

**DR. DERWIN L. GRAY**

**the  
good  
life**

**WHAT JESUS TEACHES ABOUT  
FINDING TRUE HAPPINESS**

***foreword by Beth Moore***

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## CHAPTER 8

# *Happy Are the Peacemakers*

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will  
be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9)*

**R**odney King, a victim of police brutality, said, “Can’t we all just get along?” Based on an observation of humanity, the answer is, “No, we can’t all get along because animosity between people is so strong.”

We can see the animosity between the police and minority communities.

We can see the animosity between Republicans and Democrats.

We can see the animosity between different ethnic groups in America.

We experience animosity in our own families.

And on a global scale, animosity touches every inch of this planet. It’s everywhere. And when it’s everywhere, it becomes like an airborne disease that we can catch.

It's critical that we are immunized by the gospel of peace. The "gospel of peace" will fortify our hearts against this disease (Eph. 6:15). But before we get to the gospel of peace and how it transforms us into peacemakers, let's make some cultural observations. Just like a good doctor, we must consider the symptoms, do some blood work, and have a spiritual MRI so we can diagnose the illness and heal it.

### Peace Seems Like a Good Idea Until . . .

Peace, love, and forgiveness seem like a beautiful idea until we are called upon to be the person who jumps between coworkers who are so toxic their poison is spreading like Ebola, infecting and killing the workplace culture. A bad work culture has negative effects on the people trapped in it. One psychotherapist writes, "Workplace toxicity leads to adverse effects in part by stimulating people to ruminate on their negative work experiences."<sup>1</sup> Twenty years of research have shown that a toxic work environment increases "depression, substance use, and health issues among employees."<sup>2</sup> An unhealthy work environment leads to decreased work productivity, low employee commitment, and high employee turnover.<sup>3</sup> Toxic work environments hurt people and business.

The dark powers of evil have one goal—"to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10). Think about how much time we spend at work. If that time is toxic, imagine how much harm dark powers are unleashing on people. An unhealthy work environment leads to unhealthy people, who infect their spouses, children, and friends.

The idea of peace is gorgeous until someone offends you and you have to be the one who walks across the hot coals of fear, anger,

and frustration to rehab and restore the relationship. The Mayo Clinic writes, “Letting go of grudges and bitterness can make way for improved health and peace of mind. Forgiveness can lead to healthier relationships, improved mental health, less anxiety, stress and hostility, lower blood pressure, fewer symptoms of depression, a stronger immune system, improved heart health, improved self-esteem.”<sup>4</sup> Despite the benefits of being a peacemaker, which entail forgiveness, patience, grace, and humility, we often choose not to engage in reconciliation and forgiveness. It just seems too hard for us to eat that slice of humble pie. Unfortunately, our pride that prevents us from pursuing reconciliation will imprison us in a cage of mental, physical, and spiritual illness. And like a virus that causes sickness, the toxins will spread to those we are in relationship with.

Have you ever noticed that when you spend time with negative, toxic people, you find yourself being more pessimistic? Research shows that a small amount of negative brain activity has the potential to weaken our immune systems, making us susceptible to sickness, and could cause a heart attack or a stroke.<sup>5</sup> If we choose not to be peacemakers, we take our lack of peace with us into future relationships. Remember, wherever we go, we take ourselves along. We can only fake being emotionally and spiritually healthy for so long. Eventually, who we truly are is revealed. Here’s what happens when we are caught in the clenched fist of unforgiveness:<sup>6</sup>

- We bring anger and bitterness into every relationship and new experience.
- We become so wrapped up in the past that we can’t enjoy the present; so wrapped up in what’s wrong that we can’t enjoy what’s right.

*the good life*

- We become depressed or anxious.
- We feel that our lives lack meaning or purpose, or that we're at odds with our spiritual beliefs.
- We lose valuable and enriching connectedness with others.

Perhaps my talk of “dark powers” isn’t your thing. In the age of scientific enlightenment, if we can’t observe something with our five senses, we tend to be skeptical of it. Be careful playing that game because there are plenty of things that we believe that go beyond the ability of the scientific method to measure, such as love, morality, and beauty. The dark powers *do not want you to believe they exist*. There is an unseen world of light and darkness, and a battle raging between them.

But there is good news. Even though the dark powers are still working, the light has won. Jesus has already dealt a death blow to the darkness.

