

INTRODUCTION

Last week I mentioned the humorous Burma Shave signs, and someone sent me a list of other funny signs. Here's a few that might make you smile:

1. Sign over a Podiatrist's office: Time wounds all heels.
2. Sign on a maternity room door: Push! Push! Push!
3. Sign on a dog owner's fence: Salesmen welcome! Dog food is expensive.
4. Sign at a propane filling station: Thank heaven for little grills.
5. Sign in the front yard of a funeral home: Drive Carefully. We'll wait.
6. Sign in a Veterinarian's waiting room: Be back in 5 minutes. Sit! Stay!

Every morning, to this day, an Orthodox Jewish man will say a prayer where he uses the word "blessed" nine times. The Hebrew/Aramaic word for blessed is pronounced "ah-she-RAY-nu." The word literally means "life is enriched." Jesus might have been copying this custom, because in the beatitudes, He said "blessed" exactly nine times. If you want your life to be enriched, if you need personal, spiritual refreshing, then you should embrace the attitudes Jesus described in these verses.

Let's look at our REFRESH memory verse from Acts 3:19, "Repent, then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." Repent means to "change your attitude." We've learned during this series that you can't change other people, and you may not be able to change your circumstances, but you can always change your attitude. Now let's read the next beatitude found in Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God."

These beatitudes are like steps on a ladder. Jesus gives them in a certain sequence, and if you want to experience the fullness of blessing you must follow them in the same order. Let's review these steps on a ladder. Step one is to Realize that I'm not God. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Step two is Earnestly believe that God exists and that I matter to Him. That's based on "Blessed are those who mourn." The next beatitude says, "Blessed are the meek" and that step is Fully submit my life and will to Christ's control. Next Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." Step four is to Receive God's righteousness as a gift of grace. Step five is Extend Forgiveness to those who have hurt me, based upon "Blessed are the merciful." Step six is Seek Purity over perfection based on "Blessed are the pure in heart." Step seven based on "Blessed are the peacemakers" is to Help Others Find Peace with God. And the Refreshing Attitude we must embrace is: I'll build bridges not walls! As you can see, these seven steps spell the word REFRESH.

Are you a Peace-faker?

Next week we're going to talk about what you will experience when you reach the top of the ladder—the last beatitude. But in this message, let's consider what it means to be a peacemaker. Not everyone is a peacemaker. Are you a peace-faker? A peace-faker seeks peace at any price, which is not peace at all. A peace-faker mistakes the absence of conflict for peace, thus they avoid conflict at all costs—even at the cost of sacrificing truth. Or if there is conflict, they never

close the loop; and what they call peace is just a pause in the ongoing, unsettled conflict. The prophet Ezekiel described them this way, "They lead my people astray saying, 'peace,' when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash." (Ezekiel 13:10). A peace-faker builds walls instead of bridges.

Are you Peace-breaker?

Or maybe you are a peace-breaker. This is the opposite of a peace-faker, because a peace-breaker is constantly causing conflict. A peace-breaker builds walls instead of bridges. They are argumentative and abrasive. They aren't happy unless everyone else is unhappy. They are the kind of people who disagree simply "for the sake of argument." They are trouble-makers who leave a trail of wounded people in their wake. Sometimes peace breakers ruin the sweet unity of the Spirit in a church. Paul wrote to Titus and told him to "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him." (Titus 3:10)

Are you a Peace-maker?

Instead of being a peace-faker or a peace-breaker, you should be a peace-maker. A peacemaker builds bridges instead of walls. When most people first hear the word peacemaker, they think Jesus must have been talking about a person who brokers a peace treaty between two warring nations. But that isn't what Jesus had in mind here. A desire for world peace is a noble goal and a great answer for a beauty contest participant. But Jesus said there will always be wars and rumors of wars.

Is world peace even possible? It hasn't been possible for much of human history. Historian Will Durant pointed out that in over 4,000 years of recorded human history there have only been about 286 years of peace. And during that same period he estimates there have been over 8,000 peace treaties made and broken. Someone said "Peace is merely that brief glorious moment in history when everyone stops to reload."

