

BEING A PEACEMAKER IN THE WORKPLACE

A Christaf Seminar facilitated by Dr Nola Passmore

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SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

The theme of peace is a recurrent one in the Bible, but what does it mean to be a peacemaker in the workplace? The following scriptures may shed some light on it.

Matt 5:9 – Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Heb 12:14 – Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness, no-one will see the Lord.

Rom 12:18 – If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

That Romans verse is in the middle of a whole section on dealing with others (vv. 9-21) – Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; honour one another above yourselves; share with God's people who are in need; practice hospitality; bless those who persecute you; live in harmony with one another; do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position; do not repay anyone evil for evil; do not take revenge; if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

James 3:17-18 – But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

1 Peter 3:8-12 – ... live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For 'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it ... ' (Also Ps 34:12-16)

Ps 34:14 – Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

One of the things that strikes me about those verses is that **being a peacemaker is an active rather than a passive act**. We are to make peace, make every effort to live in peace, sow the seeds of peace, seek peace and pursue it.

WHAT SITUATIONS IN THE UNIVERSITY SETTING REQUIRE PEACEMAKING?

- Conflicts between you and other colleagues.
- Conflicts between you and students.
- Conflicts between other colleagues.
- Conflicts between students.
- Conflicts in the hierarchy (e.g., between management and employees)
- Conflicts between departments or sections.
- Any others?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PEACEMAKER IN THE WORKPLACE?

What it is not

- It's not sweeping aside things that need to be discussed – that would only bring a false peace. To use a double negative, it's not the same as “not wanting to rock the boat”.
- It's not taking sides or showing favouritism, though that doesn't mean that all sides of an argument are equally valid.
- It's not sticking your nose into other people's business when you're not part of the problem or solution.

What it is

- Speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15). Both truth and love are needed in balance. Which side do you tend to err on?
- Picking your battles – knowing which ones you should fight and which ones should be left to God. For example, is it something we're directly involved in? If not, would our involvement help those who feel they have no voice? Are we in a position where we might be able to influence outcomes?
- Respecting and valuing each person and genuinely wanting to resolve a conflict.
- Impartial, but not compromising good. Sometimes compromises are necessary, but know what you can't compromise. Sometimes when we stand up for godly principles, we will ruffle some feathers. However, if we're communicating in an appropriate way and others choose to react, that's between them and God. Remember again Rom 12:18 – “... as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone”.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO BE PEACEMAKERS IN THE WORKPLACE?

- Pray first. Sometimes we can step into a situation before we've sought God or thought it through. There are also times when we may be under spiritual attack and therefore spiritual warfare and intercession are needed before we proceed. Always seek God first, as He's the one who gives peace (e.g., Phil 4:6-7). Pray that He'll give you wisdom and discernment (James 1:5).
- If words or actions are against you, think before responding. Never respond in anger. Perhaps you misunderstood. Clarify.
- Affirm the person first. Don't just focus on the negative.
- Deal with facts. Don't assume something you've heard second-hand is true without first checking it out.
- Use "I" statements rather than "you" statements. For example, instead of saying "You've let down the whole team by not getting your part of the report done in time", you could say "When I didn't have everything I needed in order to complete the report, I felt frustrated because I couldn't build a strong case for our argument to management".
- Build up your credentials through genuine relationships and a good track record. If you're seen as someone who is fair, just, not prone to gossip etc, both sides will be willing to come to you.
- If it's just between you and another person, let them know that you want to restore the relationship.
- Be humble and teachable.
- If you've been in the wrong, even in a small matter, apologise.
- Be consistent in your witness, not hypocritical. Remember that our actions usually speak louder than our words.
- Remember that peace is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), so rely on the Holy Spirit. If we don't have that peace, we can't pass it on to others.
- Build bridges rather than burning them. You never know when you may need to work with that person later or you may have an opportunity down the track to share with them.
- Try to understand where other people are coming from. What made them the way they are? Ask God to help you see them as He sees them. Pray for them. I remember hearing about a book once called "Hurt people hurt people" and that seems to make sense.

- Again, remember that it says in Rom 12:18, “as far as it depends on you”. There may be some who will resist all of your attempts at peace. Still pray that the God of peace will speak to them.
- Show that you’re willing to get your hands dirty and help in a practical way.
- Seek wise counsel.
- Sometimes a professional mediator might be needed.
- Hold your tongue.
- What happens when we make a mess of it? Confess it to God, ask for His help, apologise to the other person if relevant, and then don’t keep condemning yourself. No-one’s perfect. Ask God to help you improve in this area.
- So does all this sound easy? It’s not, so I’ll end with the first point in the list – we really need to pray.