[God] has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. In him, we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:13–14)

Forgiveness of sins is the pathway to peace with God and peace with God’s other image-bearers. The apostle Paul, a leading Jewish intellectual with Roman citizenship, wrote these words to bring peace in a first-century, multiethnic, multiclass church that he started in Ephesus (in modern-day Turkey):

Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. (Eph. 6:10–12)

The dominion of darkness does not want us to be peacemakers because evil knows that forgiveness, grace, peace, and love lead to life. The human heart is like a garden that requires cultivation so life can flourish. Peacemaking acts as nourishment to help the human heart grow and bloom. Dark powers are active in perpetuating a culture of division, dissension, and death. They are death-dealers, but Jesus is a hope dealer. Listen to Jesus with the ears of your heart: “A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance” (John 10:10).

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### Life Reimagined

The Beatitudes are a manifesto of hope that enables humanity to reimagine how beautiful and life-giving our species could be under the rule and reign of King Jesus. He is a wise and good King. One of the greatest gifts that God has given humanity is our imagination.

Before the Wright brothers took flight, they had to imagine it.



*the good life*

Before Muhammad Ali could “float like a butterfly and sting like a bee,” he had to imagine it.

Before Leonardo Da Vinci painted the *Mona Lisa*, he had to imagine it.

Before we could experience the good life, Jesus had to capture our imagination by embodying it and teaching it. His life and teaching, along with the life-giving power of God the Holy Spirit, enable us to reimagine the Jesus-way-of-being-human, so we can, in turn, live as citizens of his kingdom.

### Peacemakers Are Blessed

As Jesus continued his prescription for happiness, he said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:9). This beatitude is intertwined with hungering and thirsting for righteousness and being merciful (vv. 7–8). Becoming a peacemaker requires that we have first been brought into peace with God through the forgiveness that comes by grace through faith in Jesus. It then comes from the overflow of being empowered by God the Holy Spirit to live a righteous and merciful life in response to the gospel that we have believed. Like a river flooded by pouring rain, we are deluged by God’s own life. God’s righteousness has

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**MAKING PEACE  
IS HARD, HAPPY,  
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always been about embodying God’s love, and God’s love is always merciful. The good life—a life of happiness—is loving God, self, and all of humanity. In the kingdom of God,

there is “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). Peace is not passive. It is the intentional act of God in Christ

to reconcile us unto himself through the cross, thus enabling us to extend peace to others. Making peace is hard, happy, gospel-work.

John Wesley, one of the founders of Methodism, said these words a few hundred years ago. They were true then, and they are true now:

God is the joy of his heart and the desire of his soul . . . happy in God, yea, always happy, as having in him a “wellspring of water springing up into everlasting life,” and overflow in his soul with peace and joy. . . . True religion, or a heart right with God and man, implies happiness, as well as holiness.<sup>7</sup>

God’s kind of happiness is deeper and more satisfying than simply something good happening. The happiness of God is a quiet confidence that enters the arena of life and believes it’s going to be okay because my redeemer lives, his redemptive purposes will stand, and I will stand with the one who triumphed over sin and the grave. He works all things “for the good of those who love [him], who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

The happiness of God is like a compass that keeps our bearings straight on the narrow path that leads to life.

The happiness of God is like the North Star because it’s found in the unchanging character of our faithful God.

The happiness of God is like a lighthouse that guides sailors back home as they journey the rough seas.

Before we go further, let’s remember that the first-century, Greco-Roman world of Jesus was chaotic, violent, and tumultuous. Jewish men were awaiting the Messiah to usher in peace by

eradicating the Romans from their homeland, and the Romans believed that the Caesar would usher in peace. Rome's method of ensuring peace was through force and brutality. Also, as I shared earlier, many of the Sadducees and Pharisees had become corrupt. Jesus was a Jewish man under the force of the Roman war machine, and he was a member of the *Anawin*, a poor but devout subset of Jewish people, making him a double minority. Jesus saw and experienced Roman oppression and the hardships of being poor and living on the margins. So when we say that the happiness he taught about was more than the good feeling you get when something nice happens to you, we can know that Jesus meant it. He experienced it constantly.

When Jesus correlated our happiness with being peacemakers in a world of violence, injustice, and hardship, his statement would have been considered radical. Jesus' method of eradicating the Romans from the promised land was not to cast them out with the sword, but to usher them into the peace of God *so they could become peaceful people*. Likewise, his method of transforming the corrupt Jewish religious establishment was by giving them the peace of God *so they could become peaceful people*. For Jesus, seeking vengeance is a tool of the ungodly. The Prince of Peace was sent to a world devoid of peace to create peacemakers.

Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.

Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil  
with good. (Rom. 12:19–21)

God's vengeance is often God leaving people to their own devices after they reject his mercy over and over. The oppressor, the abuser, the liar, the selfish, the corrupt are eaten alive by their thoughts and actions. Willfully, arrogantly living outside of God's grace is like having a spiritual autoimmune disease—you begin to attack yourself.

### Family Resemblance

When my children were young, they looked like me. As they have become young adults, they look more like their mother. There is a family resemblance because our children carry our DNA.

Jesus says that those who make peace carry his Father's DNA: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9). Those of us who are united to Christ share in the DNA of God, and peacemaking is a family trait. The phrase *sons of God* is a Hebrew idiom for family resemblance. God the Holy Spirit's primary task is to conform us to the image of Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:29). Before we move on, let's do a self-diagnostic:

1. Would people who know you most intimately say that you are a peacemaker?
2. Would people who read your social media posts say you are a peacemaker?
3. Would people who know you say that you participate in gossip, slander, deception, and lies?

*the good life*

4. How would people who know you say you engage in conflict?
5. How would people say you interact with people on the opposite end of the political spectrum?
6. Would people say you pursue peace amid the racial division in America?

The more we soak in God's peace through Christ, the more forgiving, merciful, kind, and compassionate we will become, because our hard hearts will be softened by his grace. His love draws us deeper into his heart, and we start resembling him as we follow him by faith. Thus, the God of peace will express his peace through us.

Being transformed into the image of Jesus is not automatic. Just as you entered God's kingdom through faith, we grow as God's children by faith. It's often slower and more painful than we would like, but by God's grace, we cooperate with him in the process of becoming more like Jesus.

Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose. (Phil. 2:12–13)

## Upward, Inward, Outward

At the heart of the gospel is that God wants his family back. This reunion is called reconciliation. We have gone astray, detached

and dislocated from the Creator. As a result of our cosmic betrayal, we have found ourselves enslaved with no means of escape.

But God, who is rich in mercy, filled with “I-am-coming-to-get-my-kids-kind-of-love,” sent Jesus as a peace offering so we can be reconciled to him. At the heart of the gospel is reconciliation.

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

God in Christ brings us near through his shed blood. We are moved from being enemies to family, from foes to friends, from orphans to sons and daughters. Even creation itself will be made new through the shed blood of Jesus. In Jesus, “faithful love and truth will join together; righteousness and peace will embrace” (Ps. 85:10).

Through Jesus, peace himself, “we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). God’s peace enables us to live out this truth—“If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone”—across ethnic, socioeconomic, and political lines, starting in the household of God, and then to those outside the family of God (Rom. 12:18; Col. 4:5).

But like any gift, we must take hold of it, unwrap it with grateful hearts, and live from it in the way our lungs take in oxygen.

*the good life*

We are forever God's family through the reconciling grace of Jesus. That's the good life!

God's peace and the doctrine of reconciliation are two sides of the same coin: "But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds" (Isa. 53:5). By grace, we are carried into the community and unity of God. We are eternally friends of God. Since God has made peace with us, we can now make peace with ourselves.

Our fussy souls calm down as we rest in God's grace and forgiveness.

Our anxious hearts rest in knowing that our slate has been wiped clean.

Our hearts find peace because Peace found us and said, "You are no longer an orphan, you are my daughter or my son."

He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the Beloved One.  
(Eph. 1:5-6)

The separation between us and God is nailed to the cross and the relationship that God the Father has with God the Son is a gift we now possess. Inwardly, as we steady ourselves in the grip of God's grace, we can begin to love ourselves because our worth is found in the infinite value of Jesus. Our inner peace is shaped, not by external factors, but by the eternal cross of Christ. Marinate on this:

For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation. (Rom. 5:10–11)

Paul says we also “rejoice” because of the reconciliation we have with God. We are happy because God says we are his friends. We are his children. We are *his*. It’s like God is saying, “The wall that divided us—I knocked it down by plunging through it with my Son on the cross. His cross is the bridge that unites us.” Happiness is knowing that we are loved by God. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, was the peace offering sent so we could become peacemakers. I want to share a story about how peacemakers make the powers of darkness tremble in fear.

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**HAPPINESS IS  
KNOWING THAT WE  
ARE LOVED BY GOD.**  
.....

