

THE PEACE FAMILY
MATTHEW 5:9

It is astounding to think that our triune God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the three Persons of the Godhead—have never, ever, ever had a conflict. For the entirety of their eternal existence—hundreds of trillions and zillions of years—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have never had an argument, have never been irritated with each other, have never experienced the slightest bit of tension, and have never done anything to even mildly offend each other. They have lived in perfect harmony and unspoiled fellowship every moment of their eternal existence.

It's difficult to imagine a conflict-free existence, isn't it, despite John Lennon's attempt to coax us to do so nearly fifty years ago? That's because ever since our first parents sinned in the Garden of Eden conflict has been so tightly and prominently woven into the fabric of our relationships, we cannot fathom life without them. We have never *experienced* life without them. In fact, life as we know it is so permeated with conflict that most of it goes unnoticed and unannounced. And when we do hear about it, it is so commonplace that it hardly raises an eyebrow.

I took the newspaper one day this week and did a simple experiment. I looked at all the stories and counted how many of them dealt with conflict. Well over half the articles, including four out of five on the front page were about some kind of incident or issue that had turned nasty. Some of those incidents or issues had alienated those involved. Some had escalated to violence. Some had threatened national security. All of them had caused considerable amount of consternation.

It is no surprise that strife makes headlines, because conflict creates stories of interest. But we've grown so accustomed to hearing about conflict that most of us have become desensitized to it. We *expect* people to get on each other's nerves and under each other's skin. We *expect* people to quarrel and fight and do things that hurt each other.

Most of us don't like strife, most of us try to avoid it whenever possible, but most of us concede that tension will inevitably wiggle its way into every relationship and institution and that it *might* escalate into strife. Even in relationships between Christians. Even in institutions that are solidly Christian. I heard a startling statistic last week. Nine out of ten missionaries who leave the field do so because of strife with their fellow missionaries.

It raises a couple of questions: what does God think and feel about strife? How does He want and expect those who belong to Him to think and feel about strife? And how does God want and expect those who belong to Him to *deal* with strife?

It will be of no surprise to most of you that the answers to these questions are prominent themes in Scripture. In fact, the Bible reveals that our attitude about strife and response to strife is one of the most revealing things about our character and, more importantly, our relationship to God. Because God is a God of peace. Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace who was sent by His Father into this world to make peace. And those who have put their faith in Jesus and have been born again by His Spirit are the product of His peace making mission. He has made us, His former enemies, into His friends by His work on the cross. And not just friends, but children of God, who, by nature, share this family trait of loving peace and hating strife.

What is more, He has made us ambassadors of peace. He has given us the responsibility to promote and administer peace in this world. Paul called it the ministry of

reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, simply called it *peacemaking*. And in one of the beatitudes He proclaims that those who take on that role are favored by God. **Verse 9.** “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*”

Notice that Jesus is not declaring a blessing on those who merely *love* peace, or those who merely *desire* peace, or even those who *possess* peace. He says blessed are those who *make* peace. Blessed are those who try to mend strife-torn relationships. Blessed are those who bring contenders together in order to facilitate reconciliation and restore friendship.

The Jews who were listening to Jesus were familiar with the concept of *peace*. *Peace* is one of the richest and most beloved themes in Jewish culture. Their capital city is Jerusalem, which means “City of Peace.” Their greeting is “shalom”, which means “peace be upon you.” At the root of *shalom* is the notion of well-being, not merely in one’s health or circumstances, but in one’s *relationships*.

But the word Jesus uses in verse 9 is not so much a reference to possessing this peace, but *promoting* it. Jesus is describing champions of peace—people who spend their energies and efforts actively facilitating peace between striving parties.

Furthermore, the word is not describing peace-keeping, but peacemaking, and there is a big difference between these two concepts. When someone is in a turbulent relationship and says, “I just want to keep the peace,” what he usually means is that he is going to back off to try and avoid conflict. She is going to be careful not to provoke the other person. They are going to try not to rock the boat and make waves.

That’s not peacemaking; that’s peacekeeping. Peacekeeping is passive; it merely prevents hostility from escalating. Peace-keeping is defensive—the goal is to keep striving people away from each other.

Peacemaking, on the other hand, is active. Better yet, it is proactive. A peacemaker has to make a choice to engage. A peacemaker often has to plan and prepare and strategize, because peacemaking is a complex and delicate skill that requires wisdom and precision. What is more, peacemaking sometimes requires intervention, because one or more of the parties may be resistant or may not be willing to engage initially.

So the goal in peacemaking is not to keep striving people apart so they won’t hurt each other; it is to bring them together so they can resolve their conflict and become friends. Peacemakers are bridge builders. They are friendship restorers. That is what the word *reconciliation* means, and that is the ministry to which we have been called.

