

Dealing with Differences (Pt. 2): Becoming Peacemakers

Series: Making Relationships Work: Love, Sex & Marriage

October 8, 2017 – Brad Bailey

Intro

Today...we are **continuing** our **Fall focus** on **Making Relationships Work: Love, Sex, and Marriage**. **Last week...** began to consider **conflict**.

In that poetic summary God provides in the beginning of the Scriptures...God includes most of the third chapter to capturing the beginning of conflict. **God describes how our human life, once separated from God...**we have all been **operating** with **fundamental insecurity**... we are hiding in shame and given to blame. Hiding and hurling as some state it. And that nature is **still at work**.

Last week...we began looking at how God gives us perspective in dealing with conflict... dealing with our differences.

There is a **hard but healthy** truth about life:

You can't have meaningful connection without potential conflict. [1]

As C.S. Lewis wrote [2],

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness.

But in that casket — safe, dark, motionless, airless — it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.

If you choose to love...you choose to care... and when our hearts care...there is always going to be hurt... **sometimes mild** disappointments...**sometimes deep**...and **walls will rise**. And so it is into this reality that **Jesus...the lover of souls**... taught us,

“Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.” - Matthew 5:9

This is a grand call to rise against the culture and join the divine call to become a peacemaker.

The Calling to Be Peacemakers

And let's quickly consider a few truths about this call.

1. Peace is not that which flows from weakness...but strength.

When we feel attacked... the idea of **making peace** can seem weak... dangerous. But Jesus...was quite serious... and knew exactly what was involved.

Jesus spoke these words into a **culture** that saw **peace as weak...just as we do today**. These words speak of the power of heaven... the source of all power that can simply bring force and control... but knows that there is another force which is greater...that which can bring peace. [3]

When the Roman local governor Pilate said to Jesus that he had the power to free him...Jesus made it clear that no one had power over God...and that in fact he had the real power which was to give his life. [3b]

2. Peace is not that which is passive...but active.

Jesus does not say...blessed are the *peacekeepers*... but rather *peacemakers*.

Myth about peace. We think that peace is simply the absence of conflict. We use the term....“Keep the peace.” Assumes we have it and just need to not mess with it.

But God sees conflict running through us...and knows that peace must be pursued.

Jesus knows there is conflict between people.

In the same way we speak of **waging war**... we must learn to **wage peace**. [4]

The Apostle Paul would express this as he wrote..

Romans 14:19 (NIV)

“...make every effort to do what leads to peace ...”

Many of us might make every effort to avoid conflict... but he says...we should make every effort... to do what leads to peace.

3. Peace is not this which is just for certain types to pursue...but is for everyone.

He tells us that it is those who seek peace who God can call His children...who God sees as reflecting His image in the world. That is a serious statement to take in.

As Christ followers we are to be **instruments of peace**. Just as Christ was a peacemaker, so we are to be peacemakers. **If one person in a relationship** will bring reconciliation... peace is likely to occur.

4. Peace is not that which avoids others ...but which takes others seriously.

Jesus teaching is very pointed...people matter to God... as we read in...

Matthew 5:23-24 (NLT)

“So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you,²⁴ leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

Jesus knows the Father's heart. He knows that we can't try to honor God if we don't care about his children...those who bear His very image.

> Jesus revealed the profound **inseparable relationship** between our **relationship with God and our relationship with others**.

Jesus said the whole of life's calling can be summarized by two great commands... love God with all your heart... and your neighbor as yourself. Here he makes clear that they relate to one another. we can He speaks of one on their way to worship. If one is aware of hurt... STOP.

People matter to God.

The significance of peacemaking lies in realizing the sacred value of another...and that with it comes a sacred responsibility.

We have a responsibility to see and maintain the honor of another.

He calls us to honor one another...

How do we do that?

Steps for peacemaking when there is conflict

I want to encourage you to **do something with me. As we quickly go through some common but critical steps to helping resolve conflict... what will really serve our lives most...is to identify the steps you still need to grow in.** I believe that this is relevant to those married as well as unmarried. Marriage simply raises the common nature of conflict. (So...If you are married... I want to encourage you to consider at least 3 more of these...and if unmarried...one or more.)

1. Be timely: Initiate in a timely manner... with mutual consideration for the time and place to process.

Jesus says when you realize there is an issue..."GO"

Don't wait... don't brood....go in a timely way. [5]

Elsewhere in the Bible, the Apostle Paul instructs us...

