



HOW TO QUIET YOUR HEART
IN AN ANXIOUS WORLD

CHIP INGRAM

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Tony Evans, PhD, senior pastor,
Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship



I CHOOSE PEACE

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CHIPINGRAM



BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ingram, Chip, 1954– author.

Title: I choose peace : how to quiet your heart in an anxious world / Chip Ingram.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2021] | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020042357 | ISBN 9780801093821 (cloth) | ISBN 9781540901286 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Peace—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Anxiety—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Stress management—Religious Aspects—Christianity. | Bible. Philippians, IV—Criticism, interpretation, etc.

Classification: LCC BV4908.5 .I54 2021 | DDC 248.8/6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020042357>

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21 22 23 24 25 26 27 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Chip Ingram, I Choose Peace

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To the Venture Church family—
elders who became fast friends
and modeled these truths,
staff who practiced them with me,
and a congregation who loved and supported
Theresa and me for nearly a decade.
May the *shalom* of God be in you
and with you all the days of your precious lives.

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus and His disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee in a small fishing boat one day when a violent storm swept over the water. Waves crashed over the side of the boat, and the disciples were terrified. They cried out to Jesus for help, but somehow, some way, He was still asleep in the stern. They were overwhelmed with fear for their lives; He was taking a nap. And when they woke Him up and accusingly asked, “Don’t you care if we drown?” (Mark 4:38), He didn’t thank them for alerting Him to the problem. He simply calmed the storm and asked why they were so faithless and afraid. In circumstances that would make most people panic, Jesus had astonishing, supernatural peace.

If you are a believer and follower of Jesus, you have peace too. Maybe that’s news to you. Perhaps you’ve been struggling and straining to find peace in the midst of tumultuous circumstances and personal crises. Maybe, after discovering that being a Christian doesn’t pluck anyone out of all life’s problems, you’ve wondered where that elusive peace is. You

know it's a promise in Scripture. You just don't know why you aren't experiencing it. And you might argue with someone who tells you that you already have it.

But I'm telling you anyway. You already have it. Jesus actually gave *His* peace to all His followers the night before His crucifixion. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). So you don't have the kind of peace the world tries to give. You have the peace that Jesus gives—the same peace He had that day in the back of the boat while a storm raged around Him.

So why don't all Christians experience this supernatural peace? Because we must willfully, purposefully choose to walk in the peace He gave us. It isn't automatic. Even though we already have it, we tend to pursue peace on the world's terms. The world offers it to us if and when we are successful, accomplished, pretty, rich, famous, or secure. It holds out an ideal that most people can never attain, and those who do attain that find out it isn't all it's cracked up to be. It promises peace but can't deliver. And in the process, it robs us of the peace we've already been given.

This book will help you overcome the various challenges and lies that rob us of Jesus's peace. We will discover the biblical truths and principles that allow us to experience deep, lasting peace in the midst of relational conflict, anxious moments, the brokenness of this world, difficult circumstances, a materialistic culture, tests of faith, and all the uncertain times we experience in the chaos of life. We will look at the theological basis for experiencing supernatural peace, but

the focus is not on theory. It's on actually experiencing it. By the end of the book, you will have numerous practical steps you can take to experience the fullness of the peace Jesus has promised.

This book is not written in a vacuum, an ivory tower, or a pulpit. It comes from decades of experience, much of it hard earned, and observations about how God works. Many of its illustrations come from the hardest times of my life. It was written during a pandemic that threatened the global economy and changed the way we live. And all the adversity, challenges, and crisis situations of life do nothing to change the truths and practices we find in God's Word. In fact, they confirm them. These principles of peace apply in the best and worst of times because they aren't dependent on the times. They are rooted in the nature and character of God Himself.

That means we can have the kind of peace that is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. It is never beyond our reach if we know how to reach it and take the steps God has given us to experience it. That's my prayer for you in the pages that follow—that you will anchor yourself far deeper than the chaotic circumstances and values of this world and live high above them. And that every day for the rest of your life, your heart, mind, and soul will be filled with the peace that passes all human understanding.