While world peace may be beyond our scope, it is possible to experience *personal* peace. And we can help others experience peace. So what is a peacemaker? Let me share with you three indistinguishable marks of a peacemaker.

1. A PEACEMAKER ENJOYS PEACE WITH GOD

The most important peace in the universe is being at peace with God. The Bible says, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1) The Bible teaches that because we are sinners, we are alienated from God—enemies of God. But God so loved the world that He gave His son Jesus to bring us a way to find peace with Him. That's why the angels announced at Jesus' birth, "Peace on earth, good will toward men." Jesus didn't come to usher in an age of peace between nations. In fact He said, "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division." (Luke 12:51) The truth about Jesus sometimes divides nations and families.

The peace that Jesus came to bring is both peace with God, and then an inner peace, a peace that

passes all understanding. That's why we can enjoy peace with God. Once you are a child of God you don't have to worry or fret about what may happen in this life or the next. You can live in peace!

Sometimes people ask a dying person, "Have you made your peace with God?" I know they mean well, but you and I cannot make peace with God. We don't have to make peace with God, because Jesus already made it. We only have to accept His terms of peace. Jesus is the world's greatest peacemaker. The Bible says, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus], and through him to reconcile to himself all things...by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." (Colossians 1:19-20)

It's good to sing the song that says, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin in me." Before you can BE a peacemaker, you must accept the peace God offered you through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

2. A PEACEMAKER ENDEAVORS TO MEND BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

When Jesus came preaching He claimed to fulfill the prophecy found in Isaiah 61. "The Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted." (Isaiah 61:1) Jesus came as a peacemaker, to bind up broken hearts and relationships. As the followers of Jesus, we will endeavor to mend broken relationships as well. The key word is *endeavor*, because it isn't always possible. As you examine your personal relationships, are you building bridges of peace or building walls of separation? When it comes to mending broken relationships, we have two jobs as peacemakers:

Job 1: Keeping the peace in my relationships

The Bible says, "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." (Romans 14:19) Life is all about relationships and we often experience conflict in relationships. Conflicts are inevitable, so the only variable is HOW we deal with conflict. There was conflict between the first two brothers, Cain and Abel, and since that time there has been fighting and bickering at every level of society. It's widely known that Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Lady Astor engaged in a public feud. At one gathering Lady Astor said, "Mr. Churchill, you are despicably drunk!" He said, "You're right. And you are despicably ugly. But in the morning, I will be sober." At another time Lady Astor said, "Mr. Churchill if you were my husband I'd put poison in your tea." To which Churchill replied, "Indeed. And if you were my wife, I'd gladly drink it!"

We can laugh at other people's conflicts, but there's nothing funny when we are going through the pain of conflict. In Matthew 18 Jesus gives a formula for resolving personal conflict. He says if someone has offended you, the first step is to go them personally and seek to make peace in your relationship. If he listens to you, then you have won your brother over. If that step fails, then take a couple of trusted friends with you who will try to help you make peace with your friend. Jesus said that if those first two steps fail, only then should the issue be brought before the church. But where most people fail in this process is when they tell others before confronting their friend about the conflict. If someone has offended you and you go tell another person

before lovingly confronting the offending party, then you have sinned against them, and you need to seek their forgiveness for disrupting God's peace process.

There was a man named Francis, born in the Italian village of Assisi in 1182. He grew up in a wealthy family and enjoyed all the luxuries of wealth and position. One day he was confronted by a beggar who had no food, and God used this experience to change Francis' heart. God changed him from a self-centered indulgent boy to a pious follower of Jesus Christ. He went into the ministry only to face scorn and ridicule from his family and friends. For two years he lived in a cave in the forest just praying and reading God's Word. During this time he developed a special relationship with the birds and creatures of the forest. That's why St. Francis is often called the patron saint of pets. He lived a life of poverty and service to others. Others soon followed and today there are thousands of Franciscans who model their lives after this simple man of God. St. Francis was a peacemaker, as you can tell from the words of his famous prayer: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; when there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand, to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying (to ourselves) that we are born to eternal life." Would you make that the prayer of your heart?