Ephesians 4:26-27 (NIV)

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

He uses a common phrase... of not letting the sun go down...not to create a law...but a principle.

It means be timely. Of course you will have to consider the appropriateness of when you both could engage issues well. If the other person is a night owl...don't expect talking in the early morning...and if they are a morning person....don't expect you will have a good conversation late at night. It's the principle of timeliness.

Why? What happens when we carry our hurt...or we leave others in their hurt?

First, as time passes the facts get distorted. It isn't long before you can't remember who did or said what. Then the argument may shift to fighting over distorted facts. This solves nothing. The best time to solve a conflict is when it hasn't grown into something beyond itself.

Second... what happens in the heart? It grows harder... more self-righteous.

Don't be the person who allows weeks, months, or even years to go by without resolving conflicts. You will always be the loser.

Now i

2. Be direct: Avoid “triangling” in other people.

Be direct... why...what happens when we don't go directly to another person...and we speak to others?

We violate trust. Most of us are not that trustworthy when we are hurt.

‘Triangling’ refers to getting other people involved in our favor. It can be a **mutual friend or a parent or even a child**. As tempting as this is when we want to prove we are right... it can deeply damage the good faith of the relationship... because it implies that we are willing to cause others to think negatively about our partner for our gain. Unless we mutually agree to work with an appropriate third party, we should leave others out.

Jesus teaches that when we realize there is conflict we should...

- Take the initiative
- Be timely
- Be direct
- Only involve others when needed

These four qualities work together. What I have found is that when I don't take responsibility to initiate...I let the hurt go unaddressed. And when I wait... I am more vulnerable to being indirect...to talking with others...involving people before it is truly needed.

What Jesus brings together is that which will **honor the trust between us as people**.

Foundational to be those who are peacemakers is the trust inherent in being timely and direct.

3. Be open-hearted: Prepare yourself with humility to consider any responsibility on your part.

When we are hurt we can naturally feel focused on defining everything as the wrong actions of another. When confronted with such...we can become defensive. There is no way that such postures can bring peace.

Pride will deceive us. [5b]

Proverbs 16:18 (GW)

Pride precedes a disaster, and an arrogant attitude precedes a fall.

Humility... means not losing sight of our nature.

It's so common when we feel attacked... when we have conflict...to form a courtroom in our heads...where we develop the whole presentation. The problem is...we like to **portray our best** and the others worst.

So Jesus teaches us...

Matthew 7:3-5 (NIV)

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Start with our own issues.

Nothing may help more than **taking our feelings to God.**

- **Ask for God's Spirit to search your heart, to get perspective or insight into why you might be feeling the way you do.** Ask for perspective on your unmet desires that may be involved. Are they essential \ basic needs? Are they felt needs (i.e., desires)? Are they healthy needs?

If you are not prepared to have a discussion... with appropriateness... don't claim you are. It's better to say... Hey, I'm mad...about _____, but I know that I need to get a more open perspective...so let's talk later."

4. Be affirming: Preface problems with an affirmation of appropriate commitment and positive desires for the relationship.

Nothing may change the nature of engaging conflict more than whether we come in a spirit of threatening the relationship...or affirming the relationship.

If we can **express in some form or fashion...** "I'm committed...and it's because I value my relationship to you....that I want to help deal with some hurt."

It **changes everything** when we are clear that our **intent** is to **reach... not breach** the relationship. If engaging one's spouse we may need to hear in our hearts what Jesus declared...

"... what God has joined together, let not man separate." - Matthew 19:6

5. Be respectful: Commit to self-control against attacking the person.

We live in a **culture** that **uses words like clubs.** We might think of **cavemen** with clubs as **barbaric**...but we accept what we do with words as mature.

"Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." - Proverbs 12:18

Reckless words...they can flow **when we decide** that we are **free to hurt** another...in a spirit of revenge or punishment. There is a violence...that may not be physical...but it is a violence of the soul.

It's to this we are called to have self-control. If we don't...we will no longer be safe for others. [6]

Here are

A few common things to avoid...

- Avoid aggressive volume and tone
- Avoid harsh language
- Avoid absolutes or exaggeration. (i.e. *"You never..."*...or *"You always..."*)
- Avoid labels (focus on their behavior not their being)
- Avoid being passive-aggressive (i.e. using the silent treatment.), or manipulative, or sarcastic (i.e. the "martyr" who says sarcastically, "I just can't do anything right!" or "I guess it's all my fault!")
- Avoid smirks or laughter that doesn't reflect taking the other person seriously

As the beautiful **Biblical description** of love reminds us...

