

How a Jesus-Centered Approach to Peacemaking Equips the Church to be Hospitable in a Multi-Ethnic, Multi-Religious World

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Abstract

Conflict resolution and related fields have become a major field of academic research and global practice. While many Christians have written on the topic, I have yet to find a book or article that describes a Jesus-centered approach to peacemaking. In this paper I will articulate a distinctively Jesus-centered approach to peacemaking that focuses on Jesus’ person, teaching, example, death on the cross and second coming. I will argue that this Jesus-centered approach to peacemaking best equips the church to be hospitable in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious world.

Introduction

Conflict resolution and related fields, such as peacemaking, have become a major field of academic research and global practice. This field of peace studies was formally established after World War II,¹ due in part to the devastation of the war. It was also linked with the founding of the United Nations whose central mission is the maintenance of international peace and security.²

The field of peace studies is broad, diverse and interdisciplinary in approach. It is informed by the study of international relations, economics, law, religion, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and management. It encompasses the work of governments, relief and development organizations, human rights activists, peacemakers, peacekeepers, religious leaders, and community mediators to name a few.

While I learn much from academics and practitioners of diverse perspectives,³ the focus of this paper is on Jesus Christ -- his person, teaching, example, death on the cross and second coming. We will examine these five theological foundations and describe how they equip the church to demonstrate hospitality – the practice of receiving a guest or stranger graciously⁴ -- in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious world.

Five Foundational Truths about Jesus-Centered Peacemaking

1. The Person of Christ

Jesus is the embodiment of peace and peacemaking. In two of the most well-known messianic prophecies in the Bible, Jesus is called the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6-7) and is described as the one who is our peace (Micah 5:2-5). Paul’s letter to the Ephesians describes this in detail.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near (Ephesians 2:13-17).

Thus, peace “is not merely a concept nor even a new state of affairs, it is bound up with a person.”⁵ The phrase “he is our peace” is emphatic in Greek and should be translated, “he himself is our peace.” Jesus embodies peace according to Paul. He is the source of peace and the one who brings peace.⁶

2. The Teaching of Christ⁷

Jesus’ teaching about peacemaking begins with the famous beatitude: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).⁸ Peacemakers are blessed in that God’s favor and approval rests upon them.

The term peacemaker combines two Greek words: “peace” (*eirene*) and “to make, do or produce” (*poieo*), implying that peacemakers step into conflict to restore harmony. Thus, the

very term peacemaker implies some form of mediation. Mediation is about helping people resolve conflict. And the majority of mediation is informal – between friends, family, neighbors, schoolmates, and business associates.⁹

These blessed peacemaker-mediators are described as “children of God.” Jesus indicates that peacemakers are children in the sense that they are like their Father in heaven: The God of peace,¹⁰ who sent the Prince of Peace, to usher in a world of peace.¹¹

Next, *peacemaking is an urgent priority* according to Jesus.

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23-24 New International Version).

Jesus commands us to stop worship and seek reconciliation. In other words, reconciling with our brother or sister even trumps worship! “First go and be reconciled” teaches that we take responsibility for broken relationships. Even if I don’t have anything against my brother or sister, if he or she has something against me, I must take the initiative.

This passage also indicates that the Great Commandments -- love of God and love of neighbor -- are inseparable. One cannot truly love God without loving one’s neighbor – which is demonstrated by our commitment to pursue reconciliation.¹²

Thus, Jesus’ brand peacemaking is proactive. *Peacemaking also begins with humility.*

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye (Matthew 7:3-5).

With a sense of humor, Jesus the carpenter, exhorts us to *first* get the log out of our own eye, *then* we can take the speck out of our neighbor’s eye. Again, Jesus gives us clear steps in the peacemaking process.

Sadly, it is human nature to be part of ‘speck-finders.org.’ We specialize in speck finding in others and tend to be blind to our own issues. But peacemakers are log removers first, and speck finders second! Jesus calls those in conflict to begin with humble introspection.

