis to the full restoration of all things in the book of Revelation, God's aim has been to unite all things in Christ. Revelation 7:9-10 paints the picture: "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'"

From the onset of God's covenant with Abram (Abraham), the intent is to bless all nations with the redeeming work of Jesus. In what ways has this covenant promise been fulfilled and in which ways is it still yet to be fulfilled?

A Little Taste of Heaven

About 300 of us got a little taste of this scene a few weeks ago on a Zoom global prayer meeting led by Free Methodist World Missions. Translation was available in nine languages. Four people from Asia led out in prayer for Europe. Four from the Middle East prayed for Africa. Four Africans prayed for Latin America. By the end, each continent had offered intercession for others and everyone had received the blessing of being prayed for. It was powerful! At the end, the organizer told us we could unmute ourselves to say goodbye. For a full five minutes, blessings and farewells were called out in nine languages. Nobody wanted to leave! It was like a reunion of long-lost loved ones, reaching out for a virtual embrace, some weeping, calling across the void, "I love you!" "God bless you!" "Until next time!" We realized that most of us will never meet in person on earth, but, united in Christ and joined as a global movement for the cause of Christ, we love each other even now and are assured of a grand meeting in heaven.

Whenever we experience supernatural oneness that transcends natural human divisions, we discover that we are part of the answer to Jesus' fervent prayer. Right before His arrest, crucifixion and resurrection, He prayed:

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one — I in them and you in me — so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:20-23).

Our unity brings glory to God. Our unity convinces the world that the Father has sent the Son. Our unity communicates to a watching world the unspeakable love of God. Let's do whatever it takes to seek and find that unity. Everything is at stake.

Bishop Linda uses the book of Acts to paint a portrait of cross-cultural expressions of faith in the early church. “Chapter 10 tells the story of the Jew Peter overcoming a lifetime of prejudice against Gentiles as God orchestrates an encounter with the Roman centurion named Cornelius. Complete with parallel confirming visions and a powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit on a whole Gentile family, the wall between Jew and Gentile is breached.”

1. How are we like Peter — having a difficult time overcoming various prejudices — even religious ones?
2. What role does the Holy Spirit play in bringing together the Jews and Gentiles in Acts 10? How might that inform us as to how the Spirit might work today toward the same ends?
3. God uses the distinction between what is “clean” and “unclean” to convince Peter he has categorized people. What might we label “unclean” today that keeps us from crossing boundaries of culture to share the gospel and collaborate with new believers?

Bishop Linda closes her article with the story of 300 people of all nations gathered on Zoom to pray for one another. Nation prayed for nation and continent for continent. She describes it as a “taste of heaven.” What similar situations might you have experienced that have caused you to believe you caught a glimpse of heaven?

Close in Prayer

Lord Jesus, we are prone to call things unclean, divide and separate ourselves from other believers, and gather around the comforts of our own likes and preferences. We’ve brought that into the church, and we confess it to You here and now.

We know that we have brothers and sisters around the globe and in our towns and neighborhoods. Bring us together more and more. Let us be humble in heart as we open up to learn from others around the globe who love You and serve You.

Give us that spirit of peaceable interrelatedness that brings shalom to all.

We pray in Your name, Jesus, amen.