CHAPTER 1

Choose Peace in Relational Conflict

I didn't grow up following Jesus. I went to church, but I never encountered God there and met a lot of people who talked one way and lived another. I didn't know if God existed and really didn't care. I didn't think I needed Him.

Life has a way of pointing out your needs over time, and I had plenty of them. And God has a way of bringing people into your life who can show you what He is like and how He meets those needs. Right after I graduated from high school, I met some people whose lives were radically different from mine. They shared God's love with me and invited me into a personal relationship with Him. They told me Jesus died in my place to break down all the walls between me and God so I could have peace with Him. It was all very new, and I

was very skeptical, but I turned from my self-will and sin and asked Jesus to come into my life.

As a new believer, I was given a Bible that was written in easy-to-understand language. No one told me I had to read it, but I couldn't put it down. I even hid it under my pillow; I didn't want my parents to think I'd become a Jesus Freak. But there were some things I couldn't hide. I changed. My insecurities had driven me to be a type A overachiever who just had to date the right girl, get the right scholarship, and accomplish whatever would make me a "somebody." But when my new relationship with God made me a somebody, there was nobody left to impress. He had taken up residence inside me. I had peace.

My father was an alcoholic and a retired Marine (not an ex-Marine, as I was once bluntly corrected). When I came home from college after my first year, he asked what was going on with me.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You're different," he said. "Really different."

"What's different about me?"

"There's peace in your life. How'd you get it?"

I was hardly a theologian at the time. It was all very new. So I gave him the best answer I could. "I have no idea. All I can tell you is I have a personal relationship with God and have been reading the New Testament."

"Where do you get one of those?"

I told him, and he started getting up early every morning to read the Bible. Eventually he came to grips with some of his issues and turned his life over to Christ. He began to change too.

Peace is part of the package when we enter into a relationship with God in Christ. It's not always a smooth path—Dad and I both had plenty of ups and downs along the way—but it's ours for the taking. Yet we have to choose it. Peace is a gift and a choice.

**Peace is
a gift and
a choice.**

Over the years, I've learned how to determine whether I receive or reject that gift. I've managed to figure out some unfortunate ways to quench God's peace so I don't actually experience it. I know how to worry, stress out, focus on the future, and get into conflict with other people, including my own wife and children, and I've seen the peace dissipate pretty quickly. But I also know by now how to be intentional about it. It's possible to train our hearts and minds to shift our focus and experience the peace we've been given. We really can choose to live in peace and experience God's restoration in our lives.

What Is the Source of Your Peace?

People tend to search for peace from one of three sources. One is *inward*. Advocates of this approach will tell you that you just need to look within. It's already there; you just need to find it. You can do that through meditation, relaxation, centering, and whatever else it takes to find harmony with

the cosmos. But it's not "out there" somewhere, and you can't depend on circumstances and other people to give it to you. You have to discover it yourself, somewhere deep inside.

There's some truth to that approach. Circumstances and other people really don't provide peace, and there is some value in going deep within. But what source are you going to find there? Meditation and relaxation are means in a process, not sources. The search within would have to lead to something reliable and true.

Another source people commonly appeal to is *outward*. We are told to achieve, to conquer our fears, to control our emotions and our environment, to perform in ways that lead to lasting peace. It's out there, and we are to discover it by accomplishing something that brings us peace—getting into a good school and making good grades, finding the right person to be with, finding a meaningful and profitable career track, having a nice home and driving a nice car, creating a secure income. The idea is that if we achieve, conquer, and perform, our desires and circumstances will align, and we'll have the peace we're looking for.