This is especially important in Christian-Muslim relations, which is the focus of my work.¹³ Christians tend to compare the best interpretation and practice of their faith with the worst interpretation and practice of the Islamic faith.

During a Vineyard Great Lakes Regional Conference in Columbus, Ohio,¹⁴ the Yale theologian and peacemaker, Miroslav Volf shared with the pastors in attendance a story about the Common Word Dialogue between Christians and Muslims at Yale:¹⁵ “Prior to the dialogue, we inserted a brief apology in the Yale response to the Common Word, asking for forgiveness. People got so upset! They said you should not ask for forgiveness until Muslims ask for forgiveness first!” Miroslav paused, and with a big smile on his face asked, “Since when is my moral behavior predicated on the moral behavior of another?”

Instead of a critical spirit, we model a humble heart. In Jesus’ approach to peacemaking *we start with the heart.*

It also demands that we eventually take the speck out of our neighbor’s eye – which means *we practice the art of reproof.* We neither distance ourselves from offenders nor do we go on the attack.¹⁶ Instead, we tell them how they hurt us, where we think they were wrong, or where we think they caused conflict. The Bible calls this “reproving or rebuking,” which means we point out their faults. We have a crucial conversation.

“So watch yourselves. If a brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them” (Luke 17:3 New International Version).

To reprove someone requires courage to speak difficult words. It involves being emotionally honest about ways someone has hurt us or others. But we do this in such a way as to resolve the conflict and restore the relationship.

The goal of reproof is not to prove that we were right and the other person wrong. The goal is reconciliation. Because of this, we don't just reprove the offender. We "lovingly" reprove them.

It is often said that honesty is the best policy. But honesty alone is not Jesus' policy. How we communicate is also important. We don't attack the person, we attack the problem. We are commanded to speak the truth *in love* (Ephesians 4:15). Both truth and love are important!

Jesus modeled this for us in the book of Revelation. "*Those whom I love* I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent" (Revelation 3:19, emphasis mine). Jesus' rebuke comes from a heart of love. Ours must too.

Jesus told the famous parable of the Good Samaritan in response to a religious expert's question, "Who is my neighbor?" This religious leader wanted to limit the definition of neighbor so that the demand of neighbor love remained within his comfort zone (Luke 10:29-37). Like most people of his day, he believed that a neighbor referred to someone of his race or faith. Neighbor meant someone "like me" or a person "I like."

But Jesus' revolutionary parable shattered his relational categories. Jesus showed that love for one's neighbor reaches out beyond race or religion, color, or creed. The hero of the story was a despised Samaritan! Samaritans were viewed as heretics – syncretistic in faith, ethnically inferior, excluded from the true worship of God (John 4:9). In other words, a "good" Samaritan would have been an oxymoron for a Jew. Yet this Samaritan showed compassion toward his enemy the Jew, demonstrating that *love of neighbor includes the people we love the least*. An accurate understanding of love of neighbor means we love even our enemy.

But in case this isn't clear, Jesus makes it explicit.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even

the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
(Matthew 5.43-48 NRS)

Many Christians think the command to love one's enemy reflects an unrealistic and idealistic standard, so they've engaged in what could be called the 'hermeneutics of evasion' – figuring out ways to interpret it so it doesn't apply to their lives.¹⁷ The Bible gives at least three reasons why we must obey this command.

