

HOW TO BE A PEACEMAKER

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You've heard the expression, "Art imitates life"? That's what sermon crafting can be like. Two weeks ago I determined to speak today on the theme of conflict resolution, and the two weeks since then have been one object lesson on that theme after another!

Conflict is inevitable, where people are involved. As soon as you admit one other person into your life, you are inviting conflict, let alone dozens of people! As a matter of fact, even if you choose to live alone, you will soon discover conflicts within yourself!

Romans 7:15 *I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate.* ¹⁸ *I want to do what is right, but I can't.* ¹⁹ *I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.* ²⁴ *Oh, what a miserable person I am!*

Defining Conflict

Conflict may be defined as "any opinion or purpose that frustrates my goals or desires." And it generally has one of four sources:

1. Misunderstandings that result from poor communication.
2. Differences in values, goals, gifts, callings, priorities, expectations, interests, or opinions.
3. Competition over limited resources (such as time, money, or a desired man or woman).
4. Sinful attitudes and habits that lead to sinful words and actions.

By the way, such differences as those mentioned in #2, above, are often not inherently wrong, but simply our God-given diversity. If they are handled properly, they can lead to productive dialogue, encourage creativity, promote helpful change, and generally make life more interesting.

Responding to Conflict

However, human nature's characteristic responses to perceived conflict are:

1. avoidance
2. manipulation
3. control

It is simple instinct to react to perceived mistreatment or opposition by justifying ourselves or doing all we can to get our own way.

Romans 2:15 *Their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.*

Put another way (thanks to Ken Sande), there are three possible types of responses to conflict:

1. Peace-Faking
2. Peace-Breaking
3. Peace-Making

Peace-Faking involves methods of escape, such as denial, running away, or (the ultimate escape) suicide.

Peace-Breaking entails modes of attack, such as physical or emotional assault, filing a lawsuit, or (the ultimate attack) murder.

Methods of escape focus on ME.

Methods of attack focus on YOU.

Peacemaking, however, focuses on US.

That's why Jesus, who came to unite all people into one family under God, said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

Going It Alone

You can do peacemaking all by yourself. It begins with deliberately and quietly overlooking an offense, determining not to talk about it or dwell on it, which is a form of forgiveness.

If the offense is too serious to overlook, the next step is to seek reconciliation, by confessing your own part in the breach, offering loving correction for the other's part, and extending forgiveness.

When there are material issues as well as relational issues, negotiation becomes necessary, seeking a settlement that satisfies the legitimate needs of each side.

All three of these stages are included in Jesus' directive:

Matthew 18:15 If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.

Helping Hands

The next part of that instruction involves the (sometimes necessary) assistance of others to reach the desired goal:

Matthew 18:16 But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. 17 If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church.

Another person can assist with clarifying communication and exploring solutions. If that is still insufficient, arbitration can render a binding decision on both parties. Ultimately, such assistance usually leads to accountability structures, in order to lovingly and redemptively restore broken relationships.

Galatians 6:1 If another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. ² Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. ³ If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.

Inner Conflict

Our congregation is remarkably free from the more blatant church conflicts. But ours is still not a conflict-free zone.

The most common type of conflict I see in our congregation is intrapersonal, or self-conflict. By that, I mean, inner conflict that people usually bring with them into the church, affecting their perspective of day-to-day events and the behaviors of people around them. The common result of this inner brokenness is complaint about petty irresponsibilities—things left undone, things overlooked, things forgotten (not real heart issues; not things that deeply matter).

Some deal with these matters by complaining in the background to those who will listen. Others speak down to the offenders or make jokes about their behavior, giving subtle jabs at their character or faith. Not a fun or encouraging environment for believers to grow in! This is a modern form of Phariseeism.

Matthew 7:1 Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. ² For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. ³ And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? ⁴ How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.

The presence of a log in my eye causes me to readily recognize the speck in another's eye, because it is familiar material to me. The speck and the log are the same in nature.

The apparent difference in size is really only a perceptual difference. When the speck is in your eye, it looks like a speck to me. But when the speck is in my eye it feels like a log!

The odd thing is that when I am concentrating on the speck in your eye, I don't feel the log in my own eye. If Jesus didn't point it out to me, I might never notice it.

The amazing thing is that the conflict over the "speck" in your eye is what occasions the revelation of the "log" in my own eye, if I have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying.

Conflict Is Good?

Because God exists and involves Himself in human affairs, every interpersonal conflict has both negative and positive sides. The negative aspects are well-known to all. What is it that leads to a positive outcome?