The problem with this approach is that the peace that is out there is always just out of reach. There's never enough achievement and success to make life truly peaceful. There's always a situation or two that need to be fixed. There's never quite enough money to completely satisfy us. American oil tycoon J. Paul Getty was the richest person in the world, at one point bringing in \$20 million a day, and he was consumed with keeping it going and getting more. He was divorced five times and alienated from his children, often prioritizing

money over their health and welfare. Near the end of his life, he said he would gladly give his millions away for just one lasting marital success. He had spent his life accumulating more and more and still had no peace. No matter how much he tried to buy it, it just wasn't "out there."

Eastern traditions tend to emphasize the inward source of peace, while Western traditions have gravitated toward the outward source. And some of these approaches are not inherently wrong in themselves. There's nothing wrong with breathing deeply, relaxing, and centering, on one hand, or earning money, making good grades, and searching for the right relationships on the other. Those can be great skills to have. But they are methods and endeavors that work much better as by-products or outcomes of peace, not the source of it. They can't ground us in reality, and they aren't dependable.

The dependable approach, the one that grounds us in truth, is *upward*. Peace is a person, not a condition (Ephesians 2:14). Jesus said He doesn't give the kind of peace the world gives. He gives His own peace (John 14:27). We trust in Him, depend on Him, and abide in Him. We cultivate faith, love, and obedience to His ways, and He gives His peace to us. We don't discover it within or reach for it outside of ourselves. We receive it by faith.

**Peace is a
person, not
a condition.**

When I turned from my sin and invited Christ to forgive me and come into my life, He took up residence in me and sealed me with His Spirit. I didn't know such monumental events happened at the time, but I can look back and see that they did. The Holy Spirit

lives inside of those who believe, and through Him we experience God's sovereignty over a chaotic world, the goodness of His nature, and the peace and calm of knowing Him. In fact, peace is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Regardless of whether circumstances go up or down, relationships are good or bad, or the stock market rises or falls, we can have a supernatural peace that transcends human understanding (Philippians 4:7). He will keep us in perfect peace as our minds are stayed on Him (Isaiah 26:3).

God's Peace: *Shalom*

Dictionary definitions of *peace* often describe it as the absence of something—the absence of disturbance and hostility, of internal and external strife, of conflict between people or nations. In other words, it's the calm between the storms, those times of getting along or being at rest that are so often disrupted by crises and turmoil. In fact, many people have a hard time describing peace without focusing on what it is not. But God's definition of peace is different. It's something we can choose, embrace, and enjoy. We don't run away from turmoil to find it. We enter into it. Rather than the absence of some conflict or stress, it's the presence of something God gives.

The Hebrew word for this peace is *shalom*. It's a familiar term for many, and *peace* is the best one-word translation we have for it. But the English word *peace* doesn't nearly capture the meaning of the Hebrew expression. *Shalom* is much bigger. It's a rich, full concept that covers every area of our lives.

There are four aspects of the biblical use of *shalom*: (1) complete wholeness and health; (2) harmony in relationships; (3) success and progress in our purpose; and (4) victory over enemies. So in contrast to the world's peace, God's peace includes our mind, body, and emotions. It covers our marriages and children, relationships with neighbors and coworkers, and fellowship with other members of the body of Christ. Our alignment with God, His purpose for our lives, and the ability to live in His will are all involved—no matter how many ups and downs we go through in following Him and walking out His plans. And this *shalom* encompasses confidence that He is protecting us, providing for us, helping us overcome difficult problems and adversaries, and giving us victories in life's challenges.

We will face those challenges, sometimes long-lasting ones, in every one of these aspects of *shalom*. Some people spend nearly their whole lives wondering if they are in the right job or the right place or if they are with the right person. Many of us live with the dreaded fear of missing out, that FOMO that keeps us thinking of alternatives almost constantly. At some point we will have conflict with somebody, face challenges that seem insurmountable, struggle with physical and emotional issues, and search for God's will for our lives. But we can trust that God will lead us toward *shalom* in every area of our lives as His stated purpose for each of us. He wants us to have peace in all its fullness.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), literally the Prince of *Shalom*. The night before His crucifixion, He told His followers that He was giving them His *shalom*. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you

as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27). That’s more than a promise of a calm demeanor in a moment of crisis. *Shalom* is a comprehensive expression of God’s will for us in every situation we face.