When I say, “we,” I mean all of us. This call to make peace is one of the things that identifies individuals as *kingdom* people who have been born of God. That’s why Jesus says that peacemakers will be called “sons of God.” Look at the text again. **Verse 9.** “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*”

We must keep in mind that in Jewish culture *sons* did not always have reference to gender or even the biological relationship between child and parent. Sometimes it referred to a person’s character or behavior. It would be the same as us saying, “He’s a chip off the old block,” or “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” What we mean by these idioms is that the person is *like* his father; he shares similar traits.

I want to remind you that when we were born again not only were we adopted into God’s family—the Peace Family—but we were given a brand new nature—God’s nature. This means that because God is a God of peace it is in our spiritual DNA to love peace,

pursue peace, and make peace. It means that when we are filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit—who is our new nature—we display His peace, because peace is one of the fruit of the Spirit.

All of this to say that peace and peacemaking are not incidental, optional traits for the child of God. They are prominent and indispensable traits, because those who have been born again bear a family resemblance to their heavenly Father.

Do you exhibit the family trait of peacemaking? I'd like to suggest a few things that might help you know if you do.

First, *genuine peacemakers have a passionate, relentless commitment to reconciliation, just like their heavenly Father.* If you were to condense the message of the Bible into one concise statement it would be this: "God making peace with mankind." Paul said it this way: "*God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself*" (2 Cor. 5:19). The Bible begins with peace in the Garden of Eden and ends with peace in its description of heaven, and in between, amidst all the turbulence and tension caused by sin, it is the unfolding story of God pursuing stubborn, resistant, and often hostile men and women in order to reconcile them to Himself.

Of course, God's passionate, relentless commitment to make peace with mankind came at a tremendous cost. It came at the expense of His beloved Son, who bore our sins in His body on the cross and died in our place, experiencing God's punishment for our sins, so that God's justice could be satisfied and His wrath diverted from us. Jesus' sacrificial death made peace possible.

If God gave His only Begotten Son to secure peace, if God was willing to funnel His wrath upon His Son instead of us, the very Son with whom He had enjoyed perfect peace and fellowship for their entire eternal existence, then peace must be extremely high on God's list of priorities. So it stands to reason that it is (or ought to be) a high priority for those who are members of the Peace Family, those who have been born of the Spirit and have become sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

That's why genuine peacemakers also have a passionate, relentless commitment to reconciliation. It's a family trait. When they are aware of a conflict, they cannot stand idly by and leave it alone. They cannot ignore it, dismiss it, or sweep it under the rug. They cannot concede that it is none of their business, or that they are unqualified to deal with it. Peacemaking is their business—it's part of their spiritual DNA. And they *are* qualified to make peace because the Spirit of peace lives in them.

And so genuine sons of God will go to great lengths, even if it involves risks and personal sacrifice, to help facilitate peace.

I've been involved in many peacemaking endeavors over the years and, although I've seen God do some amazing things, I've also experienced great pain and loss due to some of these engagements. I've lost some of my dearest friends while trying to facilitate peace. I've been in situations where one or both of the striving parties have turned on me.

Peacemaking is rarely a pleasant business. Because peacemakers often find themselves in emotionally volatile circumstances where words and motives and body language can easily be misunderstood or misinterpreted. Peacemakers often have to ask hard questions. They often have to probe in areas that are painful. They often have to peel off a scab and reopen a wound. They often have to expose things that people are determined to keep hidden. And they often have to do it in an environment where the tension is so thick you can cut it with a knife.

And so the ministry of peacemakers is not always welcomed or appreciated. Sometimes it comes back to bite you. Sometimes the peacemaker gets blamed and comes off looking like the bad guy.

But because peacemakers have a passionate, relentless commitment to reconciliation, just like their heavenly Father, they willingly walk into these unknown, unpredictable, and potentially volatile situations in spite of the risks because their God is a God of peace. It's His passion and His priority, and it is His mandate for His followers.

Second, *genuine peacemakers trust in the Lord with all their hearts and do not lean on their own understanding*. As I said earlier, peacemaking is a complex and delicate process that requires extraordinary sensitivity, wisdom, and patience, all of which must come from the Lord if it is to be effective. Reconciliation between striving parties, especially if the conflict has been unresolved for a while and bitterness has crept in, is a supernatural work. It is nothing short of a miracle—every bit as much a miracle as God healing a blind man. Therefore, peacemakers know that if true reconciliation is to occur, God Himself must do the work in the hearts of striving parties to make them willing to reconcile.

I was involved in one situation many years ago in which someone had been abused severely for many years by a trusted family member. It was the worst case of abuse I have ever heard about. And the damage it had done to this person's life was utterly devastating. It had affected every decision and every relationship in a profoundly negative way.

35 years later, the victim was ready to confront the abuser, and invited me to mediate. It is the most difficult conversation I have ever been privy to, and it did not end well. But by God's grace and God's power thirty days later the person asked to have another meeting, because she said she wanted to forgive this family member.

