

“Blessed are the Peacemakers” | Matthew 5:9
Trinity Presbyterian Church | Reverend Steve Johnson
9/6/2026

Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 5:1-12, the beginning of Jesus’ most famous sermon, the sermon on the mount (p. 809-810). Next week we’ll begin our new sermon series on 1 Corinthians and that should last us the school year, Lord willing.

Last year Andrew Brue and I taught on biblical peacemaking in the senior high Sunday School class and then I was able to teach an elective class on this topic at our summer RYM trip, so my hope and prayer is to share some of the highlights of what I’ve learned over the past year. Much of what I’ll be speaking on today is based off of the book The Peacemaker by Ken Sande. Ken Sande is currently the executive director of Relational Wisdom 360,¹ an organization focused on training people with skills for conflict prevention from a biblical perspective. This organization has created a very helpful pamphlet titled “Peacemaking Principles,” and I’ve put a stack of those on the welcome center and on the bookwall for you to take.

This is the word of God, the very teachings of Jesus Christ.

5 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

¹ Visit <https://rw360.org/> for trainings and resources

On November 13, 1789 Benjamin Franklin wrote this in a letter to a Frenchman, “Our new Constitution is now established, everything seems to promise it will be durable; but, in this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes.”² That last phrase has become quite famous, hasn’t it? Nothing is certain except death and taxes. Now Franklin wrote this tongue-in-cheek, there are other things we will certainly experience in life, like interpersonal conflict. As babies and toddlers and throughout our childhood we experience conflict with our parents and siblings and friends. And into adulthood it doesn’t go away. So how are we to think as followers of Christ about conflict and how do we bring real, lasting peace to our relationships? It’s a big question, far too big to answer in one sermon, but my hope is to orient us in the right direction with the right gospel perspective as we make peacemaking a life-long study.

There’s an ancient proverb, maybe Asian in origin, that says this, *I’d rather be a warrior in a garden than a gardener in a war*. I’m a true believer in conflict prevention and preparation. It is better to prepare and train for conflict before you’re in it, because once the battle’s started, if you don’t have a plan or skills or the right perspective, your relationships will likely suffer or even die. So even if you’re not in a season of personal conflict right now, this message is still for you, to help you prepare for the inevitable. But maybe right now you’re in conflict with someone and you feel stuck. You feel like it’s too late to turn things around. You’re afraid and angry and confused and sad. God’s word provides a path for us in peacemaking, so it isn’t too late. There is hope.

We’ll start by looking closer at Jesus’ call to peacemaking in the sermon on the mount, then we’ll consider why we fight, how Jesus brings peace, and end with biblical wisdom for maintaining peace and reconciling.

I. Jesus’ Call to Peacemaking (Matt. 5:9)

1. What peacemaking is

A. Someone who reconciles with others

² <https://gratefuleamericanfoundation.org/what-inspired-benjamin-franklin-today-to-write-our-new-constitution-is-now-established-everything-seems-to-promise-it-will-be-durable-but-in-this-world-nothing-is-certain-except-death-an/>

First, Jesus' call to peacemaking. Before Jesus gave his famous sermon, he went up a mountain, likely one of the rolling hills near the Sea of Galilee. This would help Jesus be seen and heard as he taught, but it also may have been to draw a contrast between him and Moses. Moses ascended mount Sinai and gave the people the law, and now Jesus ascends a mountain, but this time he will teach the heart of the law with greater authority and accuracy than anyone before him. Not only that, Jesus will proclaim the law's fulfillment (5:17-18) and the establishment of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus begins with what we call the beatitudes, nine statements describing those who are truly blessed in God's kingdom of heaven. And there we come upon the seventh beatitude in verse 9, "**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.**"

So what is a peacemaker? The word for "**peacemaker**" here in the Greek is simply the combination of the words for *peace* and *make*, so the translation "peacemaker" reflects that very well. Commentator Leon Morris points out that Jesus here "refers not to peace-keepers but to peace-makers, people who end hostilities and bring the quarrelsome together."³ He says this word refers to making peace not just between quarrels but it could also include making peace to large-scale conflicts, such as wars.

