

Series: “More Than Happiness”  
(Part 6) “Peacemakers”

The problem of strife among human beings is as old as humanity itself. History books record war after war after war. World War I, near the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was touted as “the war that would end all wars”. But since, the U.S. alone has been involved in a Second World War, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan – plus a host of lesser skirmishes and invasions.

Strife is elsewhere too. There is often bad blood between labor and management, teachers and school boards, taxpayers and elected officials. Need I mention the conflicts within government ranks – whether it’s the Federal government, the state government, or local government. Family members fight with each other and hurt each other. Some in families haven’t spoken to one another for months, even years. And yes, even *the church* can be a war zone! Sometimes church people can outdistance the world in being ugly and mean-spirited towards each other!

Now listen to the words of the Master: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). We continue in this series on the Beatitudes, Jesus’ prescription for happiness. In this one, Jesus is saying, *O the blessedness of the peacemakers!*

*God is a God who wants peace and harmony in His creation.* In the Bible, God is often called the God of peace: Romans 15:33 says, “The God of peace be with you all.” There are other verses too that make this point.

God is working all the time to overcome discord and strife and bring peace and harmony to His world! *First of all, God wants to make peace between us and Himself.* Because of our sin we are separated from God, and at war with God. But through Christ God welcomes us back into a relationship. We are *reconciled* to God, or brought back on friendly terms with God, and find *peace with God*. Colossians 1:19-20, in the Good News Version, says, “For it was by God’s own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son’s death on the cross, and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in earth.”

*But God also wants us to work at bringing about peace with one another.* Hebrews 12:14 commands us, “Pursue peace with everyone.” Romans 14:19 says, “Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.”

*The kingdom of God is a kingdom of peace.* Old Testament prophets looked to a time when Messiah would come, and God would rule, and there would be universal peace. People would “beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (Micah 4:3). Even in the *animal world*, natural enemies would live together in peace! Isaiah 11:6-9 pictures this peaceful world in the animal kingdom: “In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion, and a little child will lead them all. The cow will graze near the bear. The cub and the calf will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like a cow. The baby will play safely near the hole of a cobra. Yes, a little child will put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes without harm. Nothing will hurt or

destroy in all my holy mountain, for as the waters fill the sea, so the earth will be filled with people who know the Lord.”

*Somebody has said that there are peace-takers...peace-fakers...and peace-makers! I like that. Jesus does not want us to be peace-takers!* Some people very good at robbing a situation of peace, creating dissension, stirring up trouble. Wherever they go, they always seem to create a whirlwind of discord. Maybe you have somebody like that at work. Or in your neighborhood. Maybe a family member fits that description. These “peace-takers” are in churches too! Wherever they are, things are stirred up. They seem to be the common denominator in almost every church squabble!

There were squabbles in the New Testament churches too! Apparently in the church at Philippi there were two ladies (leaders in the church) who were fighting. Paul wrote: “I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord” (Philippians 4:2). The Apostle Paul didn’t want them to be *peace-takers* in that church!

*Then, there are “peace-fakers”.* What does that mean? These are people who want to keep peace at any cost, or try to smooth things over, and avoid hard issues, just to keep things calm. They’re kind of like “peace-wishers”. Notice, Jesus didn’t say, “Blessed are the peace-wishers”, but rather “Blessed are the peacemakers”.

Sometimes we can want peace so badly that we actually make things worse. October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1938, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain made a speech in London, in which he said, “We should seek by all means in our power to avoid war, by analyzing possible causes, by trying to remove them, by discussion in a spirit of collaboration and good will. I cannot believe that such a programme would be rejected by the people of this country, even if it does mean the establishment of personal contact with dictators.” Sounds good, doesn’t it? Yet when Chamberlain gave in to Hitler’s demand for Czechoslovakia, it turned out to be more “peace-wishing” than peacemaking. Many historians look back upon Chamberlain’s actions as compromising, and actually contributing to World War II.

The same is true on a more personal level. Some of us will put up with almost anything just to “keep peace”. Parents can allow a teenager to get away with murder just to keep peace. Husbands or wives can permit a spouse to walk all over them, just to avoid conflict. Church people can let one person, or a few dysfunctional people, hold the rest of the church hostage just to keep peace in that congregation.

God doesn’t want us to be peace-takers, or peace-fakers...but peace-makers. To help bring about peace and harmony in life situations. The word used for peace in this beatitude is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word “shalom”. “Shalom” means “wholeness” or “well-being”, an overall experience of harmony and well-being even amidst the struggles of life. *O the blessedness of the peacemakers, Jesus said!*

*We need peacemakers on the international scene.* Wouldn’t it be a blessing beyond measure if

we could eliminate wars from the face of the earth! Think of the lives that would be spared, the horrible wounds and disfigurement of human beings avoided. The trillions of dollars that could be used for enriching life, rather than spent for weapons of war and destruction.

