

SERVING THE PRIME PEACEMAKER

John 14:27, Matthew 5:9, Romans 5:6-11 (NASB)

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18 July 2021

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The world is a conflict-strewn mess, as are its countries, towns, businesses, and every human enterprise. The screaming and repeating of vile accusations seem to have become normal. More people died in the wars of the twentieth century than in all wars of all history combined, and the twenty-first century does not seem to be slowing down. We experience conflict in our town squares, our churches, and our families.

All of this has brought into sharp focus the desperate need for a path to genuine peace. As human attempts to bring peace continue to flounder, the voice of the prime Peacemaker can be heard above the din: **“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful”** (John 14:27). This is a precious truth which easily gets blown away by the hurricane of earthly conflict.

But how can peace actually come into daily reality? Whether you are a pastor or a lay person, man or woman, young or old, you have been granted the privilege to be agents of the prime Peacemaker. In fact, this is far more than a task, it is part of our new identity as sons and daughters of God. Jesus said: **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”** (Matthew 5:9). The text does indeed say “sons,” but the connotation in that day was to full heirs—full recipients of all that the Father gives, and fully like him.

Embracing our identity as peacemakers goes directly to the core of the Great Commission. And there is no better place to learn what we should do than to gaze upon the prime Peacemaker whom we serve, as Jesus said: **“It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master”** (Matthew 10:25a). I offer you five specific steps to that end from the Apostle Paul in Romans 5:6-11:

1. TAKE THE INITIATIVE

First of all, we need to learn to take the initiative. Students in military officers’ school are examined for a specific trait they call “a bias for action.” We desperately need this as we encounter the normal world of people who are messed up, hostile, and also helpless. Paul wrote: **“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly”** (Romans 5:6).

Peacemaking will never happen if we wait for people to ask us for help. Christ did not wait for us! Helplessness means that humans do not even recognize their need for help. This is the status of everyone everywhere.

Several years ago a commercial airliner took off from LaGuardia airport in New York City and immediately slammed into a flock of geese which destroyed both engines. A friend of mine who served as a fighter pilot and later a jet test pilot tells me that all jet engines are tested for bird strikes. The engineers start up an engine in their test facility and fire frozen turkeys at it. The engines are designed

to withstand a certain number of strikes but eventually they all fail.

The captain of this aircraft, an experienced pilot named Chesley Sullenberger, had given the controls over to the copilot as usual. He processed the bird strike situation as it unfolded and here is what he found: the plane was full of people, it was at low altitude, it was directly over one of the most populated cities in the world, and it was completely without power. No pilot trains for this scenario and no pilot ever wants to face it.

Sullenberger's response was terse: "My aircraft." And the copilot repeated the command back to him: "Your aircraft." Who in the world wants to be in charge of a plane in that situation? Only someone with a bias for action who already thinks: *I am responsible. I'm the guy.*

You and I face a world full of people who are spiritually powerless. The aircraft of their lives is going down. One way they display this is perpetual conflict with God and others. Who wants to step into that situation? Jesus Christ did this for us, and wants every believer to face every human conflict situation and say: "I'm the guy," or "I'm the gal." "My aircraft."

And we must overcome our tendency to initiate only for the sake of good folks, as Paul wrote: **"For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die"** (Rom. 5:7). We all have a powerful tendency to associate with folks like us and preferably the least troubled. This is a long-standing and richly-deserved critique of the church in America, that we do not actually embrace the call to disciple all people but only a subset whom we prefer. Jesus did not pick and choose. He came for all. This is a cause for reflection and repentance.

No human being can comprehend the total nothingness we have to offer to God as a reason for him to come save us. No person can appraise the divine horror and revulsion a holy God has for our sin—even the best among us. This is what Christ faced as he came for us. If we want to be servants of the Prime Peacemaker, we go in the same way. We look at the human wreckage around us and say: "It's me. I have to go."

2. EMBRACE THE SACRIFICE

Secondly, serving the Prime Peacemaker means that we willingly embrace the sacrifice. This is what Christ did for us, as Paul wrote: **"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"** (Romans 5:8).

Peacemaking is going to cost us something. Paul described it this way: **"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"** (Colossians 1:24). Paul was not saying that Christ's suffering lacked anything with respect to our salvation, but that it is the destiny of Christ's body on earth, the church, to participate in the same kind of suffering to fulfill the will of God.

And so the challenge of sacrifice comes to us as individuals and as a group. In order to validate our identity we are going to have to enter into the pain of others as Paul wrote earlier in Romans 5: **"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does**

not disappoint...” (Rom. 5:3-5). Paul is not saying that we should be happy about miseries which come to us as we serve others in Christ’s name. Our rejoicing is in walking in the steps of our Master by embracing the sacrifice.

The sorrows of sin are the chief pain of every human being. We enter that first and foremost. It will not do any good to put Band-Aids on temporary human sufferings yet abandon people to eternal torment. So we embrace the difficulty of entering the worlds of people who do not think they have a problem and speak the good news of Christ into their lives. There are a myriad ways of doing this, but none of them are easy. All require a sacrifice from us which is not expected only of the gifted. The Great Commission is given to all.