And I will never forget watching her take his hands in hers, hands that had viciously attacked her, and then singing these words to him: "His love has no limits, His grace has no measure; His power has no boundaries known unto men. For out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again."

That was a miracle. That was something only God could do. But God wants to do those kinds of things, and He is looking for "sons" who are willing to be used by Him to facilitate peace.

Before I step into a peacemaking role I always ask the Lord to incinerate my self-reliance, my own opinions, biases, judgments, and assumptions and to give me the mind of Christ—to let me have His perspective, to let me think His thoughts after Him, and to fill me with His wisdom.

I repeat, *genuine peacemakers trust in the Lord with all their hearts and do not lean on their own understanding*. Their confidence is in God alone. But when they trust Him they proceed with confidence even when they don't know the outcome, even if the situation doesn't turn out the way they hoped, even if the situation comes back to bite them because they know that peace is God's will and they know that He promises to give wisdom to those who ask for it (James 1:5).

Then finally, *genuine peacemakers are kingdom minded*. Don't forget that Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, was describing the attitudes and ethics of those who belong to the kingdom. He was demonstrating to His audience that God's kingdom is not primarily about the political or military power to overthrow one's enemies and rule over them; it's about God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven. And peace is God's will. Peace that results in His glory being revealed and His kingdom progressing. So being a peacemaker is one of

the traits that identifies individuals as *kingdom* people who have been born of God.

I have read every book I can get my hands on about an evangelist named George Whitefield whom God used to ignite the Great Awakening—a powerful revival that swept through Britain and the United States in the eighteenth century.

Because of the power and passion with which He preached, George Whitefield was an immensely popular figure in England and America. That influence and popularity, however, aroused jealousy in two of his dearest friends and Oxford University classmates, John and Charles Wesley. The jealousy of John, in particular, compelled him to write slanderous things about George that maligned his views and his character. They were hurtful, they were destructive, and even though Whitefield tried to resolve these issues, John was unwilling.

But John and his brother Charles had their own issues. John fell in love with a young woman and planned to marry her, much to the dismay of Charles. He so disapproved of this relationship that he secretly arranged for her to be married to another man, who was also in love with her.

When John found out he was devastated. But Charles was not about to back down. He publicly renounced his brother and stated that from that point on they would have nothing to do with each other. Whitefield immediately went and attempted to heal the rift. He pleaded with them; he wept; he stayed with them until it was resolved, and according to historians, it was his tact and tenderness that prevented a major breach that could have destroyed what we now know as the Methodist Church.

Whitefield could have decided to mind his own business, reasoning that these two brothers who had done him wrong were getting what they deserved. Instead, he saw the big picture. He knew what was at stake—the progress of the kingdom and the reputation of Christ Jesus. And so he laid aside his own hurt and plunged in to make peace, for the sake of Christ and his kingdom.

George Whitefield was a “son of God.” In his role as a peacemaker, he bore a striking family resemblance to his heavenly Father, and God used his commitment to peace to fan into flame perhaps the greatest revival in the history of the church.

I began this message by talking about our world that is permeated with conflict. It’s easy to look at all this conflict and be overwhelmed by it—to concede that it is so prevalent we cannot possibly make a difference. What can we do about strife between races that has resulted in the “Black Lives Matter” movement? What can we do about strife in our government, strife in the workplace, and strife in marriages and families? What can we do about strife in the Christian community resulting in church splits, or strife among missionaries resulting in unreached peoples not being reached?

It can be overwhelming...*if* we think about our role as a peacemaker in isolation from other “sons of God” who are also called to the same role. But the fact is, there are more than a billion peacemakers in the world right now, and if all of us were to take that role seriously, if we were willing to let God use us in that role, the world would be a far different place. Each one of us needs to simply start where we are, in our own sphere of influence. With our own families, friends, workplaces, churches, schools. We start where we are, and ask God to use us to facilitate peace in whatever situation we encounter where there is strife. We ask for wisdom, we ask for courage, we ask for patience, and then we trust God to use us.

God *will* answer that prayer, because peace is His will. He’s the God of peace; Jesus is the Prince of Peace; and one of the fruit of the Spirit is peace.

“The Peace Family” Matthew 5:9

Main Idea: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”

Introduction: The God who is peace and loves peace

The Pronouncement: “Blessed are the peacemakers”

The meaning of “peacemaker”

The difference between “peace-keeper” and “peacemaker”

The Promise: Peacemakers are Called “Sons of God”

Meaning of “sons”

A family trait from our spiritual DNA

Not an optional, incidental trait

A prominent, indispensable trait

Traits of Genuine Peacemakers

1. Genuine peacemakers have a passionate, relentless commitment to reconciliation, just like their heavenly Father

2. Genuine peacemakers trust in the Lord with all their hearts and do not lean on their own understanding

3. Genuine peacemakers are kingdom minded