Positive fruits of conflict are traceable only by those who seek them with faith in God's help, and most people simply do not. This is where peacemaking begins.

Romans 8:28 We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

In general, the positive aspects are these:

- Reality check; truth surfaces, as some things are said with a clarity and honesty that were forbidden by former fear or politeness.
- Constructive changes become possible.
- Better lines of communication are established.
- Relationships deepen and strengthen.

Consider this: God's highest purpose for you is not to make you comfortable, wealthy, or happy. He has something far more wonderful in mind: He plans to conform you to the image of His Son, Jesus. Conflict is one of the many tools God uses to develop more Christ-like character.

For instance, He may use conflict to remind you your weakness and to encourage you to depend more on Him. God may also use conflict to reveal sinful attitudes and habits in your life. Conflict also

provides the environment for you to draw upon God's grace and put new attitudes and habits into practice.

Consider this process the "ABC of spiritual growth": Adversity Builds Character. Worry less about *going* through conflict and focus more on *growing* through conflict, and you will enhance the process immeasurably.

Levels of Conflict

Conflicts rise through five stages:

1. *A problem to solve*: a predicament or substantive issue; not a personal attack.
2. *Disagreement*: the tension development stage where self-protection takes precedence over the problem.
3. *Contest*: win-lose stance. Objective is now to WIN. Now more than one issue and people are taking sides.
4. *Fight-Flight*: hurt or escape from the "enemy." Issue is lost. Severe or irreparable damage to relationships occurs.
5. *Intractable fight*: goal has become "destroying the enemy."

Elements of Peacemaking

Characteristically, peacemaking is the product of openness, humility, careful listening, and gentleness.

Proverbs 13:10 *Pride leads to conflict; those who take advice are wise.*

Proverbs 16:18 *Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall.*

Proverbs 18:13 *Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish.*

Proverbs 15:1 *A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.*

Respect for your "opponent"—even in the face of attack—minimizes barriers to understanding and peace.

Proverbs 16:7 *When people's lives please the Lord, even their enemies are at peace with them.*

Key Ingredient

Jesus taught us to love our enemies. This instruction expresses the inevitability of conflict, but also the possibility of constructive growth from it, and the necessity of God's help for that to happen.

The key ingredient for peacemaking is the love of God. Not merely love *for* God on the part of the peacemaker, but the love that comes *from* God working *through* the life of the peacemaker.

1 Corinthians 13 is usually the central Bible reference of a wedding ceremony, expressing the love of one spouse for another. Yet marriage and family are also the most common relationships for friction and conflict between two persons. Before I close today, let's look at that passage again from the perspective, not of joining two people together, but of mending a relationship that has been torn.

Fresh Perspective

As we re-examine this passage, bear in mind that this love comes *from* God; it is the direct result of one's relationship with God. This love cannot be drummed up by will or intention; it can only be drawn down from above by faith and obedience.

First, Paul emphasizes the superiority of this love over all personal, spiritual, and devotional gifts.

1 Corinthians 13:1 If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. ³ If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

Note this: communication skills, insight and power, sacrificial giving ALL can be exercised without love—but with no attending value (they are fruitless on their own).

1 Corinthians 13:4 Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude.

This love is patient AND kind (a difficult combination, at times).

1 Corinthians 13:5 It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.

This love does not demand (claim rights). Nor is it irritable. And there is no record-keeping of offenses (God has forgiven our sins, and we shouldn't be holding out on other people when we have been forgiven something so huge.).

1 Corinthians 13:6 It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.

No gloating over unjust behaviors, or seeing others get “what they had coming.”

1 Corinthians 13:7 Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

NEVER gives up, NEVER loses faith, ALWAYS hopeful, endures through EVERY circumstance. Never, never, always, every!

1 Corinthians 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child.

Those were poor resolution skills, even then!

1 Corinthians 13:12 All that I know now is partial and incomplete.

Own your own stuff. Admit your limited perception. Resist presumption. Recognize competing values.

Four G's

The four basic principles of peacemaking can be summarized in four simple questions:

1. *Glorify God*: How can I please and honor God in this situation?
2. *Get the log out of your own eye*: How can I show Jesus' work in me by taking responsibility for my contribution to this conflict?
3. *Gently restore*: How can I lovingly serve others by helping them take responsibility for their contribution to this conflict?
4. *Go and be reconciled*: How can I demonstrate the forgiveness of God and encourage a reasonable solution to this conflict?

I intend to explain the practical steps involved in each of these four stages of peacemaking over the next month. You will learn to respond to the conflicts in your lives from a new, more effective point of view—one that will bring peace to you and glory to God.