



THE ART OF PEACEMAKING

A DIFFICULT, BUT WORTHY SKILL FOR ALL LEADERS



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I'm Luke Kuepfer.

I help non-profit and business leaders understand how to maximize their God-given potential to lead and serve others. I do this primarily through speaking at events and leading half-day/all-day workshops.

I work with business leaders to create a serving leadership culture in our society, and I help provide leadership training, consulting and coaching to faith-based and non-profit organizations.

I would love to talk with you for 15 minutes to see if we would be a good fit!

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever done that group exercise where everyone gets tied up in knots? The group circles up with everyone reaching across to two different people to grab right and left hands in theirs. From then on it is up to the group to figure out a way to untangle the mass of bodies and arms and recreate a circle without letting go of anyone's hand. It usually works best with groups under ten people. More than twelve usually proves too difficult; less than eight is too easy.

After much laughter and hard work, the group might solve the problem and untangle themselves. Sometimes it's necessary for a person outside the group to coordinate and coach individuals and smaller groups within the larger group toward a solution.

In the life cycle of any team, there are times when members get tied up in knots. Disagreements occur, personalities clash, and feelings get hurt.

Getting things untangled calls for patience, ingenuity, and a sense of humor. Sometimes an outside mediator or peacemaker needs to be called in to help solve the tangled mess. In any case, there is an art to peacemaking and finding creative solutions.

Achieving peace is not always easy, in fact, it's often very difficult. But the hard work and energy invested in sorting out human relationships, conflicts, and misunderstandings are certainly worth the effort!

WALK IN HUMILITY

The first key in the art of peacemaking is to walk in humility. Jesus was a perfect example, evidenced by his entrance into our world. Angels at his birth proclaimed: “This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’” (Luke 2:12-14)

Consider an all-powerful sovereign God bringing us peace—reconciling us back to himself. What could be more non-intimidating than appearing as a fragile, vulnerable baby? Jesus assumed a most humble posture in bringing us peace.

So how might we follow his example? Philippians 2:5-8 records: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to

be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

First, don't be presumptuous and power up over someone even though you might be in a higher position. (“in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.” Philippians 2:3b-4)

Second, do not become demanding. Jesus' motive was always to help, not to hurt, whether in speaking truth or acting upon his mission from the Father.

Third and finally, take on the role of a servant. Do not become self-seeking. The Living Bible states Philippians 2:6-7 this way: “Who, though He was God, did not demand and cling to His rights as God, but laid aside His mighty power and glory”. Lay aside your perceived rights for the good of others. Assume a posture of humility and walk as Jesus walked.

DO YOUR PART

At some of my events, I circle up groups of 15-20 people for a game of “Don’t Drop the Ball.” The rules are quite simple:

- Pass a ball around the circle with everyone touching it one time.
- Don’t drop the ball.

After playing through it once, I ask them to switch positions in the circle and stand beside someone else. I then ask them to repeat the game using the exact order of people through whom the ball passed originally. No one can remember the entire sequence. The only way to complete the game again is for each person to remember from whom they received the ball and to whom they gave it. Each person needs to simply do their part.

So it is with peacemaking. We all must do our part without concern for others’ responsibilities.

Consider Romans 12:17-21: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it

depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is Mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

"The phrase—"as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone"—suggests that peacemaking is a personal responsibility. It's also a lifetime process. Note also that justice is God's responsibility, not yours. Finally, focus only on the process since the outcome is outside your control. A soccer goalie can't ensure his team will score a goal but he can do his utmost to keep the opposing team from scoring on him. Make every effort toward peace regardless of others' efforts or lack thereof.

In the short story, "The Mystery of the Thatch" (taken from *Coals of Fire* by Elizabeth Hershberger), Mennonite preacher Peter awoke one night to the realization that men were on the roof of his house, removing the thatch. He said to his wife, "workmen have come to us; you had better prepare a meal." Not long after he went

outside and called up to the men: “You have worked long and hard. Surely you are hungry. Come in and join us for a meal.”