Job 2: Helping others keep the peace

Once we have made peace in our relationships, God calls us to broker peace between others who are in conflict. When you sow seeds of peace, you reap a good harvest. The Bible says, "Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." (James 3:18) When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, he mentioned two women by name who were in conflict. He wrote, "I plead with you Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in Lord." (Euodia means "good journey" and Syntyche means "happy experience" but neither of them were living up to their names. They were making it a long unhappy trip for everyone! Then Paul asks the pastor to referee between them.) "Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel." (Philippians 4:2-3) That's what God call us to do. Sometimes we need to help people who are going through times of personal conflict.

One of the greatest stories in the Bible about making peace is tucked away in the pages of the Old Testament. In I Samuel 25 we meet a brilliant woman named Abigail. Abigail was married to a hothead named Nabal. David (who was not yet king) was fleeing from Saul. One day David's men politely asked Nabal to share some food with them, but Nabal broke every rule of etiquette and refused them. To make matters worse, he even insulted David. When David heard about Nabal's behavior he was enraged. He said, "Strap on your swords! By morning, Nabal and his mangy pack of dogs will be dead meat. Let's ride!" He took 400 heavily armed soldiers and they headed off to lay a world of hurt on Nabal and his men.

While David was on the way, somebody told Abigail what was going on. Now if she had been a lesser woman, she might have said, "I'm not going to interfere. Let Nabal get what's coming to him." But instead, she sprang into action like Wonder Woman. Within hours Abigail gathered

200 loaves of bread along with wine, roasted grain, raisin cakes and 200 packs of fig newtons.

Then, without telling Nabal, she rode out with the food to intercept David and his men. When she met them, she got off her donkey and fell on her face before David and said, "My master, let me take the blame. My husband's name is Nabal, and you know that means 'fool.' I admit most of the time he acts like a fool. But please don't be angry at him. It's my fault. If I had been there, I would have given you food. [Peacemakers aren't afraid to absorb the blame] Here, please take all this food as my peace gift to you. I believe God lives in you and I believe one day you will be king of Israel."

Abigail played the role of a peacemaker between Nabal and David. Then David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands...Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request." (I Samuel 25:32-33; 35) Not long after that, Nabal died of a heart attack. David remembered the wisdom and peacemaking skills of Abigail and said, "That's the kind of woman I'd like to marry!" So he sent for her. Abigail gladly hopped on the first donkey leaving town and joined David and became his wife.

What's the moral of that story? Ladies, even if you're married to a fool, you can still become a queen? No, the lesson is those who sow peace will reap a harvest of righteousness. Do you know two people in conflict who need you to be an umpire and stand in the gap between them? Blessed are the peacemakers.

3. A PEACEMAKER ENCOURAGES OTHERS TO FIND PEACE WITH GOD

The best way to be a peacemaker is to introduce people to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. That's what God has called us to do. The Bible says, "He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." (II Corinthians 5:19-20) God didn't call us to be diplomats; He calls us to be ambassadors. An ambassador is someone who represents a king or government while living in another land. As ambassadors for Christ, we live in this world, but our citizenship is in heaven. Our job is to represent our King and tell men, women, boys and girls how they can be reconciled with God. We must tell them they can have peace with God.

We don't have to preach sermons; we just simply have to share the story of how we came to enjoy peace with God. The world is full of people who need to hear your story, and if you don't tell them who will? You are the only Bible some people will ever read. You can reach people who will never come within a hundred yards of our church, or would never watch a religious television show—but they'll sit down and listen to your story.

That's what God wants you to be doing until He takes you to heaven. If going to heaven was all there was to the Christian life, then God would just kill all of us as soon as we are saved and that would settle it. But God has left me and you here for a purpose. Think about it. There are only two things you can do here that you *can't* do in heaven. You can pray here, and you can pray in

heaven. You can sing and worship here and you can sing and worship in heaven. You can sleep, eat, relax, and have fun in heaven. But I can think of only two things you can do here that you won't be able to do in heaven. The first is you won't be able to sin in heaven. Heaven is a perfect place, where there will be no sin. The other thing you can't do in heaven is to tell others about how to know Jesus. Nobody there will need to know. So God left you here for a purpose—to do what you can't do in heaven. Do you think He left you here to sin? Nope. He left us here to tell others how to have peace with God! When we get to heaven I think God will say, "Great! I'm SO glad you're here. Did you bring anybody with you?"