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“Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” What a great line for us—an assurance of the peace of God in any area where we feel unsettled. When you’re watching the news and feel threatened by a rapidly spreading disease or an economic downturn; when you’re worried about your future,

whether you will ever find the right job, get married, have children, and have good, satisfying relationships through it all; when you’re looking around you and seeing all the things people are dealing with in this world, you need that kind of assurance. The good news is that God gives it to us.

That doesn’t mean everything will always work out just the way we want it to. It does mean, however, that we can live our entire lives as followers of Christ with supernatural peace. Some people go through their whole lives with that kind of peace available to them and never choose it. They are robbed of something that was theirs for the taking. The purpose of this book—and God’s purpose for our lives—is to give us the understanding and the tools to avoid that tragedy.

In the first five chapters, we’re going to look at five things that rob us of our peace. Paul covers them in Philippians 4, and the first is conflict in a relationship. Some of us get along

with nearly everybody, while others have a hard time getting along with anybody. But all of us have someone in our lives with whom we would like to have a better relationship. If you had to come up with a person who is at odds with you (or you with them), whether in your family or somewhere else in your social network, whether now or buried in the distant past, who would it be? Maybe you can think of several, but my guess is one person came to mind first. Who is that?

Whoever that is—an old friend, an in-law, an ex-spouse, a contentious coworker—you can't experience your God-given *shalom* if you push it down and cover it up, or if you always think the problem is all the other person's fault and none of your own. Whatever lack of relationship health you don't deal with, whatever poison or bitterness eats away at you will affect you somehow. It may color your healthy relationships in negative ways, unsettle your emotions, or manifest in physical issues like indigestion and migraines. Whatever the case, you need to be at peace in your relationships, at least as far as it depends on you. Full reconciliation may not always be possible, but it is possible to know you've done everything you can do and be content with that. In the following pages, we are going to walk through a biblical process for getting peace when you have relational conflict.

Dealing with Relational Conflict

● *The Context*

When Paul wrote Philippians, he was in confinement in Rome—probably under house arrest awaiting a trial for

crimes he didn't commit. He deeply loved the church at Philippi, where he had also been in prison, though just for one very dramatic night. God had done amazing things in this church, and Paul thought of it fondly. It was one of the bright spots of his ministry.

But there were a few problems in Philippi, and when we read between the lines of his letter, we can see that some people may have been drifting away from God and forgetting the importance and the power of the gospel in their lives. There was also apparently some relational conflict, some sort of personality clash or competitive spirit between some of the members. So Paul wrote to remind them of his love, to encourage them to stand firm, to urge them to plant their feet in the kingdom of heaven where their true citizenship was, and to give them hope in the midst of the mess of this world.

He ends chapter 3 with these reminders and a call to live out their new, heavenly life on earth. And in that context, he turns his attention to the two people who need to remember that heavenly citizenship in the midst of their relationship. These two women might have expected a stern rebuke, a command to get with the program and behave, but that's not the heart behind Paul's words. He was encouraging them to remember who they were, who God is, and how their hope applies to life in this world. Listen to his tender but strong words to each of them.

“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!” (Philippians 4:1). Those are not the words

of an angry leader. They are the words of an encouraging friend. These people are his *joy* and his *crown* whom he *loves* and *longs for*. He is telling them that when they don't live in the peace God provides, it breaks his heart. He wants them to stand firm in the hope they have been given.