A young daughter was working so diligently on her homework that her dad became curious and asked her what she was doing. She said, "I'm writing a report on how to bring peace to the world." The father smiled kind of whimsically and asked, "Isn't that a pretty big order for a little girl?" She replied, "Oh, no. Don't worry. There are 3 of us in the class working on it." If only peace in the world were that easy! But there are people and groups diligently trying to make peace among the nations and tribes

"Search For Common Ground" is an organization whose mission is to change the way the world deals with conflict. It was founded in 1982. I read how, working in the African nation of Burundi, it brought together 2 warring factions directly involved in violence. It got 36 young men together for a retreat. The group spent the night eating, playing cards, listening to music, talking and watching a movie on teen violence. In the morning, they played soccer, and then gathered in a circle. For an hour, they spoke in general terms until one of them said, "This is a joke! We're not here to discuss what we heard happening, we're here to talk about us!" They began to share one shocking story after another – of violent deeds they committed, of seeing families and friends executed. A few protested that they shouldn't be speaking so directly, but the frankness continued. In the end, these 36 young men agreed to hold more soccer matches, and group discussions, and to include other youth involved in the violence. Thank God for those who are working among the nations for peace and good will. They deserve our prayers.

*We can be peacemakers in our neighborhoods and communities.* I served a church in the city of Easton, PA. The neighborhood around the church was becoming more violent. A newspaper article highlighted the work of one lady, willing to confront the problems in her neighborhood, willing to put herself at risk. to address the things that were wrong, and build better relationships between the young people and the community. This courageous woman was a member of our church. I told her of our prayers and support (but looking back, wished we would have done more to join her in efforts).

*We can be peacemakers in our families.* This may mean confronting something that needs to be addressed in our family, rather than being passive, just to "keep the peace". It may involve encouraging family members who aren't getting along to sit down and work things out. Now, we have to be careful here, that we don't get ourselves caught in the middle of a squabble between two parties, where we can wind up taking sides. This just makes things messier! But it can mean maintaining a relationship with the two parties involved, and encouraging them to work it out between them.

*We can be peacemakers at work, at school, among friends and acquaintances.* I know a Christian couple who had a stormy period in their own marriage and almost divorced. But they gave their marriage over to Christ and found healing. Now, they give of their time to talk with couples having marital problems, and help these couples find healing in their marriages.

*We can be peacemakers in our congregations.* I once read a biography of Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, author of books on the power of positive thinking, and pastor of Marble Collegiate Church in New York City. He was a young seminary student, serving a church weekends in a small Rhode Island town. The town was in the midst of a bitter strike at the mills, and it affected the church. The congregation was divided into factions. The two opposing parties would sit on opposite sides of the main aisle at the church, and make faces at one another.

There was a widow named Mrs. Follett who lived next to the parsonage. She thought of Peale as a boy sent to do a man's job. In fact, supposedly she once remarked that their new minister looked as if he didn't have sense enough to come in out of the rain. A Mrs. Lloyd was another lady in the church. She was a leader of the group Mrs. Follett opposed. One day Dr. Peale called on old Mrs. Follett, his next-door neighbor. He said, "Mrs. Follet, you know I heard Mrs. Lloyd say something very nice about you." "Humph...you must have been hearing things," Mrs. Follet replied. "No," Dr. Peale said. "She said you were a very excellent cook." (Well, he *had heard* Mrs. Lloyd make such a grudging admission). "I got the impression she considered you one of the best cooks in town." "Well," Mrs. Follet said, "I'm not too bad. And if it comes to that, Peggy Lloyd makes nice light pastry herself" (she tossed her head as if stunned to hear what was coming out of her own mouth).

In a little while he left and went right on to Mrs. Lloyd's house! "You know Mrs. Lloyd, I heard Mrs. Follet saying something very complimentary about you...". "Who?" cried Mrs. Lloyd, as if she couldn't believe it. "Mrs. Follet. She said you made the best light pastry she ever tasted. You don't happen to have a small piece of pie handy, do you? Or a glass of milk? I'm starving?" No wonder Norman Vincent Peale touched millions in his lifetime with his message of faith and the power of positive thinking!

To be a peacemaker is to be involved in the same work as God, the God of peace. In fact, when Jesus says peacemakers will be called "sons of God" that's a Hebrew way of saying peacemakers are doing a work like God the Father is doing!

Is there a place where God wants us to try to make peace between people? No, we can't be sure it will work. We can't *make or control* anybody to let go of their hostility and reconcile with someone. That's their choice. We don't have the power to control another person's relationship with someone else. But sometimes peacemakers, by working with both sides, can turn the tide, and be a catalyst for bringing two opposing people or sides together.

And if we ourselves are at odds with someone, we can try to make peace with that person. It might mean going to them and saying, "I'm sorry." Or "What you did really hurt me," "I really have a problem with what you said to me (did to me), but can we talk, and try to work these out?" We can't control whether that person *wants* to reconcile with us, but we can control whether or not *we* will reach out and try to build a bridge. I think that's why Scripture says, "*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*" (Romans 12:18).

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9).*

