

Study for Sermon on January 23, 2022



*So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. **Matthew 5:23-24***

Getting Started

Peacemaking involves restoring damaged relationships and negotiating just agreements. When we forgive others as Jesus has forgiven us and seek solutions that satisfy the interests of others as well as our own, the door is opened to reconciliation and peace.

Group Discussion

FORGIVE AS GOD FORGAVE YOU

Forgiveness is the heart of the gospel. Through our faith in Jesus, we are a forgiven people. Scripture commands us to forgive others in the same way we have been forgiven. Some of us confuse forgiveness with forgetting, or with feeling good about the wrongdoer. Real forgiveness is a choice, a decision made in gratitude for the forgiveness we have received. When we forgive someone, we release them from liability for the sins they committed against us. Forgiveness is hard and requires that we rely on God's strength, not our own.

DISCUSS

- Do Christians in your community practice godly forgiveness? What are some of the ways in which fellow-believers misunderstand forgiveness? How can you help them change?

- Make a list of the sins for which God has forgiven you. Be specific. Thank God for his forgiveness and for the changes he is helping you to make. Then, the next time someone sins against you, recall this list and ask, "How do my sins – for which I've been forgiven – compare with the sins committed against me?" The more we appreciate the forgiveness we've received, the readier we become to forgive others.

LOOK ALSO TO THE INTEREST OF OTHERS

Conflict narrows our focus, leading us to view matters in absolute terms – I’m right and she’s wrong; I want what is good, so she must want what is bad. Life is seldom this black and white and such thinking can betray a self-focus that has tipped into idolatry. Paul’s counsel in Philippians 2 – to be concerned not only for our own interests, but also for the interests of others – is an antidote for hearts that have become hardened. The PAUSE Principle enables us to negotiate substantive disagreements in a way that takes the concerns of all into account. The key is understanding “interests” and negotiating in a cooperative manner. Cooperative negotiation works best when relationships are strong and itself is a tool in moving us toward reconciliation.

DISCUSS

- Do you negotiate competitively or cooperatively? What is the relationship between your preferred negotiation style and where you place yourself on the Slippery Slope?
- Recall a conflict in which your emotions impacted the way you negotiated. What was the result? What would you do differently next time?
- Are reconciling personal issues and negotiating substantive disagreements thought of as distinct where you live? For example, can you be relationally reconciled with someone and openly disagree at the same time? Or, are disagreements hidden beneath the surface to promote harmony? What does your answer tell you about priorities in your community? In what ways are they biblical? Unbiblical?
- The heart of negotiating cooperatively is identifying “interests” and using them to create different solutions. Have you ever experienced this kind of problem solving?

OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD

Sometimes, nothing seems to work. We pray faithfully, take personal responsibility, speak restoratively, consider the interests of others and...still there is no peace. As Christians, we know this never means that God is not working, or that he doesn't hear our prayers. We must continue to trust him with the timing and not become discouraged. Waiting on God should never be passive. We are to watch what we say. We can seek the wisdom of godly advisors. We must continue to do what is right. We need to remember that it is God's job to change hearts, not ours. And we can deploy the "ultimate" weapon – a deliberate, focused love that meets the needs of enemies. In doing so, we imitate Jesus himself, who rescued us "while we were yet sinners."

DISCUSS

- How do Christians in your community respond to enemies? How do you respond? Is your response godly?
- Recall a time when you, or someone you know or know about, "overcame evil with good." What did they do that helped win over their enemy?
- Is there a conflict in which you are involved that appears incapable of being resolved? How have you responded? What can you do to actively wait on God? In particular, what would it look like for you to deploy deliberate, focused love?

Next Steps

- Take some time praying for one another.
- What relationships are in need of repair? How can you better use the principles of reconciliation in your relationships?
- Find ways to get involved in your church community.
- Read and study God's Word and listen to what it has to say about Peacemaking.

This Study Guide was adapted from

<https://rw360.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Peacemaker-Study-Guide.docx>