***"Love is not rude..."* - 1 Corinthians 13:5**

And Jesus provided the ultimate guide when he commanded us to...

***"Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you."* - Matthew 7:12 (NLT)**

Think of how you would want to be confronted.

Attack the problem, not the PERSON.

6. Be exploratory: Seek to understand (underlying feelings, fears, needs, expectations, etc)

As noted last week...anger is generally a secondary emotion. Beneath anger is hurt... frustration...fears. It will help us if we can identify what might be at the core.

- If one partner comes home late... is the issue really that others waited... or that being late without calling was adding to general lack of care. We need to explore to understand the underlying issue.
- If one partner made a purchase... is the issue just not having discussed it...or is there a desire to discuss because it's deepening a lack of security about financial planning... or because it's adding to a feeling of selfishness. We need to explore to understand the underlying issue.

So here are some basics of exploring...

- Identify the **UNDERLYING** issue that's going on for you... as best you can. (What seems to be frustrating you? How do you feel hurt? etc.)
- **OWN** your feelings. (Framing the issue in "I" statements)

Take responsibility for our feelings by framing the issue in "I" statements. Example: "I feel ignored when you...." "I feel hurt when you....."

- **LISTEN... to both words and needs**

James 1:19. "...But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger."

- Identify what **EACH** of you is feeling and desiring

Don't try to press to resolve a conflict until you can identify what each of your different desires are. When you can agree as to what each partners perspective is... and perhaps what each is feeling... then you can approach a potential solution with far more understanding and mutuality. Coming to a conversation about a tricky topic without it being reduced to a right and wrong / win or lose polarity can change the whole tone of the exchange.

7. Be forward-looking: Focus on the potential for positive change, not the past.

Many say that we should never bring up the past. I'm not sure it's quite that simple. Sometimes the very nature of our struggle is a pattern that has become more difficult because of the ongoing experience. The issue that we must guard against is using the past to constantly bind another person in. We need to focus on the potential. If we are going to refer to the past it is only helpful if the point is not to justify some underlying punishment but rather to clarify the potential future we desire.

8. Be balanced: Include positive feedback whenever possible.

If we are feeling challenged by our partners demands... over time we will get discouraged if we don't get some positive encouragement when it's appropriate. We all know what it's like to feel that we don't have a chance of ever succeeding at something... when no effort seems to count... when no positive change seems to even be appreciated. So we need to ask ourselves:

'Has my partner done anything that has been helpful in terms of the thing I am saying I want? Have they shown any positive thought or growth?'

John Gottman and his colleague began one of the most extensive long term research on marriages. In the 1970 they began research having many couples solve conflict problems...and videotaped the process. They then did a follow up nine years later. What did they find was different from from the couple who had maintained relationship? A key was the balance of positive expressions amidst negative ones. They were not usually big statements...but hreaching out to take a hand... a warm smile... a word of appreciation or care. [7]

9. Be safe: If you're losing control of your aggression, (i.e. intimidating physical gestures, harsh language, etc.), don't continue until you have self-control.

When we lose control we simply are not safe. Better to stop for a period than escalate.

10. Be resourceful: If an issue remains and is damaging your relationship, mutually commit to getting help.

While this can seem very natural for some.. it can be very difficult for some as well. Some of us have an internal wall that thinks sharing our problems...especially about marriage... is declaring that we have failed...and is just not something we can accept.

Sadly... the reluctance to seek help often is simply our pride willing to sacrifice the connection and care our marriage desires.(It can ultimately imply that 'I would rather have us suffer in this pain and contempt than feel uncomfortable having to face anything that makes me feel challenged about the ideal self that I must maintain.')

> If we don't feel safe with sharing our struggles with anyone else we really should not get married.

My wife and I have not only sought counseling...but we have found it easier to recognize when it is the best way to care about the marriage. We have realize that it is a message to each other....that this relationship matters.

The way I would encourage thinking about getting the help of a third party when needed is simply that a **third party** helps the **system adjust** when the **system is stuck**. Recall the idea of ruts... we all can discover some ground that we keep going over and likely hoping we can resolve better but in truth our own ways of engaging are just creating a deeper rut... a pattern that is becoming more set. That is where a third party can provide some leverage to get out of the rut... help us discover what is not connecting ... and find a more positive way move forward.

Closing: St Francis wrote a beautiful prayer... which some may be familiar with. It begins with "**Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.**" [8] Will you make that your prayer? It may begin with letting go of being an instrument of avoidance...or attack.

Let's pray...

Notes:

1. A rather humorous story many have used to capture this alienation is that of Gayadhar Parida.

Gayadhar Parida of India ... after a quarrel with his wife...he threatened go live in a tree...and he did. He made a make-shift shed in a mango tree just down the road ...half a kilometer away. That is where he lived...for over 50 years...well into his 80's. Despite his wife and children pleading...he wouldn't come home.

He survived the massive cyclone of 1999...which destroyed the tree...just changed trees.

Now none of us may go live in a tree...but we can live lives out on a limb... isolated.

Source: iol.com, May 1, 2006, Learn more . This article was originally published on page 4 of The Star on May 01, 2006 (South African paper) and Gulf News <http://gulfnews.com/news/asia/india/sulking-man-lives-on-tree-for-50-years-1.235075>

2. The Four Loves, (New York, Harcourt, 1960), Kindle Location 1541.

3. Consider also how James describes the role of peace and peacemaking...

James 3:17-18 (NIV)

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

And the Apostle Paul's words....

Romans 12:18 (NIV)

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

He says... "*With everyone*"... how much easier if we could choose some to leave out...but he we are called to live at peace with EVERYONE.

He also begins... "*If possible.*" The Scriptures understand that we don't control others... and so... peacemaking is not always peace achieving

He says... "*As far as it depends on you*"...the responsibility is on us. We are not responsible for what others do...but for what we do.

3b. John 10:18; 19. 11

4. Again we hear of the call to make effort...

Ephesians 4:3 (NIV) - "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

Hebrews 12:14 (NIV) - "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy..."

Glen Stassen wrote... "Peace, like war, must be waged. It must be waged courageously, persistently, creatively, with imagination, heart, and wisdom."

5. We can also note, Jesus said, "*Agree with your adversary quickly...*" (Matt. 5:25).

5b. Regarding the deceptive nature of pride, we also can note:

Proverbs 26:12 (GW)

Have you met a person who thinks he is wise? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Philippians 2:3-4 — Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

6. “The fool who provokes his family to anger and resentment will finally have nothing worthwhile left.” Proverbs 11:29 (LB)

When anger dominates our posture in relationships... it will lead to three things: more anger, apathy, alienation. If someone constantly relates with anger... these three things are likely to unfold over time.

Consider also...

- Proverbs 16:23 — A wise man’s heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction.
- Ephesians 4:15 — Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is that Head, that is, Christ.
- Ephesians 4:29 — Do not let any unwholesome talk
- Proverbs 13:3 — He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.
 - o Proverbs 17:27 — A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered.
 - o Proverbs 10:29 — The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.
- Colossians 4:6 (NIV) - Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

7. The Magic Relationship Ratio, According to Science by [Kyle Benson](#), October 4, 2017 in which he describes Gottman’s work

To understand the difference between happy and unhappy couples, Dr. Gottman and Robert Levenson began doing longitudinal studies of couples in the 1970s. They asked couples to solve a conflict in their relationship in 15 minutes, then sat back and watched. After carefully reviewing the tapes and following up with them nine years later, they were able to predict which couples would stay together and which would divorce with over 90% accuracy.

Their discovery was simple. The difference between happy and unhappy couples is the balance between positive and negative interactions during conflict. Even when engaging conflict... those couples experiencing successful marriages had a ratio of 5 to 1... for every negative interaction during conflict, a stable and happy marriage has five (or more) positive interactions.

8. *The Peace Prayer of Saint Francis*

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is error, truth;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in self-forgetting that we find;
And it is in dying to ourselves that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

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“...make every effort to do what leads to peace ...” Romans 14:19

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Steps for peacemaking when there is conflict

1. Be _____: Initiate in a timely manner... with mutual consideration for the time and place to process.

2. Be _____: Avoid “triangling” in other people.

3. Be open-hearted: Prepare yourself with humility to consider any responsibility on your part. (Proverbs 16:18 (GW) / Matthew 7:3-5)

4. Be _____: Preface problems with an affirmation of appropriate commitment and positive desires for the relationship.

5. Be respectful: Commit to self-control against attacking the person.

“Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” - Proverbs 12:18

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- Identify the UNDERLYING issue that’s going on for you... as best you can. (What seems to be frustrating you? How do you feel hurt? etc.)
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- LISTEN... to both words and needs
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