

Sermon – Peace
Sunday July 23, 2023

Raise your hand if there's someone in your life right now who's difficult to deal with?

(Don't look at them. Just look straight ahead and raise your hand.)

Maybe you're a parent and you're having a difficult time with your kids. They're throwing tantrums and being rude. And when you try to talk to them, they give you attitude.

Maybe you're having a difficult time with your parents. It feels like they're always lecturing you and telling you what to do. You wish you could talk to them but they don't seem to listen.

Maybe you're having a difficult time with your spouse. They slack and shirk their responsibilities. They nag and complain about your habits. When you try to talk, they bring up the past and you end up in a big fight.

Maybe you're having a difficult time with someone at work. Maybe you have a colleague who's not pulling their weight and leaves you to pick up the slack. Maybe you have a boss who hasn't given you the promotion you deserve.

Maybe you're having a difficult time with a friend. They're rude and inconsiderate. They've hurt you and disrespected you.

How many of you know that relationships are hard? Why is that? It's because people are messy! People have different values, different personalities, different perspectives, different ways of doing things.

It's frustrating because as much as you might try, here's the thing: you can't change people. Maybe for some of you right now, it feels like it's hard work and you're emotionally drained. And whenever you think about this person, you get triggered.

What do you do when there's someone in your life who's difficult to deal with?

We're in a series called *Marks of a Flourishing Life: Fruit that Nourishes Relationships*. Last week, Bethany preached on Joy. How many of you were blessed by her message?

Our current sermon series is on the fruit of the spirit. Now when we give our lives to Jesus, the Holy Spirit dwells in our heart. He produces God's character in us. The Bible calls it the fruit of the spirit. The fruit of the spirit consists of nine virtues that express God's loving character. The fruit of the spirit is described in Galatians 5.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (Galatians 5:22-26)

Each Sunday, we'll be unpacking each virtue and learning how to cultivate them in our lives. Today we're looking at the fruit of peace. What I want to do today is look at What is peace? How do we experience peace into our relationships?

First, What is peace?

When we think about peace, we normally think about it in individualistic ways. We think about serenity and peace of mind. We think about a life free from worry.

When we think about peace, we also think about it in negative terms. We think about peace as the absence of war. It's when there's no more conflict and tension.

But the Bible rarely describes peace in these ways.

The Bible rarely describes peace in an individualistic way. Biblical peace is broader and more comprehensive, it's experienced in the context of relationships.

The Bible also doesn't describe peace primarily in negative terms. Biblical peace is primarily described in positive terms. Peace isn't just the absence of certain things; it's the presence of certain things. **Peace is God's wholeness and healing that infuses all our relationships.**

The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*.

- Shalom or peace describes the world as it's meant to be.
- It's what happens when relationships flourish.
- It's what happens when we're living the way we were designed to live.

The Bible opens with peace in the Garden of Eden. And it closes with peace in the New Heavens and the New Earth. Jesus, the Prince of Peace came to establish this peace.

Peace is God's wholeness and healing that infuses all relationships. Now let's break down this definition.

Peace is about God's wholeness and healing. That's why Jesus' miracles were more than just a display of his power. They were signs of the wholeness and healing in God's kingdom.

- Jesus brought wholeness to those who were broken.
- Jesus brought healing to those who were sick.
- That's why after healing them, Jesus would say, Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.

God's peace is the wholeness and healing in God's kingdom.

God's peace also infuses our relationships because peace is about right relationships. First, it's about right relationship with God – this is our vertical relationship.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making *peace* through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:19-20)

Humanity had broken their relationship with God through their sin. But God re-establishes peace through the reconciling work of Jesus on the cross.

This word *reconcile* is an important word. It's actually a financial term that describes the exchange of money. It's like going to the bank to change your Canadian money into foreign currency.

But when God reconciles people to himself, he's not changing money. He's changing the relationship – he's changing the relationship from hostility to friendship.

So peace is about right relationship with God. But peace is also about right relationship with others – these are our horizontal relationships.

For he himself is our *peace*, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making *peace*,¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (Ephesians 2:14-16)

Who did Paul write this letter to? He wrote it to Jewish Christians in Ephesus. Now Jews hated Gentiles. They would never associate with them because they considered them to be unclean dogs.

So Paul chooses a powerful image to describe this relationship. What's the image he uses? It's a wall. Now what does a wall do? It keeps enemies away, it separates, it divides. This was the relationship between Jews and Gentiles.

But all this changes because of the cross. Why? Because on the cross, Jesus destroys that wall. He tears down the hostility. He ends the division.

How does he do that? He does that by becoming our peace. He makes peace by becoming the bridge that makes the two groups one.

Now what does a bridge do? A bridge connects, it joins, it makes it possible for people to come together.

Jesus makes peace so that people can come together. This means that not only are we reconciled to our Heavenly Father, we're also reconciled to each other through Jesus.

