

# 2024.10.27 - Blessed Are The Peacemakers

Good morning, Sherwood Oaks! My name is Noah and I'm the Production Director here at Sherwood Oaks. That means I'm responsible for all the fancy technology you see in here. I know what you're thinking: "Noah, if you're down here on the stage, who's up in the tech booth??"

And I say to you, our volunteer team consists of such cool people that I am able to stand here and not sweat a single thing. I might be in charge of the tech, but it's the wonderful people up there who do such a great job, and I'm so pleased to be able to work with them. Let's give them a hand!

I have a question for you: do you enjoy cleaning your house? Or fellas, your garage? Does it make you feel anxious when you see that corner you've been putting off organizing, or furniture you've wanted to rearrange but only your kids and God knows what's under there? Maybe you see that pile of laundry that hasn't been folded? It's totally normal - there is always something else to clean - but I personally am only a fan of it once I'm on the other side! It's tough to start because, in the beginning, it seems difficult and messy and tiring. I know what I have to do, but I don't want to do it. But once I'm on the other side and everything in its proper place - there's no sense of satisfaction quite like that.

I mention the whole cleaning thing because, to me, it's the most accurate analogy that describes the feelings I have for conflict resolution. It can be difficult and messy and tiring. Most of the time, I know what I should do, but it's hard to bring myself to do it, even though I understand things will be better if I put in the work.

Today we're discussing the 7th Beatitude that Jesus preaches on His Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:9 - "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." The Message translation says "You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are."

I'm going to tip my hand early and give you my main point now so you can chew on it as we go through some other stuff. Here it is:

**In a world of tension, be the relief.**

None of us escape the fact that this world is pretty tightly wound. Because of Internet culture and media outlets and the almighty algorithm, there's an increasing polarity to people's opinions, even down to silly things like iPhone vs Android. It's only becoming more accessible to mock others because a screen acts like a wall that separates you from the real person you're engaging. There is a mounting pressure to act and feel the same as those in your circle, otherwise you will face judgement. There's tension in this country for some reason I can't remember...

But by learning to be a peacemaker, we can be the relief to all of it. Don't think that it's an easy life to live. Peacemaking at its peak is difficult, messy, and tiring... and necessary.

There are a few things in this Beatitude that Jesus is telling us. The first is that those who find resolution with others are living the blessed life. When you work to be at peace with those around you, you are behaving as one related to God. Others will be able to experience God through the peace that you bring to them.

If you're like me at all, you might relate when I say that words become numb to me after hearing of them a thousand times. Unfortunately, "peacemaker" has fallen victim to this. So let's break it down. It's a simple compound word, it's pretty straightforward. Fun fact, the original Greek word used here is "eirēnopoios." You know what it means? "Peacemaker." So that's not exactly helpful. Let's define one word at a time, starting with "peace." Merriam-Webster defines 'peace' as "1) a state of tranquility or quiet, 2) freedom from oppressive thoughts or emotions, 3) harmony in personal relations." No doubt Jesus refers to harmony in personal relations when He talks about the peace that we ought to bring, but that second definition especially stands out to me: freedom from oppressive thoughts or emotions. How often do those create tension for us on a daily basis?

Now let's define 'make.' Now, Merriam-Webster obviously has a million definitions for it, but my favorites here are, "1) to bring into being; 2) to lay out and construct; 3) to cause to happen." These words invoke such feeling to me personally because, as a creative, I love *making*. I enjoy creating art of different kinds, so "to bring into being" resonates with me.

Looking at these definitions helps me to fully grasp the potential of what Jesus was describing. When we combine those definitions of "peace" and "maker," you get something like this: "one who constructs harmony in personal relations; a bringer of stillness. A source of tranquil thoughts."

Doesn't that sound like such a cool person to be around? Would you describe yourself this way? Let me ask: would your spouse or parents or kids describe you as a "bringer of stillness"?

And to emphasize the importance of being such an individual, Jesus hammers it home in Matthew 5:23-24 where He says, "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that *your brother has something against you*, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Notice how it says, "when your brother has something against you"?

Jesus is saying that it's more important to be a peacemaker than to bring your offerings to Him! Let that sink in. Reconciliation is even more important to God than your offering. Even when teaching His disciples on how to pray, He makes sure to say, "Forgive us our trespasses *as we forgive those who trespass against us*. Making peace is essential to the blessed life!

Now I should mention that it's easy to confuse being a peacemaker with being a peacekeeper. "Peacekeeper" here meaning someone who's conflict-averse and suffers from people-pleasing and doesn't want to upset anyone (hello, that's me). Someone who is terrible at conflict resolution is not a peacemaker. Someone who inserts themselves into conflict without wisdom is not a peacemaker. And similarly, a peacekeeper might be more liked than a peacemaker. A peacekeeper is more prone to stuff problems into a closet or brush stuff under the rug. That'll make the house look clean, but underneath, everything's a mess. A peacemaker will actually get the house truly clean.

Distinguishing peacemaking with peacekeeping is important here because, in a lot of situations, we might think that ignoring our hurt will make it go away. But being a doormat or afraid to rock the boat gets you no closer to actually creating harmony. It's important to have boundaries; Shawn talked about that when he preached on mercy. You might agree that holding inside your hurt only adds to this world of tension. But a peacemaker relieves tension.

Okay. We understand better what a peacemaker is; what's the promise Jesus presents to peacemakers in Matthew 5:9? "They will be called children of God." This is an easy one to explain: we resemble our Father in Heaven when we are peacemakers. 1 John 3:1 says, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God." I'm the youngest of four sons, and each of us have traits that came from our Dad. When my friends see him for the first time, they say, "Wow, you two look so alike!" We have the same crooked nose, similar blonde hair, the way our beards grow out, our feet turn out the same way when we walk. We share a love of writing and storytelling and learning new things. We're both slow eaters. My dad and I share a love of dad jokes, and every time I visit, we both do that thing where we sit at the dinner table in the morning and drink our coffee in complete silence.

I mean, take a look at this!

(Show image of me) He look familiar? That's actually a picture of my Dad! No, just kidding, that's actually me. Here is my dad, though:

(Show image of Dad) This is when he was younger, he has sadly ditched those glasses. But don't we look similar??

I share his traits! And the same way I look like my dad, so peacemakers look like their Father in Heaven. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they *will be called children of God.*”

So we’ve established what this Beatitude really means. Let’s get practical about what to do about it. How exactly do we be the relief? I want to establish a couple rules about peacemaking:

The first rule is that **you can’t do it by yourself.** It’s not a stretch to say that our typical human response to conflict is to fight back. When we are offended or attacked, our gut reaction is to want to exact vengeance. When you discover that a coworker started a rumor about you, I’m going to guess that your next step won’t be to compliment their hair. You’ll want to start a rumor about them or put hot sauce on their lunch or steal their parking spot. Not saying you would do it, but you might want to!

But we must be the ones to break this cycle of one-upping each other in grievances, and throw our pride out the window and make peace. Invite the Holy Spirit to give you His wisdom when the time comes. James 3:17-18 says, **“The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”** We can begin to do that when we wait upon the word of the Holy Spirit. If it’s His words we’re saying, won’t we begin to resemble our Father in Heaven?

The second rule to being a peacemaker is to **be at peace within yourself.** If you allow your emotions to rule your thoughts and actions, you’ll have a hard time bringing stillness and harmony. If you’re going to live the blessed life of a peacemaker, watch what comes out of your mouth. Gossip and slander do wonders to drive division. Scripture notes several times that the words you say stems from the status of your heart; speaking negatively about someone behind their back does not align with the character of a peacemaker. If you are quick to anger or reactive, that adds to the tension. When you have peace within yourself, then you can be the relief to that tension.

Those are some rules about peacemaking, but I learn best through stories, so allow me to share a few.

The first is found in Genesis chapter 37. The context is this: Joseph (not Mary’s husband, a different Joseph) was the father’s favorite among his brothers. So much so, in fact, that his father gifted to Joseph a vibrant and beautiful cloak. Very expensive, very elaborate, really made him stand out from his older siblings. And according to scripture, “they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.”

If I were Joseph's brothers, I'm not sure I would, either! If you have siblings, you understand the indignity you would feel if one of them got special treatment and you didn't. If my parents gifted one of my brothers a brand-new camera (we're all photographers, it's crazy) purely out of love for no special occasion, I'd be crying out, "Ummm, you love me too! Where's mine??"

And Joseph exacerbated the tension when he tells his brothers not one but *two* dreams he has where he rules over them! Bit of a tense family dynamic here!

And the brothers' response? They rip off the robe from Joseph and throw him into a pit to leave him. They were going to kill him, but after some arguing they *only* sold him into slavery.

I've experienced sibling rivalry in my lifetime, but this is truly something else. There's not a lot of peace here.

The next eight chapters of Genesis follows Joseph's absolutely crazy story. I highly recommend reading through it when you have the chance, the twists are insane. Joseph was in slavery for years, and I wonder how many nights he spent thinking about what he would do if he ever saw his brothers again. I can't imagine the betrayal Joseph felt. God does some incredible things through him and for him, but Joseph is only human. Surely he felt that tight knot in his stomach as he laid in bed at night thinking about how things will never go back to the way they were, and he probably held a grudge for a long time.

Can you relate to any of this? You might have experienced betrayal from a family member or a friend and it's caused years of heartbreak. You might've spent countless nights replaying what they did in your head over and over and over, and wondering how everything went so wrong.

And in Genesis 45, Joseph gets the opportunity for justice. God blessed Joseph with the ability to interpret dreams and eventually he became Pharaoh's right-hand man in Egypt. Like I said, *crazy* story. Anyway, there's a famine in the region, but Joseph saw it coming because of Pharaoh's dreams, and he made all the right choices to store up food so they would be okay. Joseph's family suffered back home, however, and his brothers came to Egypt to buy food - and they were granted an audience with none other than Joseph. They didn't realize it was him because it's been so long and Joseph was dressed up in Egyptian regalia.

Now, thirteen years after they got rid of him, Joseph had his brothers in the palm of his hand. With a word, he could take them for slaves, he could execute them, he could order them to be thrown into a pit. He could do a number of things that would've been justice in his mind. He owed them nothing! What does he do? His response is amazing. Check it out in chapter 45:

"Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, 'Make everyone go out from me.' So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. And Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. So Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come near to me, please.'"

Joseph made peace with them. The story goes on to say that he gave his family the best land, the best livestock, the best grains, and took care of them until long after the famine ended.

The theme here is that Joseph showed what it means to be a peacemaker by choosing not to act out of pride or justice or resentment. He had all the power he needed to show everyone what happens when you betray your kin, to carve their names in the annals of history as treacherous and untrustworthy. But he didn't do that. He reconciled.

In a world of tension, be the relief.

Here's another tale about peacemaking. It comes from one of my all-time favorite pieces of literature: *The Hobbit*, by JRR Tolkien. Spoilers ahead for this 87-year-old book, if you have not read it. The general plot that's important here involves two characters: Bilbo, an easygoing burglar, and Thorin, the Dwarven King Under The Mountain. They get caught up in adventure and learn to trust each other and become close. They seek to reclaim Thorin's lost kingdom (and untold wealth) from the evil dragon Smaug, and it's a whole ordeal as you might guess. But at a critical point in the story, Bilbo steals the most precious jewel from the mountain of gold and silver and pockets it for himself. He knew that Thorin desired that jewel even above the rest of his treasure, but he kept it for himself, anyway.

And Thorin, during a fit of overwhelming greed, discovers Bilbo's thievery. He is outraged! He says this:

*"I am betrayed... take [Bilbo], if you wish him to live, and no friendship of mine goes with him. Get down now," He said to Bilbo, "or I will throw you down."*

Whose fault was it? Who started it? What caused the fracture in their companionship? Bilbo stole the most precious jewel, Thorin couldn't see past his greed, Bilbo pawned off the jewel to someone else as a bargaining chip, Thorin was going to kill him. It was a mess! And they were on the cusp of a giant battle! They didn't have time for infighting.

Here's how their story ends: the great battle happens, and Thorin suffers a mortal wound. When Bilbo gets back to camp and sees Thorin on his deathbed, they have a beautiful moment of reconciliation. Thorin says to Bilbo:

*"Since I leave now all gold and silver, and go where it is of little worth, I wish to part in friendship from you, and I would take back my words and deeds... If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world..."*

It took death for Thorin to regret how he ruined their friendship and wished it undone. He realized at this sudden end of his life that the gold he fought for was not worth the pain he brought upon others to hold onto it. Next to his imminent doom, this feud seemed so small.

The theme here is that fighting for what you think you deserve might not be worth sacrificing your relationships. If there is peace to be made, make it while there is still time. That moment in *The Hobbit* only happens because Bilbo by chance got to see Thorin before he passed. We might not have that same fortune with someone else. Part of being a peacemaker is realizing that our time here is so, so short, and we must discern what is truly worth fighting for.

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The final story I want to share is a little less straightforward. Gina and Madison - those are not their real names - have known each other for over a decade. They met through a mutual acquaintance and have become connected over the years. As it happens, they have personalities that don't always mesh, and it's caused a lot of strain. In my preparation for this sermon, I asked them a few questions about their relationship dynamics. The emphasis I want to make here is that both are adamant followers of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes, Gina would say something *just* the wrong way, and Madison would get hurt. She would snap back with unkind words, which would hurt Gina, and because both of their gut reactions are to shut down, they would sit in and internalize these feelings of rejection. Madison would push for her way while Gina stood her ground and refused to cooperate. Gina would speak her mind about Madison's behavior, but Madison would not want to be corrected and got defensive. Most of the time things were totally fine between them, but sometimes there would come this intense clashing that would come out of defensiveness and pride and an unwillingness to compromise.

Repeat this for over ten years, and now there's this rift between them and seemingly no way to close that gap.

I asked them how often they want someone else to step in and mediate for them when arguments arise, and one said “yes please, always” and the other said “absolutely not, never.” Both of them desire reconciliation but haven’t received it because there’s a never-ending back-and-forth of “but she did this,” “but she did this first!” Etc. How do they resolve this? Is there a resolution?

For people with such differing personalities, they share several things in common. They offended each other, either by damaging words or harmful actions that hurt each other or someone they love. They both agree that, for reconciliation, the other must come forward and apologize for wrongdoing. They also both agree that they’re more right than the other. And finally, they agree that the simplest thing they can do is to never bring up their pain ever again.

Ultimately, Gina and Madison have resigned themselves to keep the peace for the sake of everyone else.

They still hang out to this day, there’s a lot of good-natured treating that happens, but they are not yet completely on the other side of forgiveness.

The last question I asked them was, “What’s your message to others who are also struggling to make peace with someone?” And you know what they said? Almost amusingly, Gina and Madison answered basically the same: “Love the other person the way Christ loves them.”

They know what they must do, but it’s a constant process of embracing peacemaking that will eventually close the gap.

It’s easy for me on the outside to say, “Blessed are the peacemakers, so you should be making peace right now :)” But I don’t carry the scars they do; who am I to preach harmony when I don’t truly understand what they’ve had to deal with? I could quote whatever I like on conflict resolution, like 1 Peter 4:8-9 which says, “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” But who really wants to hear that when loving someone feels impossible in the moment?

Christ continues to work on Madison and Gina the same way He works on us every day, and I pray that a day comes that they can be truly at peace with each other.

The theme I’m getting at here is that, even between two people who really love Jesus, it can be difficult to show love earnestly. That’s just being human; we lack that superpower of “being perfect.” But what is vital is remembering that we can’t do it by ourselves, we must constantly invite the Holy Spirit to share His wisdom and practice the challenge of peacemaking.



There are many stories like theirs. We've all got somebody out there that can be tough to treat with, and it might be you. There are no two people exactly like, and in an imperfect world, it is inevitable that we will engage in conflict. Romans 12:18 says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." *So far as it depends on you.* As much as you can, be a presence of peace and stillness for others. Bring into being that freedom from oppressive thoughts and emotions. It is our responsibility to be a peacemaker, regardless of what others will do or say. And just like cleaning a house, it can be messy, difficult, and tiring. You know what you need to do; the problem is you don't want to do it.

These three stories - Joseph and his choice to forgive, Thorin and his decision to prioritize relationship, and Gina and Madison for their willingness to put in the work - together paint a clearer picture of the blessed life of a peacemaker. If you didn't understand anything I've said today, hear this right now. It's my main point one more time: *in a world of tension, be the relief.* People can be annoying, grumpy, mean, selfish, and hurtful, and Christ calls us to undo that. You must be the one to decide that your relationship with others is worth more than showing that you're right. To family members, to friends, to strangers on the Internet.

You know that cliché saying, "Be the change you want to see in the world"? Be the peace you want to see in this world! It starts with you. It starts with me. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." Even though it's messy, difficult, and tiring - it's necessary.

We've been ending each sermon in this series with a prayer moment, and here's what I'd like to do. Relax your shoulders, put your feet on the floor, take a deep breath with me. Put your hands out open like this. Repeat after me:

Father, forgive me for when I've offended others.

Show me where I have not brought peace

I bring my relationships, healed and wounded...

...to you.

Holy Spirit, teach me to bring peace where there is none.

Give me wisdom in what I should say.

Give me wisdom in what I should not say.

May I bring your Divine Peace to Earth.

Amen.