B. Someone who is reconciled with God, a child of God

Entering into conflict is often scary, sad, and confusing, but Jesus said that those who bring peace to a conflict are truly blessed, truly happy, because they shall be recognized as sons of God. Bringing peace to conflict doesn't make us a child of God, it's a mark of being a child of God. Because we've received the peace of God through Jesus and our conflict with God has ended, we can be like children and imitate our Father by bringing peace to others just as he brought peace to us. So in peacemaking there's a childlike quality of humble imitation. So a peacemaker is a child of God who imitates their Father by resolving conflict with His peace.

³ Leon Morris, [*The Gospel according to Matthew*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 101.

2. How do you respond to conflict?

A. Flight responses (peacefaking)

So as God's children and as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, we are to respond to conflict with peace. Now that sounds really nice, doesn't it? But what do we actually do? How do you respond to conflict? What's your gut reaction? There are two types of people, those who tend to avoid conflict and try to escape it and those who tend to start it and attack until they win. Here in Minnesota we have a thing called "Minnesota nice," which is often only a passive-aggressive way of saying Minnesota passive-aggressive. There are a lot of Minnesotans, like myself, who tend to avoid conflict. Now avoiding conflict or starting conflict, neither are inherently wrong, and as Christians we need to grow in the wisdom to know when to do which and have the courage to follow through.

Ken Sande describes three different ways we respond to conflict. First, there are flight responses, peacefaking. This is where we avoid and escape conflict in unbiblical ways. Maybe we deny that there's even a problem. We pretend it doesn't exist. We convince ourselves that the Emperor is wearing clothes. It feels like peace, but it isn't. It's fake. Another flight response is escape. We acknowledge there's a problem, but we run from it. We go AWOL. We stop responding to calls and texts. We end the relationship. We quit our job. We divorce. We find a different church. We avoid certain public places where we might run into our enemy. Now in cases of abuse and matters regarding safety or morality, physical separation is important, so I'm not speaking to that. Joseph ran away from Potiphar's wife and David fled from Absalom and Saul, and those were wise decisions. But when we don't make a diligent effort to resolve a conflict, and we escape it instead, that isn't how we are to live as children of a peacemaking God.

B. Fight responses (peacebreaking)

So there are flight responses and then there are fight responses or attack responses. This is peacebreaking. When we want to control others or win the argument and get our way at the expense of the relationship, that is an unbiblical response to conflict. Sometimes it looks like verbal attacks. We gossip, slander, and accuse. We name-call. We shame. We shout and scream. We hurt people with our words. We try to make them feel the same pain we feel. We put justice into our own hands. We're the judge, the jury, and the executioner.

Sometimes it escalates to physical violence or property damage. Sometimes people attack with litigation, using the legal system and lawsuits to take someone down or make someone pay. And then the most extreme expression is murder. Moses did this before he fled Egypt and so did David in an attempt to hide his adultery. The Bible is full of flight responses and fight responses. Human nature hasn't changed. But Jesus calls his followers, the children of God, to live differently, to live in the culture of the kingdom of heaven, a culture of peace and reconciliation with God and man.

C. Right responses (peacemaking)

So what are the right responses we are to have to conflict? What is true peacemaking? Ken Sande gives six main options we are to consider. First, there's overlooking an offense, where we deliberately don't engage in conflict over small matters. This comes from Proverbs 19:11 where it says that it is one's "**glory to overlook an offense**." Second, there's reconciliation. Jesus says a few verses later in the Sermon on the Mount that if we have come to worship and we remember that a brother has something against us, we are to "**go**" to them and "**be reconciled**" (Matt. 5:23-24). This is usually a one-on-one effort, you aren't trying to make the problem bigger by added more people. It's so important to learn how to keep a conflict small. A third peacemaking response is negotiation, where if the conflict is over a material matter like money or a family inheritance, it's good to consider the interests of others and negotiate a fair resolution that isn't centered just on your own interests. Now if we've tried one-on-one peacemaking and it hasn't worked, there is a time to get help. And so a fourth option is mediation, having one or two other wise people help resolve the conflict with you. This is in line with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18 that if a brother sins against us and we confront them but they won't listen, then Jesus instructs us to "**take one or two others along with us**" (Matt. 18:16). We must be careful who we ask to mediate a conflict. They must be wise and fair, able to see both sides of the conflict, and not be a gossip. A pastor, an elder, a deacon, a small group leader, or a trusted friend might be a good option. Fifth, there's arbitration, where a third party hears both sides of the conflict and then they decide the outcome. And sixth, there's accountability. Jesus instructs us that if someone has sinned against you and they won't repent or listen to you or one or two others, you are to bring the matter to the

church. I don't think that means you share all the nitty gritty details in a church service, but you bring the matter to the elders of the church and then they hold the person accountable, potentially with counsel or different forms of church discipline like an admonition, suspension from the Lord's table, or even excommunication from the church. The goal of church discipline is always reconciliation, to restore harmony. It's not to hurt someone or punish them or shame them.

II. Why We Fight (Matt. 7:1-5, James 4:1ff, James 1:13-15)

1. Our log problem

So much more could be said about each peacemaking response, but next I want us to understand why we get into conflict in the first place. Why do we fight? When we're arguing with someone, we can get so focused on the wrong they're doing, but Jesus wants us to first consider our part in the problem. In chapter 7 of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus famously tells us that before we try to take a speck out of our brother's eye, we need to see and remove the log out of our own eyes. What he's saying there is that we're often hypocritical when we get in conflict with people - we try to get them to stop doing the very things we do too. When someone wrongs us, we often wrong them back in the same way. We get impatient with their impatience. We get angry at their anger. We get controlling over their control. We yell at them to be quiet. We insult them after they insult us. They make an exaggerated claim about us and we dish it right back at them. We're far more hypocritical than what we realize, and Jesus wants us to stop and consider our log problem before we consider someone else's speck problem.

2. Our heart problem

Not only do we have a log problem, we have a heart problem. James, the brother of Jesus, answers our question of why we fight in James 4. He says this, **"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"** (James 4:1). We fight because we have desires and passions that stir up a war within our hearts and minds and emotions. As Christians, we need Jesus to rule our hearts, our very desires and passions. Our will needs to conform to his will. But we are born

with wills and desires and passions that are in conflict with what God wants. And so when we don't get what we want, we fight.

And do you know what one of the biggest blind spots is for Christians, one of the most common things Christians justify fighting over? *It's fighting over good things.* As Christians we rightly want many good things: a good marriage, a peaceful family, friendships, freedom, sleep, food, ministry success, job success, good grades, financial provision and stability, a loving church with sound biblical teaching... these and so many other things are good to want and to have. But what happens when we don't get them? We justify quite quickly that because it's a good thing, we need to fight for it. We have a just cause. And we don't realize that sometimes God isn't giving us the good things we desire, because he has a different and better plan.

Tim Keller said this about the good things we desire, "An idol is when a good thing becomes an ultimate thing." He hit it right on the head there, didn't he? Good things can become idols. In his book Counterfeit Gods, Keller goes on to define an idol, "What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give." Sometimes we do this with things we know are sinful, but oftentimes as Christians we create idols out of good things, things we have or things we don't have and think would satisfy us if only we had them. Our hearts need to be content with what God has given us today, not worrying about tomorrow, not living for selfish ambition, not coveting the good things other Christians have.

So when a conflict starts, or you're about to start one, slow down, take a moment or two to ask yourself a few of these questions. These following questions are like a spiritual x-ray to show you what's going on in your heart:

- What do I desire that I'm not getting?
- Am I justifying a fight because I want a good thing?
- Is the thing I want becoming an ultimate thing to me, an idol? And if I don't get it, how will I respond? Will I rest in humble contentment or will I fight or escape?
- Is what I want in conflict with what God wants?

Arguments often happen so quickly, and we would do well to slow down and ask ourselves some heart questions before opening our mouths and stirring the pot.

III. How Jesus Brings Peace (Col. 1:19-22, 2 Cor. 5:20b-21, Rom. 5:1, Col. 3:13, Luke 6:36)

1. Horizontal peace starts with vertical peace

So that's in a nutshell why we fight. We have desires that wage war within us and they grow into idols. We sacrifice our relationships on the altar of the idol. We are sinners in need of a Savior, in need of a heart-change.