● **The Plea**

Then Paul issues a direct plea for unity and request for counsel:

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. (Philippians 4:2–3)

These are two good women. Paul is not looking for fault here. No one is “the bad guy.” From the context, we can tell that this is not a moral or a doctrinal issue. Perhaps they disagree about how the church ought to function, or maybe their personalities just rub each other the wrong way. We don't know. But we do know that Paul sees them as strong and faithful members of this church who have been greatly used by God. They have contended with him, “at [his] side” as his right and left hands, in the growing of this church. They have been instrumental in the strength of this church through its beginnings and its opposition and challenges. Their names are written in the Book of Life. For whatever reason, they aren't getting along now. And, as

in any family or small group, conflict between two people affects the others.

So Paul pleads with these women to agree, literally to have the same mind. He also asks a “true companion” to help them—to intervene in the situation and give them counsel. Sometimes two people can’t resolve their own differences. They need help. There’s nothing wrong with that. It’s how the body of Christ works to bring unity and peace.

The phrase “true companion,” or “loyal yokefellow” in some translations, is the Greek *syzygos*, which describes a strong bond between two parties—in marriage, labor (like two oxen bound together), or with a very close companion. Here it could refer to one of Paul’s partners in ministry—an idea that has led to plenty of speculation about this person’s identity—or it could be read as a proper name. In any case, the meaning fits very nicely with the point of Paul’s plea, which is aimed at getting people to walk together in peace and harmony. The small church, which likely met in someone’s home at this point, had a problem. Conflict, resentment, competitiveness, and whatever other dynamics that were involved were affecting the whole group. Paul recognized someone there who probably had the gift of exhortation and wise counsel, and he wanted that person to sit down with these women and help.

● *The Commands*

Next Paul gives two commands. The first deals with this church’s relational focus. It’s easy in the midst of a conflict

to focus on the problem, specifically on the other person's faults, motives, offenses, and attitudes. We replay events and conversations in our minds, fixate on whatever part of the relationship is bad (even if most of it is good), and begin to demonize the other person. We harden our hearts, nurse our wounds, and cultivate our anger. And anger that simmers long enough begins to boil over. Our focus makes the problem worse. So Paul tells them to change their focus.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). We may read these words as a nice encouragement, but in context, it's a command. Paul is telling them to get their eyes off horizontal relationships among human beings and put them on their vertical relationship with God. This command is not just for the two women at odds with each other; it's for the whole church. He doesn't want them to take sides, to try to figure out who's right and wrong or how this power struggle is going to play out. That's our tendency, isn't it? We develop cliques and factions, and small conflicts turn into big ones. We find people who agree with us, and the stakes get higher. If we want to have peace, we have to shift our focus from people to God.

Try going to a coffee shop sometime and listen to everybody's conversations. Pretend like you're doing something on your phone or your laptop but tune in to what's going on around you. “I don't know what he's thinking, but . . .” “He plays golf three times a week and expects me to take care of the kids!” “I can't

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believe my roommate; I don't know how much longer I can do this." "My supervisor must be on drugs." What are these people doing? Gathering people to their cause, building up their side, stirring up animosity against someone else. It's like pouring gasoline on a fire. You can't imagine that these conversations are actually making anything better.

What would make things better is a change in focus. Turning our attention to God, rejoicing in all that He has done, celebrating the life and promises He has given us—that radical shift in attitude quenches a lot of fires. Some things are much more important than making sure we are happy in a situation and getting the respect we think we deserve. Recognizing the bigger issues makes our other issues look a lot smaller.

Recognizing the bigger issues makes our other issues look a lot smaller.

Then Paul gives a second command: "Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near" (Philippians 4:5). These believers have a personal responsibility to each other. Instead of putting the blame on the other person, they are to have enough humility to take the lead in resolving the problem. Why? Because the Lord is near.

The Lord's nearness could be taken in two ways: either that He is close by and available, watching us in our conflicts and offering solutions for them; or that He is coming back soon, which is consistent with Paul's words at the end of chapter 3. Whether the focus of this passage is Jesus's availability or our accountability in light of His return, the application is

the same. Life is short. We will all face Him soon enough. It's important to live with that perspective.