And then we also enter the innumerable sufferings of specific people. I remember a Christian woman named Charlotte with whom I had the privilege of walking the road to glory. Charlotte was wheelchair bound when I met her. Her bones were dissolving and so the metal pins in her broken ankle were working their way out through her skin. She contracted an antibiotic-resistant infection, all of her teeth fell out, and she descended into uncontrollable brittle diabetes. She wrestled with clinical depression. This is just the short list.

I prayed fervently for deliverance from every one of these and more. None happened. So I would visit, sit with her, talk about what we were learning about our Savior, and pray. I joked that I wished I had a magic wand to heal her. So she made me one. And then I did her funeral.

About the only thing I contributed to her situation was to embrace the suffering with her in Christ and not push her away. Peacemakers embrace the sacrifice.

3. RELY ON TRANSFORMATION

Thirdly, servants of the Prime Peacemaker rely on transformation. Paul wrote the following about the radical change which comes to every believer in Christ: **“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him”** (Romans 5:9). Paul had much more to say elsewhere about the practical outworking of transformation in human lives. But suffice to say that the indispensable center of all peacemaking is the work of God, not our work. It is rooted in justification and leads to reconciliation.

Christ came for us on his sole initiative and he embraced the sacrifice. He achieved our transformation from sinners under the judgment of a holy God to children of God who have been declared righteous by faith as a gift. This is not a human work.

This should give us pause every time we seek genuine change in the life of any person and mistakenly allow ourselves to rely on human means and methods. Even good methods are powerless to bring permanent inward change. Our love, as powerful as the effect of love can be, cannot bring peace to people. Only God’s love can do that. We have the privilege to hope for real change in people because God’s love is at work within us as Paul wrote earlier in Romans 5: **“...And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us”** (Romans 5:5).

And hope is what we desperately need when we stare into the face of anyone who is overcome by an addiction, for example. Over the years I have worked with several gambling addicts. It took a while before I genuinely began to understand the total bondage in which they live. They were often well-spoken and amiable, all the while hoping to get a loan from me or the church for some plausible reason so they could pursue their fatal lust. In retrospect, gambling addicts seem to be in a worse spiritual situation than some other addicts. But all addictions kill the soul and eventually the body.

Are we really just going to speak human wisdom into a monster of that power? We might as well be trying to stop a charging elephant with a pea shooter. If we want to avoid the disappointment of failure to help people, we need to tap into the wellspring of the love of God which God implants in the hearts of those who believe. Don't rely on your own love for people. It will burn out every time. Peace with God and other people will only come by a work of God in the end. Every other form of peace will prove partial and temporary. Life change is rooted in our justification.

4. WORK FOR RECONCILIATION TO GOD ABOVE ALL

Fourthly, the primary peace which must be achieved by a servant of the Prime Peacemaker is peace between God and the people he has made. Paul wrote: **“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life”** (Romans 5:10). Sin is so damaging to human beings that we don't even understand that we are born hostile to God. God is not against us. Apart from Christ we are against him.

We must understand our terminology here. Sins are not reconciled, they are atoned. Reconciliation is the whole point of atonement. God wants a living relationship with the people he made, and the cross of Christ is the price of it. Listen to Christ's appeal: **“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me”** (Revelation 3:20). I really don't know what we will be eating with Christ, but the focus here is on the sweet fellowship with Christ he envisions for us. He is eager to reconnect with the people whom he has made. He wants relationship with you and me.

And once our conflict with God is settled the door is open to settle conflicts with every other human being. In fact, this is the only chance for our human relationships. Two thoughts I speak into situations where I have been called to resolve a conflict between people. First, I say that my purpose for participating is to defeat the works of the Devil. He is the only one who wins when we sin and fight. Second, I speak this word of power: Every problem we have can be solved in Christ Jesus. Because if God cannot help us, no one can help us. In peacemaking reconciliation to God is always first.

5. LET JOY BE YOUR ENGINE

Fifth and finally, servants of the Prime Peacemaker learn to let joy be their engine. As we rejoice in our own reconciliation we find that we are being carried along by a great gulf stream of God's energy. Paul wrote: **“And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation”** (Romans 5:11).

I want joy in my life, don't you? Be a peacemaker. God's joy is immense. Choose to enter God's joy through the lifestyle of peacemaking and you will never lack energy for the holy work to

which you are called. Christ told this parable: **“Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!’ In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents”** (Luke 15:8-10). The holy angels always and forever resonate with the passions of God. We can, too, though we must learn how. It is a choice.

Listen to how the writer to the Hebrews describes the driving power of joy in the life of Christ, who pushed through the worst suffering anyone would ever endure in order to become the Prime Peacemaker: **“... Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”** (Hebrews 12:2). For then his work was done: atonement was made, reconciliation was achieved, and the door of peace was opened to all who would believe.

Nobody wants to step into a faceful of conflict. But folks like us—normal people who have the word of God and the Spirit of God in our hearts—have the power, by following God into peacemaking, to usher people into a state of grace. Paul started Romans 5 with that thought: **“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God”** (Romans 5:1-2).

These are the things we must do as servants of the Prime Peacemaker:

1. Take the initiative.
2. Embrace the sacrifice.
3. Rely on transformation.
4. Work for reconciliation to God above all.
5. Let joy be our engine.

This is how we live our new identity. Like Father, like son and daughter. Do the work.

“Blessed are the peacemakers...”