First of all, this is Jesus' command! And various forms of this command are repeated at least fifteen times in the New Testament. The number and diversity of these commands underscore their importance:

- Love your enemy (3x)
- Do not resist an evil person
- Turn the other cheek
- Do not withhold your coat/shirt
- Go with them two miles (the extra mile)
- Give to everyone who asks/lend
- Pray for those who persecute you/mistreat you
- Do good to those who hate you (2x)
- Bless those who curse you
- Do not demand back (what someone takes)
- Feed them
- Give them a drink
- Overcome evil with good¹⁸

Please note: the different commands related to love of enemy refer to *acts* of kindness, not *feelings* of kindness. So, enemy love is practical and possible.¹⁹ As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "We should be happy that he did not say, "Like your enemies" ... How can we like a person who is threatening our children and bombing our homes? That is impossible. But Jesus recognized that *love* is greater than like."²⁰

Secondly, Jesus commands us to love our enemy 'so that we may be children of our Father in heaven' (Matthew 5:45). The one who loves his enemy is acting like a child of God. In other words, this command is not just for spiritual giants, it is for all of God's children. It is for everyday peacemakers.²¹

Thirdly, the command to love one's enemy ends with the summary exhortation, 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48). When we love our enemies, we imitate God.²²

The Bible defines the 'enemy' in broad terms (Matthew 5-7; Luke 6; Romans 12). Enemies are those who hate us, curse us, hit us, abuse us, persecute us and do evil to us. So our enemies could be members of our family, our neighbors or they could be terrorists who literally want to kill us.

For example, Muslims are often *perceived* as our enemies and a miniscule number of them have the *potential* to become our enemies. But the vast majority of Muslims are not our enemies.²³ ISIS and violent extremists are.²⁴

Whatever the situation, the call to love Muslims – whether as our enemy or as our neighbor, is undeniable. *We may disagree on our assessment of Islam (and in fact Christians do), but Jesus' teaching about love is straightforward and indisputable.*

Finally, Jesus' teaching on forgiveness is central to the gospel and social ethics in the New Testament. "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25). For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matthew 6:14-15).

Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!" (Matthew 18:21-22 New Living Translation).

Jewish Rabbis at that time believed that forgiving someone three times was the limit, so Peter thought he was modeling amazing grace.²⁵ But Jesus was not encouraging Peter to get out his calculator when he faced conflict. He was calling Peter and his followers to unlimited, radical forgiveness.²⁶

So if we follow Jesus' teaching we will see reconciliation as an urgent priority. We will practice humility and become proactive peacemakers. We will learn to speak the truth in love. We will go

beyond our comfort zones to love our neighbors and even our enemies. We will practice forgiveness as a way of life.

3. The Example of Christ

When Jesus' preached the gospel, healed the sick, loved the marginalized, forgave sinners and fed the hungry, he was demonstrating what the kingdom of God is like. His life and ministry made the kingdom of God tangible -- "on earth as it is in heaven." In this sense he was a peacemaker. He was ushering in the shalom of the kingdom.

Jesus' hospitality, most comprehensively described in the Luke's gospel, also reverberates with peacemaking implications.²⁷ Jesus freely and habitually ate with people regarded as "sinners" to the extent that he had the reputation for being "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7:34 NRS). The stories of Jesus with the tax collectors Levi (Luke 5:27-32) and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), his engagement with the "sinful" women at Simon the Pharisees house (Luke 7:36-50 NRS) and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4:1-43), are perhaps the best illustrations of Jesus' practice.

What I find amazing is that Jesus also ate with his greatest "critics" -- the Pharisees. He accepted their hospitality while at the same time boldly confronting them about their hypocritical traditions of ritualistic washing (Luke 11:37-42) and Sabbath observance (Luke 14:1-6 NRS).

Jesus' hospitality reflected inclusive love. Unlike the Pharisees and many Evangelicals, Jesus engaged the "other" without fear of compromise or contamination. Jesus taught and modeled both exclusive truth claims and inclusive love aims.

The strong "both-and" nature of this radical Jesus unnerves many people. The majority of evangelicals contend earnestly for Jesus' exclusive truth claims. They boldly affirm, "Jesus is the way the truth and the life" (John 14:6) but somehow ignore His command to "Love your enemy!" Like the Pharisees, they miss or minimize Jesus' inclusive love aims.

