

# Be happy: Be peacemakers

Message for Sunday, November 17, 2019  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:9

## Children's Message:

What game do you like to play? Let's say you're playing that game with some friends. You're all having fun, but then someone pushes another person, who falls down. That person jumps up and shoves the first person. All of a sudden, everyone stops playing the game, and they watch to see what happens next.

QUESTION: Is anyone having fun now? *Not likely!* Just think: two people can't get along, and it spoils the fun for everyone. No one is happy now, and people are sad.

I think this is why Jesus asks us to try to make peace, instead of fighting. That's a lot better way to live.

**Message:** "Be happy: Be peacemakers"  
How would you like to be known as a child of God? That is a gift which is given to everyone who puts their faith in Jesus and follows him.

**John 1:12, New Living Translation:**  
To all who believed [Jesus] and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

But there's more! You know the saying, "She's just like her mother." There was a similar way of saying things back in ancient Israel. Someone is called "son of ...." and that describes their character. For example, the two brothers, James and John, who were disciples of Jesus, were quick to judge and condemn others. They were called "sons of thunder" [Mark 3:17]. Barnabas, who accompanied Paul on some of his missionary journeys, was called "son of encouragement" [Acts 4:36].

So when Jesus says, "Happy are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God," he says that when you are a peacemaker, you are being just like your heavenly Father.

That is the verse we're looking at today. Let's read it together out loud:

Matthew 5:9:

"Happy are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Oh, one more thing: "peace" means much more than simply the absence of fighting. The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*. Shalom means the presence of good will, harmony, health, and justice. That's the biblical idea of peace.

Jesus captures this positive view of peace later on in his message that day.

**Matthew 5:43-45, New Living Translation:**

"You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Love your neighbour' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven."

Peace isn't just the absence of fighting and hate. Peace is complete when that negative is transformed into the positive: love. And did you catch where Jesus says you are "acting as true children of your Father in heaven"? Once again, we see that being a child of God is much more than putting our faith in Jesus. It means actually living his way.

Does everyone here love peace? Good! But that's not what Jesus is talking about. Jesus says it's the people who *make* peace are especially blessed.

I heard someone say, "If you can't be a peacemaker, then at least don't be a troublemaker." I suppose that's true, but it's a poor compromise. Much better to be someone who actively works for peace. Let's look at how we can do that.

## 1) Don't avoid conflict; run towards it

Let's face it. Conflict is unpleasant. We wish it would just go away. That's true, whether it's conflict you're personally involved in, or something where you're just an observer.

But conflict is like a fire: if you don't work to put it out, it keeps spreading. Our neighbour Don Campbell was telling me about someone who burned a tree stump to get rid of it. That person thought it was all over, and let the last of the embers in the ground burn out. But the next day, Don saw fire come up out of the ground about ten feet away, where the fire had spread underground through the roots.

Conflict never goes away by itself; it will keep growing unless you deal with it. Don't let that happen; try to make peace.

Look at these two things Jesus said.

**Mark 11:25, New Living Translation:**

“When you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too.”

**Matthew 5:23-24, Good News Bible:**

So if you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God.”

If someone has hurt you, forgive that person. If you're the one that caused the hurt, make peace with that person. It doesn't matter whether you caused the hurt or you received it. Either way, you take the initiative to make peace. And do you see where Jesus says to do this “at once.” Don't put it off. I hear people say, “It's her fault; it's up to her to come to me.” That isn't what Jesus tells us to do. That's the sign of a spiritually immature person.

Yes, dealing with conflict is unpleasant. But the longer you delay, it gets worse, not better. Don't avoid conflict; run towards it.

## 2) Try your very best to make peace

**Romans 12:18, Good News Bible:**

Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody.

This is what Justin Trudeau has been doing the last couple of weeks, as he meets with leaders of the other parties in the House of Commons, and with some of the provincial premiers. We should be praying for him, for all of them.