Now why is this important? It's important because **Just as God has made peace with you, he wants you to make peace with others.** Just as God has forgiven you, he wants you to forgive others. Just as God has loved you, he wants you to love others. This is what Paul calls our ministry of reconciliation.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

Do you remember the word reconcile? It means making an exchange; changing a relationship from hostility to friendship. And just as God has done this in his relationship with you, he wants you to do this in your relationship with others.

This is your calling. You're called to tear down walls. You're called to build bridges. You're called to bring God's peace. That's why in his sermon on the mount, Jesus says:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (Matthew 5:9)

Notice who Jesus doesn't call to be peacemakers. He doesn't call kings or politicians. He doesn't call lawyers or Nobel Peace Prize winners. He doesn't call the United Nations peacekeeping force.

Who does Jesus call to bring peace? He calls the children of God. He calls you and he calls me. Why?

- Because only God's children know what it's like to be forgiven by a loving heavenly Father.
- Only God's children know what it cost Jesus to go to the cross.
- Only God's children know the joy of being a beloved child of God.

That's why God calls you to make peace in your relationships. Because just as God has made peace with you, he wants you to make peace with others.

That means that wherever marriages are strained, wherever relationships are broken – your job is to bring God's healing. Your job is to bring God's peace.

But how do you do that?

The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans chapter 12. But before I read the passage, I want to warn you - these instructions are really hard. You're going to hear them and think they don't apply to you.

But I want you to think of the person you're struggling with right now. Picture them in your mind's eye. Now listen to what Paul is telling you to do:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse... ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another... ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil... ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at *peace* with everyone.

(Romans 12:14, 16-18)

A few years ago, I took my two girls biking in the neighbourhood. At one point, I looked ahead and saw a car racing down the street, it was just about to hit my girls. So I yelled for my girls to stop. And they did - just in time.

The car blew right by the stop sign and missed hitting them by inches. The driver was texting on his phone.

I was furious! So I rode after the driver who was now waiting at a red light and I knocked on his window. He looked up at me, but instead of looking apologetic or saying sorry, do you know what he did? He swore at me; then he gave me the finger! Then he drove through the red light, made a U-turn and tried to get away from me.

So what did I do? I prayed for him. Then I shared the gospel and he accepted Christ. Just kidding, I didn't do that. I actually chased after him on my bike!

Now before you judge me, remember, this guy broke at least 4 traffic laws, he was texting and driving, he narrowly missed hitting my two girls – and he had the nerve to get mad at me! Who's wrong here? He was. And who was right? I was.

How many of you can relate? Maybe you've never chased down a car on your bike, but how many of you have been in a situation where you were right and someone was wrong? And not only that, but the person who was wrong got mad at you. It makes you want to lose it because after all, you're the one who's right.

But here's the thing, **Jesus doesn't tell us to be right, he tells us to be loving.** Jesus didn't say the world will know us by how right we are. He says the world will know us by our... what? By your love.

You see, the problem with being right is that it comes with a cost. It hardens your heart, it puts up walls, it destroys relationships. It will even make you justify bad behaviour – like chasing down a car on your bike.

Maybe some of you can relate. You've held on to your 'rightness' so long your heart hardened. You find it hard to trust others and develop close friendships. You've closed your heart off because you don't want to get hurt again.

That's why Jesus doesn't tell us to be right, he tells us to be loving. In the passage we just read, Paul says: **as far as it depends on you, live at *peace* with everyone.**

So how do you do that?

- Maybe someone has been rude to you.
- Maybe someone has hurt you.
- Maybe someone has offended you.

How do you live at peace with them? Here are three suggestions.

First, **Be curious.**

Author Marcus Warner says: "One of the best ways to remain relational is to use these words to start a sentence: I'm curious. Because curiosity is a clear sign that you are in relational mode. When your relational circuits are on, your curiosity about life and people kicks in. When your circuits are off, you stop thinking relationally and only see problems. Being curious about something can help you remain relational."

The Apostle James said it like this.

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. (James 1:19-20)

When someone has wronged you, what's your natural response?

You're quick to judge, quick to make assumptions, quick to correct, quick to criticize, quick to blame, quick to interrupt, quick to shut down, quick to get angry.

But what does James say to do? He says, be quick to listen. In other words, be curious. Because when you're curious, you listen to understand, you listen to learn, you listen to test your assumptions, you listen to see if there's another perspective you're not aware of.

So instead of being quick to judge, be quick to listen. Be curious. Say, I'm curious, is there something more going on here? Is there something I'm not aware of? Is there something I'm contributing to this?

Judging puts up walls but being curious builds a bridge.

The second thing you can do is **Be gracious.**

In psychology, there's something called the Fundamental Attribution Error. That's when you attribute someone else's mistakes to their character but you attribute your own mistakes to your circumstances.

For example, let's say someone shows up late to a meeting - what's your first thought? I can't believe how rude this guy is! He's so irresponsible, he's so disrespectful of my time.