"Jesus shatters our theological and political categories. Exclusive truth challenges the liberal, while inclusive love challenges the conservative. Jesus is so exclusive in His truth claims as to

shame the most exclusive conservative. And he is so inclusive in His love aims as to shame the most inclusive liberal.”²⁸

Jesus was also a nonviolent activist.²⁹

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, my kingdom is not of this realm." (John 18:36).

Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword." (Matthew 26:52).

However, Jesus was not a hippy-like peacenik of the 60's and 70's. *He was also a peace disturber!* Perhaps the most striking example of this is when he cleansed the temple.

Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching (Mark 11:15-18).

This is the one place in the gospels where Jesus appears to be violent. Jesus was forceful and angry, but he did not physically attack people. In the parallel passage in John it says he made a whip of cords and “drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables” (John 2:15). But there is no mention of him whipping people. “Jesus did not burn anything, nor did he lead any troops or bandits into the temple; he simply interrupted the economic activities there temporarily.”³⁰

The gospel of Mark explains his passion. The religious leaders allowed merchants to sell animals in the temple – in the court of the Gentiles. And the temple was supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations (Gentiles). Jesus confronted religious corruption. Instead of being a house of prayer for all the nations it had become an ingrown religious club.³¹

The cleansing of the temple was a passionate prophetic act against the discrimination of the Jewish religious leaders toward Gentiles. It was an act of radical reform, shaking up the status quo to reflect the inclusive nature of God's love.

Jesus also called out hypocrites and severely criticized the religious establishment.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cross sea and land to make a single convert, and you make the new convert twice as much a child of hell as yourselves... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. ...Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence (Matthew 23:15, 23, 25).

Jesus relentlessly challenged the Pharisees about their attitudes of superiority and judgmentalism – two mindsets that divide rather than unite people. The Pharisees neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy and faith. And according to Jesus, they did not have the love of God in their hearts (John 5:42).

Jesus cleansed the temple – attacking religious corruption. He called out hypocrites, and challenged the status quo. How is this an example of peacemaking?

True peace demands a pure heart. True peace includes justice for all. Perhaps the best modern example of a peace disturber is Martin Luther King Jr. He confronted white hypocrisy, racism and injustice. But his goal was not to defeat white America, rather he sought reconciliation between races.

So if we follow Jesus' example, we will pursue shalom non-violently, we will demonstrate inclusive hospitality and when necessary we will disturb the status quo to work towards true peace.

4. The Cross of Christ

At the cross Jesus cries out, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). In other words, *Jesus' death on the cross, and the whole passion narrative, demonstrate enemy love* – a key to making peace and an important part of the gospel.

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life (Romans 5:10).

And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him (Colossians 1:21-22).

The gospel not only demonstrates enemy love but it is also referred to as the gospel of peace five times in the New Testament (Acts 10:36; Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:13-17; Ephesians 6:15; Colossians 1:20). The Prince of Peace entered the world to usher in God's shalom to a broken, alienated world.³²

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one ... His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross,.... He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near (Ephesians 2:13-17).

Through Christ's death, Jews and Gentiles have experienced a double reconciliation. They have been reconciled to God and to one another. According to Paul, Jesus is our peace. Jesus makes peace. Jesus preaches peace!

One can hardly overemphasize how radical this message of peace must have sounded to Paul's original audience. The relationship between Gentile and Jew could be described as a prototype of all division or racial alienation in the first century – comparable to the relationship between whites and blacks in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement or in South Africa under apartheid. The animosity felt between most Americans and Muslims since 9/11 serves as a more up-to-date example.

Through the gospel, the church becomes an alternative society, a community where humanity's divisions have been overcome, a foretaste of heaven's harmony. Jesus overcomes divisions between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, and male and female (Galatians 3:28). The sociology of the church is egalitarian (Colossians 3:11). Anything less would be a denial of the gospel.

If we believe the gospel, then we understand that Jesus' death illustrates and underscores the priority of enemy love. And we understand that the gospel of peace is comprehensive and multidimensional.³³

5. The Second Coming of Christ

The Hebrew Scriptures repeatedly speak of the “last days” or the “day of the Lord.” The end times will be both a day of judgment and the ushering in of a universal reign of peace.

Prophecies of the end times make it clear that that *God’s end game is peace*.

In the last days ... He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken (Micah 4:1-4, New International Version. See also Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:1-9).

My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd... I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant (Ezekiel 37:24-27).

The New Testament connects these end times promises with the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus repeatedly refers to himself as the Son of Man,³⁴ and in his teaching made the link between his return and Daniel’s prophecy of the end times:

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14 NIV).

"Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30 NIV).

Paul’s picture of Christ’s future exaltation makes the link between the end times and peace.³⁵

[God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment-- to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ (Ephesians 1:9-10 New International Version).

God's grand plan will be fulfilled at the end times ("when the times reach their fulfillment"). Hostility and alienation will be overcome. All things will be restored, and will find unity and harmony in Christ. The perfect shalom of the kingdom will be established forever.

Two passages in the book of Revelation further portray the nature of Christ's return.

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10 NRS).

This vision of the coming kingdom of peace displays comprehensive multi-ethnic diversity. An innumerable community of people from *every* tongue, tribe and nation.

One of the most important images of the end times is the picture of a wedding celebration – a luxurious and extravagant feast. The Old Testament describes the end times as a feast of rich food and well-aged wines (Isaiah 25:6). It is a time of great joy: "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." (Isaiah 62:5 NRS). "The voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, ... "Give thanks to the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!" (Jeremiah 33:11 NRS).

Christ's return is the ultimate picture of hospitality.

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, ... crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; ... Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:6-9 NRS)

Thus, "the kingdom of God and heaven are figured as places and times where God will fulfill the desire and promise of unspoiled ultimate hospitality-unending feasting in God's vast abode, heaven."³⁶

We anticipate universal peace at Christ's return. There will be joyful celebration at the wedding supper of the Lamb that includes people from every tongue, tribe and nation!

How Does Jesus-Centered Peacemaking Equip Us to be Hospitable?

Paul the apostle always begins his letters with doctrinal affirmation (the indicative), and then concludes with practical application (the imperative). I want to imitate Paul by summarizing the practical implications of Jesus' person, teaching, example, death and second coming:

1. Jesus is the embodiment of peace and peacemaking.
2. If we follow Jesus' teaching we will see reconciliation as an urgent priority. We will practice humility and become proactive peacemakers. We will learn to speak the truth in love. We will go beyond our comfort zones to love our neighbors and even our enemies. We will practice forgiveness as a way of life.
3. If we follow Jesus' example, we will pursue shalom non-violently, we will demonstrate inclusive hospitality, and when necessary we will disturb the status quo to work towards true peace.
4. We believe that Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate and decisive peacemaking event in history. The cross illustrates and underscores the priority of enemy love. This gospel of peace is comprehensive and multidimensional.
5. We anticipate universal peace at Christ's return. There will be joyful celebration at the wedding supper of the Lamb that includes people from every tongue, tribe and nation. This magnificent multi-ethnic future kingdom informs our present calling. "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The ethical implications of these truths are staggering. All five dimensions of Christ outlined in this paper provide a unified and robust description of the life we are called to live. These truths invite us, exhort us, model for us, save us, and fill us with hope. They push us beyond our comfort zone and call us to embrace everyone. A church or individual that fails to show grace to strangers, or shrinks back from demonstrating Jesus' inclusive love, denies Christ! Far too many Christians in America have believed in what Russell Moore calls the "almost gospel."³⁷

I rejoice that one of the explicit values in the Vineyard is to be a “reconciling community.” I know that there are Vineyards who model this well. But I think overall there is room for growth. What Steve Norman learned in his doctoral research about peacemaking applies to many: “I recently conducted a research project that collected data from 15 pastors in personal interviews and 297 pastors through an online survey. Their feedback on this issue was almost unanimous: ‘Yes, I affirm the theory of peacemaking as a biblical value. No, it’s not something our church is currently doing. Honestly, we’d have no idea where to start if we wanted to.’”³⁸

I hope this paper does more than give people a place to start. A Jesus-centered approach to peacemaking *does* equip the church to be a reconciling community – a community that is truly hospitable in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious world.