CONCLUSION

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." To me, being a peacemaker doesn't make you a child of God—you can't earn that status. You can only be born (or literally born again) into God's family. Jesus meant when you are a child of God you will be a peacemaker!

Don't we feel good when our children perform well? We put bumper stickers on our car proclaiming "My child is in the National Honor Society." We put our kids' pictures on our refrigerator when they win an award or competition. We are so proud of them when they do well. What is it that makes our Heavenly Father most proud of us? I believe it's when we share the good news with someone about how they can have peace with God. That is the main job of a peacemaker. And when we do that, God says, "That's beautiful." The Bible says, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation." (Isaiah 52:7)

Not long ago I heard Randy Newton, a former IMB missionary to Brazil, tell an amazing story. He told about a Brazilian woman who wasn't a Christian, but she knew there was a God. One year on her birthday this woman looked up at the sky and said, "Dear God, please send someone to tell me how to know you!" But that year passed and nobody came. Each year, she would pray the same prayer, "Dear God, why haven't you sent someone? Please, God I want to know you. Will you send someone to tell me how?" This went on for many years, but still her prayer was not answered.

Then one year, her birthday rolled around and she prayed that same fervent prayer. Later that day she heard someone clapping at her gate. In Brazil, most of the houses have fences around them, so they don't have doorbells. When a guest wants to be admitted to a house, he'll stand at the gate and clap his hands. So, when she heard clapping, she went to her gate and found that there was a young missionary standing there who had recently moved into her neighborhood. He asked her if he could come in and talk to her about God. She immediately invited him inside. As he spoke with her, the missionary told her that Jesus Christ is God's Son, and only by putting her faith in Jesus could she have peace with God. As tears filled this old woman's eyes, she gratefully prayed a sinner's prayer to receive Jesus. Then she said to the missionary, "This is a miracle. Today is my birthday. Thirty years ago I first prayed a prayer for God to send someone to tell me about Him. Now thirty years later, you are the answer to my prayer!"

The missionary smiled and said, "It truly IS a miracle, because, you see, today is my birthday,

too. And I am thirty years old today!" God had heard her prayer and had been preparing her answer for 30 years! Our God is a great and mighty God!

In Romans 10 the Bible asks, "How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" Then Paul quotes that verse we read from Isaiah 52, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news of God's peace!" (Romans 10:14-15) Do something beautiful for God—show others how they can enjoy peace with God, and you will be blessed beyond measure to be a peacemaker!

OUTLINE

- Realize that I'm not God
- Earnestly believe that God exists and that I matter to Him
- Fully surrender my life and will to Christ's control
- Receive God's righteousness as a gift of grace
- Extend forgiveness to those who have hurt me
- Seek purity instead of perfection
- Help others find peace with God

Are you a:

- Peace-faker?
- Peace-breaker?
- Peace-maker?

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"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." *Romans 5:1*

2. A PEACEMAKER ENDEAVORS TO MEND BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

"The Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted." *Isaiah 61:1*

Job 1: Keeping the peace in my relationships

"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." *Romans 14:19*

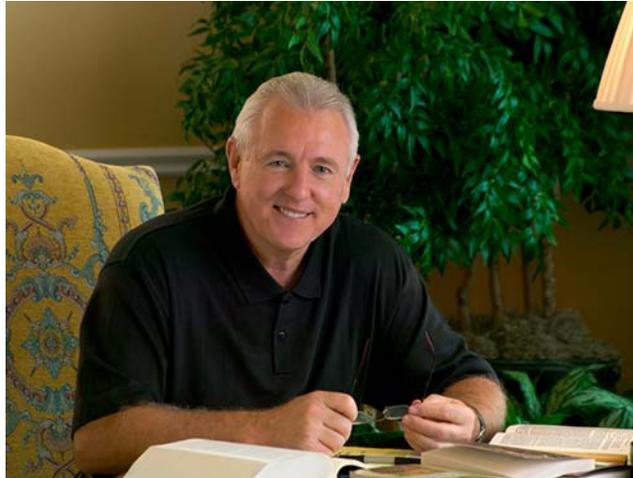
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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes