

This is Your Time: Walls of Enmity**The Power of Peace in a World of Walls**

In a world that seems increasingly divided, where offenses are quick to arise and walls are built higher with each passing day, we find ourselves longing for unity and reconciliation. But how do we bridge these gaps? How do we tear down the walls that separate us from one another and from God?

The story of Esther provides a powerful backdrop for understanding the dangers of unchecked offense and the importance of standing firm in our integrity. In the narrative, we encounter Haman, a man consumed by rage when Mordecai, a Jew, refuses to bow before him. This single act of defiance ignites a fury in Haman that leads him to plot the genocide of an entire people.

But beneath the surface of this conflict lies a deeper, generational enmity. Haman, an Agagite, carries the weight of centuries-old hostility between his people and the Jews. In his position of power, he sees an opportunity to finally vanquish his sworn enemy. This tale serves as a stark reminder of how personal offenses, when left unchecked, can snowball into devastating consequences that affect not just individuals, but entire communities and generations.

In our own lives, we may not face such dramatic scenarios, but we often encounter situations where we're tempted to build walls of resentment or prejudice based on isolated incidents or inherited biases. How quick are we to generalize an entire group based on a single negative experience? How often do we allow past hurts to dictate our present interactions?

The message of the gospel calls us to a radically different approach. In Ephesians 2:14, we're reminded that "Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility." This powerful truth challenges us to reconsider how we respond to offense and division.

Instead of building walls, we're called to be agents of peace. This doesn't mean ignoring injustice or pretending that differences don't exist. Rather, it means approaching every situation with the mindset of Christ, who faced the ultimate injustice on the cross yet responded with love and forgiveness.

Consider the story of the woman caught in adultery, thrown at Jesus' feet by those ready to stone her. Jesus' response - "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone" - didn't just save one woman's life. It initiated a ripple effect of self-reflection and mercy, starting with the oldest among them and moving to the youngest. This poignant moment illustrates how our choices to forgive and extend grace can impact generations to come.

In our daily lives, we have countless opportunities to be peacemakers. It might be in a tense work environment, a family disagreement, or even in how we engage with differing viewpoints on social media. The key is to remember that our peace doesn't come from external circumstances or agreements with others. Our peace comes from Christ alone.

When we're secure in this truth, we can approach conflicts and differences with a confidence that transcends the need to be right or to win arguments. We can choose to see others through the lens of God's love, recognizing that Christ died for them just as He died for us.

This doesn't mean it's easy. In fact, choosing peace often requires tremendous courage and humility. It means being willing to listen, to empathize, and sometimes to apologize even when we feel we're in the right. It means actively working to dismantle the walls of prejudice, misunderstanding, and hurt that we've built up over time.

One powerful example shared was of a youth minister and a facilities manager constantly at odds over the use and care of church spaces. The breakthrough came not through more rules or arguments, but through a simple, unexpected gesture of peace. "Peace, brother. Peace," the facilities manager said, completely disarming the tension that had built up over time. This small act opened the door for reconciliation and understanding where before there had only been frustration.

As we navigate our complex world, let's challenge ourselves to be agents of this kind of transformative peace. When we feel the urge to build walls or nurture offenses, let's pause and remember the cross. Let's ask ourselves:

- How can I bring Christ's peace into this situation?
- Am I generalizing based on isolated incidents, or am I willing to see individuals as God sees them?
- What walls of enmity in my heart need to be torn down by the power of the gospel?

The beauty of the gospel is that it offers hope not just for personal peace, but for reconciliation on a grand scale. It tells us that through Christ, the dividing wall of hostility has been destroyed. We are no longer defined by our differences or our past conflicts, but by our shared identity in Christ.

As we embrace this truth, we become part of a greater story - one where fences are replaced by open gates, where stones of judgment are dropped in favor of embraces of forgiveness, and where the peace of Christ reigns in hearts and communities.

Let us be a people who choose peace, who actively work to tear down walls instead of building them higher. Let us be known not by our offenses or our divisions, but by our love - a love that reflects the heart of Christ, who made peace through His blood on the cross.

In a world crying out for unity and understanding, may we be bold enough to answer that cry with the transformative power of Christ's peace. For in doing so, we not only change our own hearts but pave the way for generations to come to experience the reconciling love of God.

Here's a 5 Day Devotional Based on This Weeks Teaching

Here's a 5-day Bible reading plan and devotional guide based on the themes from the transcription:

Day 1: Peace in Christ

Reading: Ephesians 2:14-18

Devotional: In a world full of division and hostility, Christ offers us true peace. Just as the sermon highlighted, Jesus has "destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" between different groups of people. Today, reflect on areas in your life where you've built walls or harbored resentment. How can you allow Christ's peace to break down those barriers? Remember, our peace doesn't come from agreeing with others or from external circumstances, but from Christ Himself. Pray for God to help you be an agent of His peace in your relationships and community.

Day 2: Overcoming Generational Conflicts

Reading: Genesis 50:15-21

Devotional: The story of Haman and Mordecai reminds us how generational conflicts can persist and escalate. Yet, in Genesis, we see Joseph choosing forgiveness over vengeance, breaking the cycle of hatred. Consider any prejudices or biases you may have inherited from your family or culture. How can you, like Joseph, choose to see God's redemptive purpose even in difficult situations? Ask God for the strength to forgive and the wisdom to see beyond surface-level conflicts to the shared humanity in all people.

Day 3: The Power of the Cross

Reading: Colossians 1:19-23

Devotional: The sermon emphasized that if we don't believe in the power of the cross to overcome all offenses, then "the cross is meant for nothing." Today, meditate on the profound reconciliation Christ achieved through His sacrifice. How does this reconciliation apply not just to your relationship with God, but also to your relationships with others? Challenge yourself to view conflicts and differences through the lens of the cross. How might this perspective change your approach to difficult relationships or situations?

Day 4: Being Agents of Grace

Reading: Matthew 5:43-48

Devotional: Jesus calls us to a radical love that extends even to our enemies. This echoes the sermon's call to be "agents of grace" and "kingdom agents." Reflect on a person or group you find difficult to love. How can you actively show God's love to them this week? Remember, this love isn't based on their actions or your feelings, but on God's unconditional love for all. Pray for God to fill you with His love and to give you opportunities to demonstrate it, even in small ways.

Day 5: Finding Peace in God Alone

Reading: Philippians 4:4-9

Devotional: The sermon reminded us that true peace comes from Christ alone, not from external sources or agreements with others. Paul's words in Philippians offer practical steps for maintaining this peace. Today, practice presenting your anxieties to God in prayer and focusing your mind on what is true, noble, and praiseworthy. When you feel tempted to seek peace in worldly solutions or approval, redirect your heart to

Christ. Ask God to help you cultivate a deep, abiding peace that isn't shaken by circumstances, allowing you to be a steady presence of God's peace in a turbulent world.

Practical Applications:

1. This week, identify one relationship or situation where you've built up an "offense." Pray daily for God to help you break down that wall and take one practical step towards reconciliation.
2. Practice saying "Jesus, you are my peace" when facing difficult or anxiety-inducing situations. Reflect on how this impacts your responses.
3. Look for an opportunity to be a "disarming" presence in a tense situation by speaking words of peace or showing unexpected kindness.
4. Examine your social media habits and interactions. Are you contributing to "wall-building" or "wall-breaking"? Make adjustments as needed to be an agent of peace online.
5. As a group, brainstorm ways you can collectively be peacemakers in your community, addressing divisions with Christ's reconciling love.
6. Take time for self-reflection: Are there any prejudices or generalizations you hold based on isolated experiences? Ask God to help you see people as He does.
7. Practice the "peace, brother/sister" approach this week when encountering someone you typically have tension with. Notice how it changes the interaction.

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are our peace. Help us to find our security and identity in you alone. Give us the courage to break down walls of offense and to be agents of your reconciling love in this divided world. May we lead by example in showing grace, just as you have shown us immeasurable grace. Empower us to be peacemakers who reflect your heart for unity and reconciliation. In Your name we pray, Amen.