¹ Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall describe four generations of conflict resolution studies

Generation 1	Precursors	1925-1945
Generation 2	Founders	1945-1965
Generation 3	Consolidators	1965-1985
Generation 4	Reconstructors	1985-2005
Generation 5	Universalizers	2005-

See *Contemporary Conflict Resolution, Second Edition*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005. P.327

² <http://www.un.org/en/sections/what-we-do/maintain-international-peace-and-security/index.html>

³ I have completed forty hours of training in Basic Mediation and forty hours of training in Workplace Mediation – both from a secular perspective. These courses have been very helpful. I have found that the principles taught often reflect the teaching of Jesus and the Bible.

⁴ The Greek term for hospitality is *philoxenia* which literally means “love for strangers or foreigners; hence hospitality, kindness to strangers” *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* by [Barbara Friberg, Neva F. Mille and Timothy Friberg](#) 2005, reference 28087 electronic edition. For a thorough discussion of hospitality in the Bible see Koenig, J. (1992). Hospitality. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 3, p. 299). New York: Doubleday.

⁵ Lincoln, A. T., *Ephesians*, Vol. 42. (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 140.

⁶“It does not say that he gives peace but rather that he is our peace, probably echoing Mic. 5:5 (cf. Isa. 9:6).” Witherington, B., III. (2007). *The letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: a socio-rhetorical commentary on the captivity Epistles*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 259.

⁷ It is worth noting that the theme of hospitality is part of Jesus teaching but it is not central to the purpose of my paper. “As pictured by the Synoptic writers, the ministry of Jesus manifests the theme of hospitality in two basic ways. First, Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom is frequently symbolized by images of food and drink, especially at festive meals. Thus the kingdom is compared to a great banquet (Matt 8:11; 22:1–14 = Luke 14:16–24), and Jesus ends his ministry with a ceremonial meal at which words about eating and drinking in the kingdom are spoken (Mark 14:17–25 and parallels).” Koenig, J. (1992). Hospitality. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 3, p. 300). New York: Doubleday.

⁸ The context of Jesus’ ministry provides an important insight into the meaning of peacemaking. Jesus lived under Roman rule, ministering in an occupied territory. In the original context of the beatitudes, this emphasis on peacemaking was most likely directed against the Zealots, Jewish revolutionaries who hoped to throw off the yoke of Roman oppression and to establish the kingdom of God through violence. In contrast to the Zealots, Jesus speaks of a peaceable kingdom and a non-violent extension of that kingdom.

⁹ Mediation refers to third-party-peacemaking. The ideal of Scripture is that the two parties in conflict work it out between themselves -- cooperative resolution. But often, people in conflict need help. So they turn to a trusted third party to aid them in resolving their dispute. See Matthew 18:16; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8; Philippians 4:2-3 and Philemon.

¹⁰ The Bible portrays God as “the God of peace” (or a comparable title) ten times. God is the source and giver of peace. This is one of the most frequent and important titles for God in the Bible (Judges 6:24; Isaiah 9:6-7; Romans 15:33; Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 14:33a; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 4:9 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 3:16 Hebrews 13:20-21).

¹¹ Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 2:14; Ephesians 2:13-17; Colossians 1:19-20.

¹² It is noteworthy that the first mention of the command to love ones neighbor in the Bible is linked to peacemaking. “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:18). Love is contrasted with vengeance and bearing a grudge. In other words, when we overcome vengeance and grudges (i.e., peacemaking) we are truly loving our neighbor.