So how does Jesus bring peace to our relationships? Horizontal peace starts with vertical peace. We must reconcile with God before we can have true and lasting peace with others. And Jesus has not only made reconciliation with God possible, he's actually reconciled his people to God. Here's Colossians 1:19-22, "¹⁹ **For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,** ²⁰ **and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.** ²¹ **And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,** ²² **he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,**" Jesus is the ultimate peacemaker. By his death on the cross, by enduring the punishment we deserve for our sin, *our* conflict with God, Jesus has made us blameless and reconciled us with God. There was no way we could survive a conflict with God on our own, but God's mercy and love found a way through the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Are you reconciled with God? Are you certain that you are at peace with God? Romans 5:1 tells us how we can make peace with God, "**Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**" Simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the path to peace with God. If you are here today and you are not sure if you've made peace with God, then put no confidence in your own goodness or what you can do for God, and trust fully in what Christ has done at the cross. His death is enough to forgive you of all your sin. Pray to God and repent of your sins. If you're not sure what to pray, you can find a prayer at the bottom of page 15 in your bulletins. Be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

2. Gospel-reflecting relationships

Once you've made peace with God, you'll notice a change in your relationships. You can begin to have gospel-reflecting relationships. You can give the peace that's been given to you. Colossians 3:13 says "**as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.**" We can forgive others their debts against us, because we've been forgiven a much greater debt against God. Our relationships reflect the gospel when we forgive. And how patient and merciful has God been with us? We can give mercy because we have received greater mercy. Jesus says in Luke 6:36, "**Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.**" Mercy received, mercy given. That's how the children of God live.

Jesus brings peace to our relationships and changes them from works-based to grace-based. Worldly, works-based relationships are conditional. They're performance based. *I'll love you, if you love me / I'll respect you, if you respect me / if you don't reach my expectations, then I'm done with you / if you sin against me, I'll get you back or leave.* That's how works-based relationships work, and they don't end well. You're constantly trying to prove yourself to the other person or make other people prove their love and faithfulness to you. It's very insecure and often based in fear and control. But Jesus transforms how we function in our relationships. He brings freedom and peace and love. A grace-based relationship is not conditional, but committed, and in marriage it's covenantal. It's based not on performance, but on promise. *I promise to love you always, no matter what / I respect you because I love you and you're made in the image of God / I will be patient with you and my love will endure the trials of this life / When you sin against me, I'll forgive you and be committed to peace.* Grace-based relationships expect sin and suffering, but we aren't afraid to face those things because of the forgiveness and love and mercy we've received from God. There is no love in this world like the love of God shown to us in Christ, and so meditate on that love, pray for the Holy Spirit to pour that love into your hearts, and then give that undeserved love and grace to others.

IV. Wisdom for Maintaining Peace and Reconciling (Prov. 19:11; James 1:5, 19-20)

1. Wisdom for not starting a conflict

Children of God desire to make peace with others, but just wanting peace doesn't usually get very far, especially in really messy situations. Each one of us needs to grow in

wisdom for maintaining peace and reconciling. Wisdom is knowing the right thing to do at the right time in a specific situation and having the skills to do it. So wisdom doesn't develop overnight. It takes years of learning, and sadly sometimes we learn the hard way. We will just scratch the surface here of wise principles and ideas for peacemaking, and I'd encourage you to continue studying so that you're ready when battle strikes.

First, let's consider wisdom for not starting a conflict. Preventing conflict from even starting is preferred. And it all starts with prayer. Prayer is our theme for youth group this year – it's so important, all of the Christian life is connected to it. James 1:5 says this, **"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."** I'll never forget my dad encouraging me as a child to pray daily for wisdom, encouraging me with this promise that God will give wisdom to all who ask. And even though I have lacked wisdom and lost a few relationships throughout my life, God's continued to teach me. Wisdom starts with prayer, so I'd encourage you just as my dad did, to pray regularly, even daily for wisdom. In James 3:17, James describes what wisdom from God is like, and as I read this verse, think about how needed this type of wisdom is in times of potential conflict, **"¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere."** What would our family relationships and friendships look like if our daily disposition was like that? Gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, impartial... all those attributes are like wet wood resistant to the fires of conflict. And so let us pray for the wisdom from above and these fire-resistant character traits. On a personal note, I am so thankful to God to be surrounded in this church with people and leaders who are marked by these peaceable traits. I've seen leaders diffuse situations that could have blown up, not only during the pandemic but also in other situations. That being said, no church is immune to conflict, so let's continue to pray for wisdom and peace for our church.

