

Life Group Preparation Notes:
Emotionally Healthy Relationships
Session 7 - Pre-Session Reading
Fight Cleanly

Most Christians we meet are poor at resolving conflict. There are at least two reasons for this: the first relates to wrong beliefs about peacemaking and the second relates to a lack of training and equipping in this area.

A tragically misinterpreted verse in the New Testament is Jesus' proclamation: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). Most people think that Jesus calls us in this verse to be pacifiers and appeasers who ensure that nobody gets upset. We are to keep the peace, ignoring difficult issues and problems, making sure things remain stable and serene.

When, out of fear, we avoid conflict and appease people, we are false peacemakers. For example:

Karl is upset about the behavior of his spouse who constantly comes home late after work. He says nothing. Why? He thinks he is being like Christ by not saying anything, although he does give her a cold shoulder. He is a false peacemaker.

Pam disagrees with her coworkers at lunch when they slander her boss. She is afraid to speak up. She goes along. *I don't want to kill the atmosphere by speaking up and disagreeing*, she thinks. She is a false peacemaker.

Bob goes to dinner with ten other people. He is tight financially, so he orders only a salad and appetizer. Meanwhile, the other nine order appetizers, steak, wine, and desserts. When the bill comes, someone says, "Let's divide up the bill equally. It will take forever to figure it out." Everyone agrees. Bob is dying on the inside but won't say anything. He is a false peacemaker.

Yolanda is engaged. She would like more time to rethink her decision but is afraid that her fiancé and his family will get angry. She goes through with the wedding. She is a false peacemaker.

Ellen loves her parents. They are both quite critical about how she raises her children.

Each holiday is filled with tension. Ellen doesn't say anything because she doesn't want to hurt their feelings. She is a false peacemaker.

Sharon thinks her boyfriend is irresponsible but feels bad for him. *He has had so much pain already in his life*, she thinks. *How can I add to that?* So she backs down from telling him the truth about the way his behavior is slowly killing their relationship. The relationship dies a slow death. She is a false peacemaker.

The problem with all these scenarios is that the way of true peace will never come through pretending what is wrong is right! True peacemakers love God, others, and themselves enough to disrupt false peace. . . . You can't have the true peace of Christ's kingdom with lies and pretense. They must be exposed to the light and replaced with the truth. This is the mature, loving thing to do.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus explains to us the characteristics we need to display if we are to engage in true peacemaking—poverty of spirit, meekness, purity of heart, mercy, etc. (Matthew 5:3–11). He also follows the call to true peacemaking by stating that persecution will follow for those of us who follow him in this.

Nonetheless, unresolved conflicts are one of the greatest tensions in Christians' lives today. Most of us hate them. We don't know what to do with them. Instead of risking any more broken relationships, we prefer to ignore the difficult issues and settle for a "false peace," hoping against hope they will somehow go away. They don't. And we all learn, sooner or later, that you can't build Christ's kingdom on lies and pretense. Only the truth will do.

Many of us believe loving well is learned automatically, that it is just a "feeling." We underestimate the depth of our bad habits and what is needed to sustain long-term, Christlike change in our relationships.

This belief led us, over twenty-one years ago, to begin learning from a variety of sources, gathering and creating tools, to help us as followers of Jesus obey the command to love well. We wanted to move people from defensiveness, reactivity, and fear to openness, empathy, and vulnerability.

Teaching people to fight cleanly became one of the most important skills we learned.

Taken from *Emotionally Healthy Relationships* by Peter L. and Geri Scazzero

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