Interacting with God’s Story and Vision

A. Living God’s Story and Vision
Read and discuss Darling’s contemporary applications and questions (ABS, pp. 48–49). Extend #2 by pausing to pray for the enemies you are talking about. For #3 and #4, give specific, concrete examples of ways you can show compassion and generosity to anyone who asks or is in need.

B. Stories of transformative love
Using the library resources, give examples of individuals or groups who have made a difference because they followed Jesus’ radical teachings. Invite the group to tell their stories of how this text has shaped the way they live. Summarize stories illustrating how Anabaptists broke the cycle of violence and conflict.

C. Creative nonviolent solutions
What can we do to disarm an offender or de-escalate a potential conflict? Return to the newsprint list created earlier. Think of contemporary situations and then brainstorm positive ways to respond nonviolently but not passively. Note that Jesus is discouraging us from participating in violence that will most likely escalate a conflict. How could you use humor, gestures, or surprise actions to de-escalate a conflict situation? Add your ideas on the chart. Encourage each other to imagine creative alternative responses to potential conflict in their relationships at work and elsewhere. If someone is facing a conflict and seeks your counsel, offer a variety of possible ways to resolve the issue. Option: Act out your creative responses to these situations.

D. We are people of God’s peace poster
Refer to Menno Simons’s hymn “We Are People of God’s Peace” (HWB 407). Think of the ways your congregation and/or denomination lives out Jesus’ teaching. Make a peace banner using poster board and markers. Talk about how your church embodies God’s peace. Consider what conventional wisdom says about winning and losing, punishment, treating enemies. What is God’s unconventional wisdom? Write statements that tell what God’s people can do to break the cycle of violence and hatred by demonstrating love, compassion, humility, respect, and generosity to everyone, including the “enemy” however defined. Be positive and creative. Post your banner. Option: Illustrate the song or create a cartoon that gets the message across without words.

E. The “perfect” Christian
Jesus calls us to “be perfect,” imitating God’s perfection (v. 48). Perhaps complete or whole better reflects what Jesus meant. Take several minutes to reflect on what being a complete or whole Christian means to you. Think back or reread the texts we’ve studied from the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus teaches us how to live faithfully in God’s transformative society.

Share with one or two other people. Listen deeply to each other.

» What thoughts come to the surface for you?
» What insights did you gain?
» What brought new meaning to your daily life?

After each one has shared, sit quietly again. Think about a single word or small phrase that distills for you what it means to be complete. Gather as a group, inviting each person to say the word that resonates best with being perfect. You may be surprised at the rich responses.