The men filed into the house, sat at the table, and somehow endured Peter’s blessing of them and the meal as he prayed. They filled their plates, but could not eat. Instead, they went back outside, replaced the thatch on the roof, and quietly left.

This 18th-century story out of Switzerland reminds us that kindness can yield unexpected results. Instead of calling the authorities or shouting threats, Peter and his wife were peacemakers, inviting the young men in for a midnight meal.

Romans 12:20 records, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” According to the Wycliffe Bible Commentary, this concept of heaping coals of fire on your enemy’s head refers to his blushing with shame or remorse at such unexpected kindness.

Two practical takeaways from this topic: 1) Peacemaking is proactive and intentional—we don’t sit idly by letting people run over us; rather, we return good for evil, and 2) Peacemakers do not

compile lists of grievances. Conflicts often begin with mental note-taking, then scheming, and finally, revenge. 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 reminds us that, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.”

I have this picture hanging in my house of the Dirk Willems story. I relate it to you here because doing our part for peace does not always end with preferred outcomes, as in "The Mystery of the Thatch." Doing the right thing does not mean that right things will always happen to us.

Here is Joseph Liechty's account originally published in Anabaptism Today, Issue 6, June 1994: “Why Did Dirk Willems Turn Back?”

Late in the winter of 1569, Dirk Willems of Holland was discovered as an Anabaptist, and a thief catcher came to arrest him at the village of Asperen. Running for his life, Dirk came to a body of water still coated with ice. After making his way across in great peril, he realized his pursuer had fallen through into the freezing water. Turning back, Dirk ran to the struggling man and dragged him safely to shore.

The thief catcher wanted to release Dirk, but a burgomaster—having appeared on the scene—reminded the man he was under oath to deliver criminals to justice. Dirk was bound off to prison, interrogated, and tortured in an unsuccessful effort to make him renounce his faith. He was tried and found guilty of having been re-baptized, of holding secret meetings in his home, and of allowing baptism there—all of which he freely confessed.

Persisting obstinately in his opinion, Dirk was sentenced to execution by fire. On the day of execution, a strong east wind blew the flames away from his upper body so that death was long delayed. The same wind carried his voice to the next town, where people heard him cry more than seventy times, “O my Lord; my God.”

The judge present was finally filled with sorrow and regret. Wheeling his horse around so he saw no more, he ordered the executioner, “Dispatch the man with a quick death.”

Bottom line? Peacemaking means doing our part regardless of the results. Justice is ultimately up to God.

**BE A LIGHT,
NOT A JUDGE**

Peacemakers first realize how One greater than them made peace with them (see 2 Corinthians 5:18). Forgiven much, they forgive others much. Given light, they illumine a straight path for others to follow.

Romans 14:13-15 states, “Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.”

Two main takeaways:

1. **Be a light, not a judge.** Let the light of joy and peace flood from your being to everyone you meet. Add value to everyone. Make someone’s day. Furthermore, do yourself a favor by liberating yourself from a critical spirit.

Dr. Kubzansky has found that emotional vitality—characterized by enthusiasm, hopefulness, engagement in life, and the ability to face life's stresses with emotional balance—is associated with a substantially reduced risk of heart attack and stroke.

2. Don't offend someone by misusing your freedom. If you are a “light,” illuminate another person's perspective. See things from their point of view and be careful to not needlessly offend. Make it easier for them to walk down the right path by being a light, not a judge.

**ASSUME THE
BEST INTENTIONS**

Stephen Covey tells a story about riding on the New York subway one peaceful Sunday morning. A father and his four children boarded the train at one station. Shattering the tranquility, the children began to run wild while the man slumped down motionless in his seat. Covey wondered why the father didn't make any attempt at all to control his kids; they were causing havoc and disturbing the peace for all the other passengers. Covey's negative feelings toward the man began to build. Finally, he confronted the man only to discover that the children's mother—his wife—had just died and they were on their way home from the hospital.