That implies living with a sense of *gentleness*. No single English word translates this Greek concept well, but it includes tolerance, forbearance, geniality, generosity, kindness, and humility. One commentator calls it “sweet reasonableness.”¹ Paul is essentially telling them to be willing not to get their way in the relationship for the sake of the reputation of Christ and His people. In other words, we don't have to be proved right. We don't have to establish the fact that we are only 5 percent at fault. We can go ahead and own 51 percent and get the ball moving because it's more important for things to be right than for us to be right. That takes a lot of humility. And Paul says to make it “evident” to all.

It's more important for things to be right than for us to be right.

Five Ways to Defuse Relational Conflict

Relationships matter to God. We don't just choose peace for our own sakes, although we greatly benefit from doing so. We choose peace because God seeks reconciliation with everyone, and we are being conformed to His image. It's a reflection of His nature. So resolving conflict has a lot to do with following Him well.

Reconciliation isn't easy when we think we know how the other person is going to respond. We often adopt a “why

try?” attitude. But we try for the same reasons Paul urged Euodia and Syntyche to resolve their differences and because God says to make every effort. So if your network of relationships is ruptured, especially in a relationship with a family member or other member of the body of Christ, seek peace as diligently as you can. Be very intentional and persistent in following these steps toward restoration.

1. Resolve to stop procrastinating. Make a commitment to address the problem. Whichever relationship first came to mind when we started this chapter, think of a specific step you can take toward reconciliation. Maybe it begins with a conversation, an appointment with a counselor, or even a prayer for God to help you as you walk this out. Whatever moves you in that direction, be decisive about it and commit to it.

Why is it so important to stop procrastinating? Because a lack of peace in your relationships adds stress to your life and affects your physical and emotional health. You may not feel it happening—sometimes the stress is very subtle—but the harmful effects are doing something to you beneath the

**You have to
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surface. Many people who wrestle with addictions aren't primarily facing a problem with food, shopping, porn, alcohol, or drugs. They are covering up the pain of a broken relationship and a wounded heart. When you lack peace, you try to calm an unsettled soul with all sorts of short-term remedies that mask the pain but heal nothing. And the fixes that give you artificial peace keep demanding more and more of you. You have to address the problem at its core.

Through Paul’s pen, God instructs us to do just that. “Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:17–18). *Everyone* means everyone—Christians, non-Christians, family members, coworkers, supervisors, neighbors, everyone. The term for “be careful to do” means “to consider.” It’s an accounting term, a reckoning, a thoughtful appraisal of the situation. That approach takes us out of all the “he did this” and “she did that” reasonings that go on in our minds. It enables us to see from someone else’s perspective and try to understand why they think they are right. Perhaps it helps us recognize that they are gifted in different ways or have a different background that informs their perspective. It puts us in a position to quit being defensive and think objectively. Understanding the situation is the necessary first step toward any kind of resolution, restitution, healing, or forgiveness.

2. Reevaluate your expectations. Some of us got the idea somewhere in our spiritual development that Christians should never argue—that if we are really being spiritual, our relationships will always be harmonious. That means if we have a falling out with someone, that person must be unspiritual, disobedient—maybe even just bad.

In Philippians 4, there isn’t a bad person creating problems for the church. We see two women who have contended for the faith and whose names are written in the Book of Life—and, as Paul may be thinking, are going to have to spend an eternity together and might as well start getting along now. But at the moment, even though they are committed Christians and God has worked through each of them, not

everything is wonderful between them. That happens. We can't expect that Christians will never make mistakes, offend anyone, or speak thoughtless words. We can't assume Christian relationships are always smooth.