2. Wisdom for when you're in the middle of a conflict

Not what about when we're in the middle of a conflict, what wise principles can help guide us in those tense moments? Turning once again to the book of James, James 1:19-20 says this, **"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of**

God.” We would do well to learn to tame our tongues and train our ears, to develop good listening skills in heated moments, listening not just to the exact words being said, but also listening to a person’s tone, reading their posture and body language, reading the overall situation they’re in. All those things can tell us more about what a person is trying to communicate. And when you’re listening to something you disagree with, are you truly listening to the person and considering what they’re saying, or are you just preparing your comeback? Peacemaking and debate are two different things. Someone can win a debate but lose a relationship. It’s also important to ask clarifying questions of the person who’s angry before jumping to conclusions. “What I hear you saying is this... is that what you mean? Could you tell me more about this?” It slows down the conversation and helps you gather more information so you can reason through what’s going on instead of just emotionally reacting. If you’re calmly talking through things, it helps the other person calm down too.

Another helpful de-escalation technique in the middle of a tense conversation is to play opposite day... not really, but you try to do the opposite of what the other person is doing. If they’re speaking loudly or yelling, you speak quietly. If they’re speaking quickly, you speak slowly. If they speak in generalities like “you always do this” or “you never do that” then speak with nuance to the specifics of the exact situation you’re in, not looking to bring up all of your history together. Many problems are unique to the situation and not evidence of a large on-going problem. And if the other person blames you, do the opposite and take responsibility for your part in the conflict, no matter how small it might be. At the end of the day, you can’t control another person, but some of these skills can help you and the other person calm down and get to a point where you’re reasoning through a problem rather than emotionally exploding and hurting each other.

3. Wisdom for reconciling a conflict

We’ve looked at wisdom for preventing conflict and wisdom for when you’re in a conflict, now for a few bits of wisdom for reconciling and ending a conflict. When we’re apologizing to another person, our apologies are often pretty weak. We don’t fully own up to what we’ve done, we put the spotlight of blame back on the other person, we don’t get specific with our apologies, and we often don’t even ask for forgiveness. Here’s an example

of a terrible apology: “Hey, so yeah, sorry if I hurt you. I didn’t mean to make you mad... you gotta admit you’re sometimes a little too sensitive. Maybe I made a mistake, but maybe you need to think about your side of it too. You weren’t the only one hurt you know... this whole thing hasn’t been easy for me either. Anyways, can you just get over it?” Do our apologies sound like that sometimes? That kind of an apology won’t bring about peace and forgiveness, it might even start up the argument again, right? So what should we include in our apologies? Ken Sande gives a helpful list of seven elements we should consider adding to an apology:

1. Address everyone involved (Don’t leave people out if you’ve sinned against them)
2. Avoid if, but, and maybe (own up to what you’ve done, keep the focus on yourself and what you’ve done, not what the other person did)
3. Admit specifically (don’t give a vague apology like “Sorry” or “sorry for making you mad,” be very specific about the exact wrong thing you said or did)
4. Acknowledge the hurt (think about how you’ve impacted the other person and communicate how your sin may have hurt them. If you don’t know, ask)
5. Accept the consequences (if there’s a punishment, a fine, or a cost for what you’ve done, humbly accept it)
6. Alter your behavior (If an apology doesn’t lead to repentance, to changed behavior, is it truly genuine?)
7. Ask for forgiveness... and allow time (Don’t demand forgiveness, ask for it, and recognize that while there can be a time where you both forgive each other, forgiveness is also a process and if you’ve really hurt someone, it’ll be an emotional journey for them. Expect trust to take a while to rebuild.)

4. The wisdom of hope

So much more could be said here, so I’d encourage you to continue to grow in learning about peacemaking. Maybe get some training through RW360, maybe take a class on biblical counseling, pick up Ken Sande’s book, study the theme of forgiveness in the Bible, or maybe simply read through the proverbs or through James, there’s so much

wisdom there for our relationships. Or maybe it's time to write an apology to someone. To make that phone call.

Let me end now on a note of hope. In this life, our best efforts at peacemaking often don't result in reconciled relationships. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 12:18, **"¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."** So far as it depends on you... you can't control other people and how they respond, but you can do what you can with the wisdom God's given you. Sometimes it might seem like the story's over and the relationships dead. But keep praying. I've heard story after story of God reconciling people after years of conflict. And if you have an unresolved conflict with another brother or sister in Christ, know that even if it doesn't get resolved in this life, in the new Jerusalem, in the everlasting kingdom to come, you will be at peace with them. All will be made right. We will live in the freedom of forgiveness. We will love one another again as Christ has loved us. Heaven will be a world of peace, because Jesus, the son of God, is the perfect peacemaker.