You have no control over, and no responsibility for what the other person says or does. Your job is to do your very best to make peace. Here are some ways.

### a) Attack the issue, not the person

**Ephesians 4:29, Good News Bible:**

Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed.

There's a big difference between saying, “You're a useless person; you never do what you say you will,” and “When you don't keep your word, I feel that I can't trust you.” Both criticize the other person, and it's painful to hear either of those comments. But the first one is condemnation, and is much more likely to result in an argument, than a civil conversation. Focus on the issue or the behaviour, not the person's character.

### b) Put yourself in the other person's place

**Philippians 2:4, Good News Bible:**

Look out for one another's interests, not just for your own.

It's natural to focus on my needs, my hurts. God says to do the opposite. As the old saying goes, “Walk a mile in their shoes.” When you understand another person, you're more than halfway to repairing that relationship.

Peter Arnett was a television reporter with CNN, and he tells this story.

I was in Israel, in a small town on the West Bank, when an explosion went off. Bodies were blown through the air. Everywhere I looked there were signs of death and destruction. The screams of the wounded seemed to be coming from every direction. A man came running up to me holding a bloodied little girl in his arms. He pleaded with me and said “Mister, I can't get her to a hospital! The Israeli troops have sealed off the area. No one can get in or out, but you're press. You can get through. Please, mister! Help me get her to a hospital. Please! If you don't help me, she's going to die!”

I put them in my car, got through the sealed area, and rushed to the hospital in Jerusalem. The whole time I was hurtling down the road to the city, the man was pleading from the backseat, calling out to me, “Can you go faster, mister? Can you go faster? I'm losing her... I'm losing her!”

When we finally got to the hospital, the girl was rushed to the operating room. We retreated to

the waiting area and sat on the bench. We just sat there in silence, too exhausted to even talk.

After a short while the doctor came out of the operating room and said to us solemnly, "She's dead."

The man collapsed in tears, and as I put his arms around him to comfort him I said, "I don't know what to say. I can't imagine what you must be going through. I've never lost a child."

The man looked at me in a startled manner and said, "Oh, mister! That Palestinian girl was not my daughter. I'm an Israeli settler. That Palestinian is not my child. But, mister, there comes a time when each of us must realize that every child, regardless of that child's background, is a daughter or a son. There must come a time when we realize that we are all family."<sup>1</sup>

Oh my! If all the people involved in the Jewish-Palestinian conflict had that attitude, what a change there would be in Israel today! In fact, if all the people in Stirling, in Canada, in the world had that attitude, what a change there would be! Put yourself in the other person's place.

Jesus was the master of this: feeling the pain of other people, and healing their brokenness. He did this to the extreme, by taking on himself our sin and guilt on the cross.

### 3) Have peace with God

You can make peace only if you have peace inside yourself. You can offer to others only what you yourself have.

I like what Rick Warren wrote about having peace with God:

I meet a lot of people who think they have peace with God, but really all they have is a cease-fire. They have a truce. And there's a big difference. They say, "God, you stay on your side of the fence and I'll stay on my side of the fence and never the twain shall meet. You stay up there in heaven and do your thing with the angels and let me run my own life. If you won't bother me I

won't bother you." That's no peace with God, folks. That's a truce. And it's not going to last.

You need the peace that Jesus gives.

Romans 5:1, Good News Bible:

Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Once you know that your sins are forgiven, once you know that God loves you just the way you are, once you know that God wants to work in your life to heal the hurts and the brokenness, *that's* where real peace comes from. And once you have that peace, you'll be able to share God's peace with others.

### Next Steps:

- Pray: Make peace with God. Confess that you've done wrong; ask God to forgive you; surrender your life to Jesus, to follow him.
- Be a person of peace: do everything possible to live at peace with others.
- Be a peacemaker. Bring healing to relationships.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Tony Campolo's *Let Me Tell You a Story*, page 120.