¹³ <http://peace-catalyst.net/>

¹⁴ The conference was held in Columbus, Ohio at the Columbus Vineyard May 15-17, 2012.

¹⁵ “A Common Word” Christian Response” <http://faith.yale.edu/common-word/common-word-christian-response>

¹⁶ When in conflict we tend to react in one of two ways: fight or flight, violence or silence. We clam up or blow up.

¹⁷ See Richard B. Hays *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 320-324 for the various ways interpreters have engaged in the hermeneutics of evasion, and Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Inter-Varsity Press: Downers Grove, 2003) 128-145, for how to understand and apply this command as a transformative initiative.

¹⁸ See Matthew 5:43-48, Luke 6:27-36 and Romans 12:20-21.

¹⁹ This parallels the Bible's teaching on forgiveness. Enemy love begins as an act of the will. It originates with a choice and practical actions. But as we invest in the enemy our hearts will soften and our feelings will change.

²⁰ King Jr., Martin Luther. *Strength to Love* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press Gift Edition, 2010), 46-47.

²¹ It is noteworthy that Jesus says children of God as those who make peace *and* those who love their enemy (Matthew 5:9; 5:43-45).

²² The call to imitate God also means loving one's enemies because Paul describes the gospel in terms of enemy love: 'For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life' (Rom. 5.10 NRS). 'For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him' (Col. 1.19-22 NRS).

²³ See Rick Love *Grace and Truth: Toward Christlike Relationships with Muslims* (Arvada: Peace Catalyst International Publications, 2013), 8-9 for a summary of the radical diversity of Islam around the world.

²⁴ It is beyond the scope of this paper to address how followers of Jesus should address terrorism. For more on that topic see my book, *Peace Catalysts: Resolving Conflict in Our Families, Organizations and Communities*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press 2014 pp. 88-96. To see how I think we should address ISIS see my blog, "Jesus and ISIS: Five Commands for the Road to Peace." <http://peace-catalyst.net/blog/post/jesus-isis:-five-commands-for-the-road-to-peace>

²⁵ In rabbinic discussion the consensus was that a brother might be forgiven a repeated sin three times; on the fourth, there is no forgiveness. Peter, thinking himself big-hearted, volunteers "seven times" in answer to his own question—a larger figure often used, among other things, as a "round number" (cf. Lev 26:21; Deut 28:25; Ps 79:12; Prov 24:16; Luke 17:4). *Expositor's Bible Commentary, The*, Pradis, CD-ROM: Matthew. 6. Forgiveness, (18:21-35). Book Version: 4.0.2

²⁶ Brian Zahnd's *Unconditional: The Call of Jesus to Radical Forgiveness* 2010 is one of the best books available on this topic. One of the great peacemakers in modern history, Desmond Tutu, modelled and taught Jesus' radical forgiveness, summarized brilliantly in his book: *No Future Without Forgiveness*." Tutu, Bishop Desmond. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. New York: Image Doubleday, 2000

²⁷ "Hospitality is at the heart of the gospel and practice of the early church; its themes and language pervade the NT." Pohl, C. D. (2000). Hospitality. In T. D. Alexander & B. S. Rosner (Eds.), *New dictionary of biblical theology* (electronic ed., p. 561). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

²⁸ Andres Duncan in a personal email.

²⁹ When I speak about the blessing of being a peacemaker, people often counter with this question. "Yes, but Jesus also said he did not come to bring peace but a sword (Matthew 10:34). So how do you reconcile these two verses?"

Matthew 10 described Jesus' commission of His disciples to extend the kingdom. Before any mention of a sword, He told them to go in peace, "If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if it is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace" (Matt 10:13 NASB). When Jesus sent out the seventy disciples, He described this process in a slightly different way, "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace *be* to this house.' If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you" (Luke 10:5-6).