Sometimes we're shocked by what other Christians do—how Christian businesspeople work, how Christian leaders lead, how Christian families get dysfunctional like other families do. Some Christians are “rescuers” who just want everything to get fixed, and others are “warriors” who just want people to recognize how wrong they are and own their stuff. We expect other people to behave in certain ways, and we're shocked or disappointed when they don't. Whatever solution you tend to play out in your imagination—other people coming to grips with their mistakes and confessing how wrong they were, or some great revelation that makes it all a huge misunderstanding—things probably aren't going to happen that way. We'll never find genuine reconciliation or experience genuine peace until we get past those unbiblical and unrealistic expectations.

Conflict is real, and Christians aren't immune to it. Paul could testify to that himself. He and Barnabas had a strong relationship that went back to Paul's earliest days as a believer, when only Barnabas trusted his conversion and helped him out. Years later, they were sent out together on a missionary journey—Paul with his gift of communicating the gospel and Barnabas, the “son of encouragement,” planting numerous churches and spreading the gospel far and wide. But when the time came for a second journey, they had “such a sharp disagreement that they parted company” (Acts 15:39). Barnabas wanted to include a young believer

named John Mark, who had quit on the first journey and went home, and Paul didn't want to go through that again. So Paul took Silas because he felt like he could trust him, Barnabas took John Mark probably because he thought it would be good for him, and they went their separate ways.

We don't know all the details of that story, but we know that for an encouraging, generous personality like Barnabas to part company with a high-powered, driven personality like Paul—after they had worked so closely, been so fruitful, and ministered to each other in times of great need—it had to be an extremely contentious situation. This wasn't a case of two men weighing the pros and cons and deciding that perhaps it would be in their mutual interests to split this into two trips rather than one. Apparently, they blew up at each other. They each had certain expectations of the other that weren't met.

People have different styles, philosophies, and personalities. Sometimes they disagree, not over some crucial doctrinal or moral issue but simply over the way to do things. There's nothing wrong with agreeing to go separate ways. But it isn't right or healthy for the relationship to end in anger, resentment, bitterness, and brokenness.

3. Get competent outside help. Sometimes God will put it on your heart to seek restoration in a relationship, yet everything you try seems to make it worse. This can be especially painful in a close, long-term relationship with a spouse or other family member, but it's also frustrating with friends, coworkers, small-group members, a business relationship, or anywhere else you experience ongoing friction. In any relationship, there's no shame in asking for help.

In most relationships, that can be as simple as having a trusted friend to mediate or offer counsel. In the really big

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relationships like marriage and family, it may mean getting professional help. That's really difficult for many people, especially men. Some of us avoid the touchy-feely stuff or think counseling is for people with "real problems," which of course is never us. Usually those expressions are just another way of saying we feel really threatened in that area and

don't want to look too closely at our own lives. We run from the tools that could help us the most because they might be painful to use.

That's where I was early in my marriage. I was in seminary, learning to preach the Word of God to others, and I couldn't even get along with my own wife. We didn't have much income, and professional help can be expensive, even at a student rate. But the bigger issue for me was a stubborn, arrogant pride. It was extremely difficult for me to admit that Theresa and I might need some help. I struggled to overcome my inward resistance and swallow my pride, finally realizing it was the only way to improve my marriage.

We had another little bump five years later, and this time it wasn't as big a deal. By this point, I'd learned that humility is the channel grace flows through. We had been talking for hours and realized we weren't making any progress, so we decided to go talk with someone we trusted who could look at it objectively from a biblical point of view. It was amazing, and it helped us find some resolution.

When you get help from someone objective—not your friend or the other person’s friend, but someone who will treat you equally—you’ll probably hear some things you don’t want to hear. You’ll learn something about yourself. Both of you will walk away having decided not to demand that the other person change for the relationship to be what it needs to be. You can’t control the other person, but you can be responsible for yourself. And if you choose to work on your own issues, whether the other person responds or not, you’re well on the way to improving your relationship and ultimately to restoration.

Humility is the channel grace flows through.