Through this story, Stephen Covey introduces the concept of paradigm shift. It's easy to form negative assumptions and opinions when not stopping to consider alternative possibilities or entertaining an empathic posture toward others. Sometimes what's needed is a complete paradigm shift in our thinking.

In Ephesians 4:1-3, Paul exhorts, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” We should always assume the best intentions since we cannot fully know someone else’s motives. We simply need to trust them, bearing with them in love.

Consider also how a humble and gentle spirit disarms an adversarial mindset. Proverbs 15:1 states that “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” So count to ten before responding; be patient; resist the urge to fly into a rage. Put on humility and gentleness (see Colossians 3:12).

Peacemaking is not easy, but it is rewarding. So live your life worthy of the calling you received...keep the unity, for “Blessed are the peacemakers...they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

**CELEBRATE
DIFFERENCES**

Why do we often look down on others who are not like us—don't look like us, think like us, or act like us? Consider a world filled with our clones—BORING! And why do we judge people's weaknesses based on our strengths? Would we want them to return the favor? Of course not.

When we reject others because of their differences or uniqueness, everyone loses. Not only do they lose but we also lose; both what they have to offer the team as well as an opportunity for personal growth. God knows who we need for the greatest success.

So, celebrate differences rather than complain about them. Consider first your weaknesses and how you need others' strengths to compensate for those deficiencies. After all, none of us has it all together but together we have it all!

Ephesians 4:11-13 points out that, "It was He [God] Who gave some to be apostles, some to be

prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Acknowledge your differences and celebrate them.
We're all the better for it!

BE HONEST & LOVING

In Ephesians 4:14-16, the apostle Paul warns us against being wind-tossed and blown about “by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love,...grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

We need to be honest and loving in our words. A commitment to the truth is vital but lost when not shared in the context of kindness. Any relationship not anchored on truth and kindness is headed for shipwreck. So here are some dos and don'ts of speaking the truth in love:

DOS

1. Be true to yourself and to others. You can't live a lie, nor can you move a relationship forward based on flattery or superficiality.
2. Think before responding. How would I react to the words I'm about to say? Is there a way to say it more gently, avoiding embarrassment or hurt?

3. Clarify rather than confront. Ask questions to discover the other person's perspective or understanding of the issue. In other words, throw away your pre-meditated, one-sided script. Seek to understand before being understood.

4. Get to the point rather than dance around an issue. People appreciate honesty and get frustrated with a lack of clarity.

DON'TS

1. Don't grunt, grimace, or growl when speaking openly and honestly with others. Your non-verbals (body language) are louder than words. This includes the rolling of eyes, sighs, and cries.

2. Don't belittle or condemn. Praise honest effort and always insert something positive into a tough conversation. Compassion wins the day!

3. Don't assume you know what the other person is thinking. Always give them the benefit of the doubt. Wouldn't you want them to do the same for you?

4. Don't exaggerate or tell "little white lies." Over time people will become suspicious of everything you say and remember—little lies turn into whoppers!

Be honest and loving in your words. Truth mixed with kindness builds trust, and trust is essential for success!

**RESOLVE DIFFERENCES
QUICKLY**

“Let sleeping dogs lie,” some say. Problem is, they eventually wake up and bite! Scripture has better advice: “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court.” (Matthew 5:23-25a). Please also note that it’s up to you to initiate resolution even if you never caused the problem.

We must be proactive, intentional, action-oriented! Determine within yourself now that you will resolve future conflicts ASAP! It’s okay to feel anger at being mistreated—that’s simply a natural reflex God put within all of us when injustice occurs.

Ephesians 4:26-27 confirms that anger in and of itself is not sinful, but also warns us to not give the devil a foothold by hanging on to it too long. For like concrete, anger can “harden” overnight and turn into sinful bitterness.

If you are a married man, understand that conflict prevents worship/connection with God. 1 Peter 3:7 advises us: “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.” You want God to hear your prayers? Get right with your wife!