But let's say you show up late to a meeting. What do you tell yourself then? You say, Well, I'm late because I was stuck in traffic, there was a major accident on the road. I would have been on time because that's the kind of person I am. But I was late because of my circumstances.

You see - you attribute someone else's mistakes to their character but you attribute your own mistakes to your circumstances. You give others very little grace for their mistakes but you give yourself a lot of grace for yours.

That's why Paul says,

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. (Ephesians 4:2, NLT)

You and I are good at making allowance for our own faults. Why? Because you know how your story and your circumstances have affected you. So Paul is simply saying, You make allowance for your own faults because you know your story and your circumstances. In the same way, make allowance for the faults of others. Just be gracious. Recognize they have a story too, recognize they have circumstances that affect them too.

These past few years have been hard. Maybe you've had losses, mental health challenges and work and family challenges. You've struggled to keep it together and you've been leaking on others. But you know you're a good person. You know you're trying. It's just been really hard.

In the same way, is it possible that the person you're struggling with right now is also going through a hard time? Could their struggles be causing them to leak on you?

So can you be gracious? Can you give them the benefit of the doubt? Can you make allowance for their faults?

The third thing you can do is **Be the Bigger Person**.

Sometimes when someone wrongs me or criticizes me, it can be easy to remember it and let the resentment fester.

But the Bible shows us another way. The writer of Proverbs says:

**A person's wisdom yields patience;
it is to one's glory to overlook an offense. (Proverbs 19:11)**

What does it mean to overlook an offense? To overlook an offense doesn't mean you condone their actions. It doesn't mean you pretend it didn't happen. To overlook an offense means you make a conscious decision to let it go. You choose to be the bigger person.

A few years ago, Jo was writing Christmas cards. She has a list of like 300 people she writes cards to and I happened to see that list. And I was surprised by the name of one couple that was on that list.

It was a couple we had helped out and supported. But they decided to end the relationship and said some not so nice things about me.

So I asked Jo, Why are you writing them a card? And she said, I just thought I'd send them a Christmas card and let them know we're thinking of them. Then I said, Do you remember how they left? Do you remember what they said about me? And she said, Of course I do, but it's Christmas.

So then I said, I don't think you should send them a card. Then she says, I think I should. This went back and forth for awhile. Finally Jo just said I'm going to send the card. And because I'm the spiritual leader of our family, I let her.

When I asked her later why she had to write the card despite everything they had done, do you know what she said? She said, I know the kind of person I want to be and if they choose to behave that way, that's their business. I'm still going to be the person I want to be.

Here's the thing: you can't control what other people do. But do you know what you can control? How you respond.

as far as it depends on *you*, live at peace with *everyone*

Now who does everyone include? Does everyone include only the people you like? Does everyone include only the people who are kind? Does everyone include only the people you get along with?

Here's an interesting fact. In the original Greek, do you know what the word everyone means? Write this down if you're taking notes... It means everyone.

- Everyone includes the person you're not talking to right now.
- Everyone includes the person who said things about you behind your back.
- Everyone includes the person who's ghosting you with no explanation.
- Everyone includes the person who hurt you.
- Everyone includes the friend who didn't stand up for you.
- Everyone includes the boss who doesn't acknowledge your work.
- Everyone includes the parent who didn't give you what you needed growing up.
- Everyone includes the spouse who broke your heart.

as far as it depends on you, live at peace with *everyone*.

Who is someone you're not at peace with right now?

- Maybe it's a family member who's hurting you.
- Maybe it's a friend who's annoying you.
- Maybe it's a colleague who's disrespecting you.

As far as it depends on you, how can you live at peace with them? This doesn't mean you need to reconcile with that person if they're not willing. Because it takes two to reconcile. But how many does it take to forgive?

One.

- It takes one to forgive.
- It takes one to be kind.
- It takes one to admit they're wrong.
- It takes one to keep praying.
- It takes one to not give up on the relationship.
- It takes one to reach out.
- It takes one to say I'm sorry.

So you be that one. You be the bigger person.

as far as it depends on *you*, live at peace with everyone.

Now I'm not saying this is easy. Trust me – I know relationships can be painful and complicated. When you get hurt, perhaps time and time again, your instinct is to protect yourself. You think, They don't deserve a second chance. Why should I risk getting hurt again?

But think about this.

- Do you realize that in your relationship with God, you've hurt him over and over again?
- Do you realize that you don't deserve a second chance?
- Do you realize that God could have given up on you?
- Do you realize that you are totally in the wrong and God is totally in the right?
- And despite all that, what did God do for you?

He sent his Son Jesus into the world not to condemn you, but to save you. He loved us while we were still sinners. He suffered and died for us on the cross. Why? So that he could forgive you, so that he could love you, so that he could make peace with you.

And in the same way God has made peace with you, he wants you to make peace with others. Jesus doesn't tell you to be right, he tells you to be loving. So as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Let's pray.