4. Refuse to allow one relationship to ruin your life. Human beings have lots of ways to get offended, and some of them are legitimate. It happens in churches a lot. You lead a Bible study but have to be away for a week, and the next year the leadership asks the person who filled in for you to lead the study this time. Or someone moves the flowers you arranged for a funeral, puts you in a different spot on a ministry team, or disrupts the routine you’ve gotten used to over the last two decades. Offenses turn into animosities, and animosities hold us captive. We have to get free from them.

A young woman came up to me in tears after a service years ago and talked about how her dad left when she was fourteen. Understandably, this was a traumatic experience for her, the kind that can leave deep wounds for a long time. She’d had no relationship with him since that time, and she was captive to her pain. Her wounds were completely

legitimate, but I had to ask her if she was going to give him that kind of power. The broken relationship clearly wasn't her fault, but it had still left her hurting. Could she forgive him and leave that pain in the past? It's a hard thing to do, but it's the only way to be free.

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Many people have a relationship like that—with an ex-spouse, an alienated child, a friend or business partner who betrayed us. We'll talk about how to start a conversation in those situations without letting it blow up in your face, but there's something else that has to come first. You have to make a decision not to let that one relationship ruin your life. The other person may not respond well when you take a step toward reconciliation, but having done all you can to fix things, you can step back and be at peace. "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18). Sadly, it's not always possible. But once we've done all we can, we can then "let it go" and be at peace.

Years ago I went through one of the hardest times of my life. I felt like I'd been betrayed. I'm sure my perspective was only partly true, but I was so angry I couldn't sleep. My stomach would churn if I didn't distract myself with music in the car. I kept reliving scenes with certain people and the things they had said and done. It was eating away at me.

One day a friend who was helping me through this told me to "get vertical." That wasn't news to me, but I needed the reminder. I'd been a pastor for years and knew what to do,

but it felt impossible to do it. It was good to be pushed in that direction.

Then this friend asked if I would do him a favor.

“Sure,” I said.

“I can see that you’ve gotten some raw deals here. But I want you to meet me here next week at this time, okay?”

“Yeah, okay.”

“And I want you to pray for seven days. I want you to list all the mistakes throughout this whole situation as God reveals them to you. In addition, think of all the specific ways you sinned against the people you can’t stop thinking about.”

This was my friend, a godly guy I trusted, but he didn’t seem very friendly right then. But I did what he said, and I remember coming back and sitting in the same place, leaning forward with tears in my eyes, and telling him how I had pushed all those people’s buttons. I listed all my leadership mistakes. And even though it was hard to confess some things as sin, I wrote down what God showed me and gave him the list.

It’s amazing how often we demand justice in our relationships with other people but expect mercy in our relationship with God. That was a turning point in my life because I realized I couldn’t ask God to give me mercy for all the things I had done and justice for all the

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things that had been done to me. And in that process, I was able to let it all go. Nothing got fixed, and no circumstances changed. The people I was angry with may have never seen things any differently than they did before. But I could let it go and be at peace.

That's how it may be for you. The situation may not be fixed, the relationship may not be restored, you may never shake hands or hug each other again, and there may be no bow to tie up the package neatly. But you can agree to disagree, you can forgive, and you can move forward. You can refuse to let a broken relationship ruin your life.

5. Remember that a right response is more important than being right. I recently had an intense conversation with a young man and realized I'd just poured cold water on his confidence. I regretted it immediately. I went home and went to bed, and that night I found myself in one of those situations when God wakes you up and suddenly makes things clear. *What am I going to do?* I wondered. Human nature always wants to defend itself, of course, so I started to rehearse all the reasons and justifications for saying what I said: *He needs to grow up. Learning to lead means telling people hard things. He'll get over it. I'm older and wiser . . .* And God said, "I'll take care of all that. What about your part?" I knew I had to deal with some things.

Own your part and then some. If you're like me at all, you're guiltier and more messed up than you think. Your perspective doesn't quite go as far as it should toward objectivity.