Matthew 18:15-17 gives us a process for attempting peaceful resolution and restoration: “If a brother or sister sins, go and point out the fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

Bottom line? Conflicts that are allowed to fester will intensify and poison both you and your future. Resolve differences quickly!

**PRAY FOR PEACE AND
UNDERSTANDING**

In 1983, Open Doors called for seven years of prayer for the fall of the Iron Curtain and Communism. Exactly seven years later—December 1989—bulldozers started demolishing the Berlin wall.

The first multi-party elections were held in South Africa in 1994. Around the world, people prayed that the expected bloodbath would not happen. Three 40-day fasts were held before the elections, which turned out to be the most peaceful democratic elections in Africa—an internationally recognized miracle.

In 1995, intercessors in Yugoslavia united across denominational lines for five weeks of prayer. At the end of this time of prayer, the war in neighboring Bosnia was ended, and the peace accord signed in Dayton and Paris.

Some conflicts are so difficult that they can only be resolved by prayer. So pray diligently for peace and understanding. Conflicts tend to escalate over

time; prayer unwinds the tension and leads to resolution.

Jesus Christ prayed for our unity. I've often asked myself—were his words in John 17:11, 21, 22, 23 soaked in tears as he looked down over the centuries of time at the condition of the church? (“...so that they may be one as we are one...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...that they may be one as we are one...may they be brought to complete unity...”)

The apostle Paul also has much to share on this subject. After pleading with co-workers Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord he shares this exhortation: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (See Philippians 4:2-7.)

Pray diligently for peace and understanding.

**LIVE WITH PRAISE
AND THANKSGIVING**

Author Ann Voskamp in her book, *One Thousand Gifts*, writes about her struggle to live joyfully amid sin, sorrow and suffering. She invites us to embrace everyday blessings and engage in the transformative spiritual discipline of chronicling God's gifts. Embracing a posture of gratitude is both a life changer and difference maker in a world without peace.

Songwriter Matt Redman found inspiration in Psalm 103 when composing "10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)." We have so much to be grateful for, considering the superabundance of God's grace, his promises of a future, and his present goodness. Peace in our hearts equips us for peacemaking.

The Apostle Paul writes, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit,

singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:15-17).

We are “called to peace”—this should be our trademark. And thankfulness seems to be the key that unlocks the door to peacemaking. So focus on the positive. Name your blessings one by one. Rejoice. Worship. Be thankful. This will bring you closer to Christ and closeness to him will result in closeness to each other; for no one has time for fault-finding when focused on Christ.

I close by pointing you toward a message that has greatly challenged and impacted me since my teenage years: [*The Weapon of Rejoicing*](#) by Otto Koning (best known for his “Pineapple Story.”)

**SET A MODEL
FOR PEACE**

The Apostle Paul writes: “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:22-26).

We are to PURSUE peace. That doesn’t mean we give up after making one or two attempts. We ought to be bothered to our core when relationships are out of sorts. According to Hebrews, personal holiness seems to be tied to our peace with others—“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

How else do we set a model for peace? According to Paul, by having nothing to do with foolish and stupid arguments (I wonder what he would say about much of today's vicious banter on social media). Avoid discussions and debates that have the potential to divide. Dale Carnegie has said that we never win an argument. He says that you can't win an argument. If you lose it, you lose it, and if you win it, you still 'lose' it since you've lost any potential impact you may have had on that person. He who loses feels inferior; he will resent your triumph. Furthermore, as someone once said: "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."

Finally, focus on the truth rather than attack each other; assume the posture of a learner. Realize that breakdowns in the peace process are satanic; the devil is the only one who really wins; he uses conflict to promote his purposes.

I hope this has helped you process through your role in the art of peacemaking in your relationships, both in your organization and at home. If you have any questions or anything you would like me to cover in future blog posts or e-books, I would love to hear from you at luke@lukekuepfer.com!



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