

## **Start a Movement of Peace**

By Joel Vestal  
(July 9, 2006)

I have been asking myself in recent days from following so many complicated global issues, is it possible for the church of Jesus (that is you and me) to rise above partisan politics and economic/ethnic divide and be an instrument of peace in an ever increasing hostile world? I believe it is. America is divided politically as well as most regions of the world. We as the church should involve ourselves in the public square; however, we as image bearers of the most high God have more power within us than any military or commander in chief in the world to rattle the halls of hell and move the heart of God to awaken his people to action (Rom 8:11). Indeed, there is great power waiting to be unleashed among us to see peace in the world come through the church of Jesus Christ, that is you and me.

As Israel's offensive continues and the Hezbollah fights back, we are all approached with the ambiguity of Middle East policies, promises, and protocol. It is not an easy issue as some want to make it out to be. It is very multifaceted in the Middle East and globally there are ethnic, economic, cultural, religious complexities as well that leads easily to scratching one's head in bewilderment. I know I have been scratching in recent days. There is not one simple definition to understand any one conflict in the world, as some want to prescribe. Indeed, terrorism elements do exist and those who want to kill and destroy any western interest or ideology are real in our world today. I do believe strongly that any war should be the last result. I should say again, any act of war should be last result and not the first response. The inevitable loss of innocent life saddens me profoundly. I wish to give four basic reminders on how we as the body of Christ, no matter where you are located or the kind of expression you embrace, can respond in the light of current political turmoil the world is currently in and see Shalom (peace) realized and expressed.

**Reminder #1: Gathers others to pray.** We must pray because we are not equipped to see peace on merely our own strength and ability. We need divine power and divine intervention. We need God. We need Him to reveal his love to the hearts of all people on the earth. We need God to touch his people and through His leadership to move out into relationships and regions to be the presence of Jesus. Need some help on what to pray for? Here are some requests for prayer from Christian friend in Lebanon

- Please pray for God's intervention in our country and the Middle east to stop any further bloodshed and destruction
- Pray for the local churches to come alongside the needy in practical support
- Pray for our leaders – for wisdom
- Pray for us as Lebanese Christians- that we may be salt and light

Here are some requests from a Palestinian Christian who I just talked with one week ago while I was in a Palestinian region

- Pray for our Christian Palestinian brothers and sisters to give our food and clothes to our Muslim neighbors who are suffering
- Pray for patience and endurance to follow Christ and love all people
- Pray for people to come to know Jesus Christ, the prince of peace

**Reminder #2 - Give resources to peace makers** – I am not suggesting this to merely raise money for our own mission. There are thousands of organizations that are filled with peace makers with the gospel. They are acting justly and loving mercy and walking humbly before our God (Micah 6:8). The fact is that many work with little support and ability to give aid and assistance. Every one of us can do more, sacrifice more, and give more. A Lebanese friend in Beirut with little resources wrote me one day after Israel began bombing Lebanon and said

“Air-raids started again as early as 3:00 am targeting the Beirut International Airport and the southern suburb of Beirut. This went on and off all day today. The artillery and bombs being used are horrendous. May God have mercy! Families are being displaced from the heavily targeted areas seeking shelter in school buildings. Effective early this afternoon, our Beirut Baptist School opened its doors offering temporary shelter to 200 Muslim people (around 30 families) from southern Lebanon. Upon arrival we offered them food and drink; yet we have no notion of how temporary will this situation be. We live each day at a time and trust God for his intervention.”

**Reminder # 3 - Be an instrument of peace: Go to an oppressed and controversial region and offer assistance, love, and relationship** - Whatever it takes and whatever you have to do, there are multiple ways to enter into hostile areas and bring aid, love, and assistance. I was just in a Hertz rental car ten days ago and drove from Jerusalem to the west Bank (Palestinian area) and was stopped at a few check points and showed my passport and was allowed to drive on. We were met by some Christians who showed us the birth place of Jesus in Bethlehem and took us back to their store they owned. They shared without bitterness or anger of the 26 foot concrete wall the Israelis had built to keep them from leaving Bethlehem. Oder was a young, articulate Palestinian Christian tour guide who could not even get to Jerusalem to do tours because he could not get a permit. He shared that the Christian population in the Bethlehem had decreased from 80,000 to 20,000 in just about 7 years but he had no plans to leave.

There is no denying that the Israeli and Palestinian conflict is at the heart of much hostility, anger, and bitterness from the Muslim world towards the western government policies. There are other regions filled with conflict that I will advocate you to creatively engage and enter into like Iran, North Korea, Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, India, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Pakistan etc. What if you and your circle of influence could organize a way to raise \$10,000 and go give aid, love, and encouragement to the Palestinians who are suffering? Figure out how to distribute food in North Korea? Is it possible? Sure it is.

Just one month ago, the United Nations released this statement, “Though gravely under-funded, UN agency is set to feed 120,000 more Palestinians Facing “an escalating humanitarian crisis” in

the occupied Palestinian territory due to the non-payment of 150,000 government employees and more frequent Israeli crossing closures, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced today that it will increase the number of non-refugees it feeds by 25 percent, from 480,000 to 600,000. We are seeing increasing numbers of impoverished people whose means of survival are being pushed to the limit. Many families are being forced to reduce their number of meals to just one a day,” WFP Country Director Arnold Vercken warned. “We are in a race against time to reach the most vulnerable with food aid and avoid an escalation of this crisis. No matter what your political opinion is on the issue, the fact is that Israel has stopped the transfer of Palestinian value added taxes (VAT) and customs taxes and innocent people are suffering. This comprises around 50 per cent of the Palestinian Authority budget. Other countries have also suspended contributions to the PA. The 150,000 employees on its payroll support 1 million people, or more than 25 per cent of the population. “Many people are now living on only bread and the cheapest vegetables, usually those left unsold at the end of the day. We are also very concerned about the growing numbers of people, often children, rummaging through garbage cans,” Mr. Vercken said. I recognize the reality and need for Israel to protect herself and that will be debated on to what degree they should. However, the reality and opportunity before us as the church to respond and act is present.

In southern Thailand, where I currently reside with my family and other people in the ServLife community, we have launched a loan program. We have given loans to the Muslim community to start fish farms who are poor and marginalized. Relationships have been created between Thai Christians and Thai Muslims as a result. Trust has been established and dialogue has been birthed and peace is a result. The opportunities are endless to care, love, and bring peace to millions in the world.

**Reminder #4: Peace will come when we preach the Gospel**– The gospel of Jesus Christ is what people need to experience and embrace. The love of God will flow into the heart of anyone who responds to the gospel of Christ (Rom 8:39). The love of God will transform the heart of man and give them the power to love and forgive their enemies (Matt 5:43). How will people know and believe unless they are told? How will they be told unless we are sent? (Rom 10:15). As we live the gospel, we must also preach the gospel in love, humility, brokenness, and clarity. Preach the gospel where Christ is not known (Rom 15:20). Be eager to preach the gospel (Rom 1:15); Do not be ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone (Rom 1:16) The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel (Rom 1:17) Offer the gospel free of charge (1 Cor 1:19) Pray that those who are blinded to the gospel will have their veils lifted from their eyes (2 Cor 4:3). Do not preach about yourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. (2 Cor 4:4) Be prepared in season and out of season to preach the gospel (2 Tim 4:2).

A movement is needed. It can start with you!

Stay Led!