This passage implies that in some sense those on mission are bearers of peace (see John 14:27), whose fruitfulness depends on the discernment of peace when sharing their faith.

Jesus' followers are peacemaker-witnesses who speak the blessing of peace on families where they stay. Nevertheless, response to the message of the kingdom will be mixed; some will accept the message, others will reject it. Because of this, families will be divided, conflict will ensue. But please note: Jesus used the metaphor of the sword to describe the divisive fallout that sometimes accompanies the extension of the kingdom. This is confirmed by the parallel passage in Luke: "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division" (Luke 12:51).

Jesus did not use the metaphor of the sword to depict any form of violence or belligerence on the part of His followers.

Among evangelicals, Matthew 10:34-38 ("I came to bring a sword") rather than Matthew 5:9 ("Blessed are the peacemakers") seems to provide the dominant perspective regarding peace and witness in the New Testament. In other words, there is the assumption that conflict will prevail. With this mindset, could it be that conflict sometimes ensues because of the non-irenic manner in which we communicate the message? Could this be a something of a self-fulfilling prophecy?

How do we reconcile Matthew 10:34-38 with Matthew 5:9? At the very least we need to affirm both truths, since the Bible does. Walter Kaiser gives wise guidance: "When Jesus said that he had come to bring 'not peace but a sword,' he meant that this would be the *effect* of his coming, not that it was the *purpose* of his coming." (Kaiser, W. C., Peter H. Davids, F.F. Bruce. *Hard sayings of the Bible*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996) 378.) As children of God, our purpose is to represent the Prince of Peace, regardless of the effect it has.

³⁰ Witherington, B., III. *The Gospel of Mark: a socio-rhetorical commentary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 315.

³¹ The point of Jesus' complaint, however, seems to be that it all took place in the Court of the Gentiles. Hence (17) quoting Isaiah 56:7, the bone of contention is that the place intended for Gentiles ('*all nations*') to pray, was being misused by the Jews for trade (and profit). '*Den of robbers*' (17) is very strong language, and may have its origin in Jeremiah 7:11. The anger of Jesus is clear. English, D. *The message of Mark: the mystery of faith*, (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 190.

³² See *God the Peacemaker: How Atonement Brings Shalom* by Graham Cole (2009) for an excellent overview of God's comprehensive peacemaking purposes through the cross.

³³ See my book, *Peace Catalysts: Resolving Conflict in Our Families, Organizations and Communities*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press 2014 pp. 30-34.

³⁴ Sometimes Jesus' uses the term Son of Man as a synonym for being human, while other times it refers to the Danielic hope (Daniel 9:13-14).

³⁵ "God has established various goals or objectives, the most remarkable one here being the exaltation of Christ described in verse 10. Certain specific and measurable objectives are to be achieved, step by step, toward that unifying reconciliation of the universe under the headship of Christ. One (2:1–10) is the salvation of individuals, which implies their reconciliation to him. Another is the reconciliation of formerly diverse groups of believers to each other (Jews and Gentiles, 2:11–22). A third step goes beyond reconciliation: it is the actual uniting of these previously hostile groups in one body of believers, the church (3:1–12). The next step (4:1–16) depends on us: living a life worthy of the calling that Paul explains in the first three chapters. That step is maintaining the unity to which God has called us." Liefeld, W. L. (1997). *Ephesians* (Vol. 10, Eph 1:9). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

³⁶ Ryken, L., Wilhoit, J., Longman, T., Duriez, C., Penney, D., & Reid, D. G. (2000). In *Dictionary of biblical imagery* (electronic ed., p. 404). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

³⁷ See Moore's *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* by Russell Moore. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group. 2015 pp 32,172, 216.

³⁸ "Do You have a Bible Sized View of Peace? The Peace Gap in Evangelical Churches," <http://peace-catalyst.net/blog/post/do-you-have-a-bible-sized-view-of-peace-the-peace-gap-in-evangelical-churches>.