### White Supremacy to Christ Supremacy

Thomas Tarrants was a child of the deep South, born and raised in Mobile, Alabama, which had been ethnically segregated since its founding in 1702.<sup>8</sup> He attended church and Sunday school regularly until his teenage years. He was even baptized. As a teenager in the 1960s, he experienced the political, social, and cultural upheaval<sup>9</sup> that was going on in America. This seismic shift made him, and those like him, “anxious about America’s survival.”<sup>10</sup>



To the horror of many in the South, black Americans were asking for and gaining basic civil rights. At the risk of their lives, many courageous young black and white people staged “sit-ins” in white-only restaurants. Black Americans, many of whom were Christ-followers, demanded that unjust voting obstacles be removed so they could experience their right to vote as American citizens. Their social progress and successes made Thomas want to stand up for “God and country.”<sup>11</sup>

As a follower of Jesus, I’m in debt to and thankful for the many black pastors and Christians who led the civil rights movement. My mentor and friend Dr. John Perkins, one of the foremost evangelicals involved in the movement, has inspired me with his passion for the gospel and his love for all people. He writes:

For too long, many in the Church have argued that unity in the body of Christ across ethnic and class lines is a separate issue from the gospel. There has been the suggestion that we can be reconciled to God without being reconciled to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Scripture doesn’t bear that out. We only need to examine what happened when the Church was birthed to see exactly how God intends for this issue of reconciliation within the body of Christ to fall out.<sup>12</sup>

For nearly two thousand years, the church has had a biblical theology that all people are bearers of God’s image and that all humans deserve justice. Sadly, that has not often been lived out. In America, many white evangelical Christians sat silently on the sidelines as black Americans and their black Christian brothers

and sisters went through police dog attacks, church bombings, lynching, murder, and other forms of terrorism. Others stood in opposition to black people—often their black brothers and sisters in Christ—who attempted to gain basic American freedoms that the Constitution promised them. Historians Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins summarize this attitude toward the civil rights movement this way: “Typical white Baptists in the South viewed civil rights as at best irrelevant to the Christian faith and at worst a threat to their culture.”<sup>13</sup> Let me pause. Many of you at this point might be thinking, *Come on, Derwin, that was in the past*. Friends, if we don’t acknowledge and own the past, we are doomed to repeat it. The reason we talk about the ugly past is so that we, the multicolored family of God, can create a beautiful future.

Thomas Tarrants read “white supremacist, anti-Semitic literature that was circuiting at his high school.”<sup>14</sup> He was also alienated from his father and emotionally troubled. He says, “All these factors made me a good candidate for radicalization.” It was at meetings at his high school that he heard the ideology that black people were inferior “to whites, and that desegregation, by enabling intermarriage, would weaken the white race.”<sup>15</sup> Biblically and scientifically, there is only one race: the human race. The human race has different ethnicities.

*Ethnicity* is biblical (Hebrew: *goy* or *am*; Greek: *ethnos*). Ethnicity is created by God as people groups move together through space and time. Ethnicity is dynamic and developed over long periods of time. It’s not about power. It’s about group identity, heritage, language, place, and

common group experience. . . . Ethnicity is God's very good intention for humanity.<sup>16</sup>

But as Thomas fell prey to these radical ideologies, he became convinced not only that there is more than one race, but that black Americans are inherently inferior to white Americans. As Thomas immersed himself in these doctrines of hate, he felt he was a part of a "holy cause."<sup>17</sup> As he grew closer to his white supremacy community, he grew more distant from his family and friends who would have challenged and helped him to see he was going down the wrong path. Eventually, he joined Mississippi's White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, "the most violent right-wing terrorist organization in the United States at the time."<sup>18</sup> What happened next is like something out of a movie. He writes:

Little did I know that my downward spiral into extremist ideology, conspiracy theories, and racial and ethnic hatred would culminate in violence and death. But it did. Late one sweltering summer night, as my accomplice and I attempted to plant a bomb at the home of a Jewish businessman in Meridian, Mississippi, we were ambushed in a police stakeout. My partner, a young female school teacher, was killed at the scene. Four blasts of a shotgun fire at close range left me critically wounded. Doctors told me it would be a miracle if I'd lived another forty-five minutes.<sup>19</sup>

He was convicted of the attempted bombing and sentenced to thirty years in the Mississippi State Penitentiary. After only six

months in prison, Thomas, along with two other inmates, escaped. He intended to continue his terrorist activities. After a few days of being on the run, he and the other inmates were apprehended after a gun battle with authorities. One of the inmates was killed in the shootout. After returning to prison and being placed in a six-by-nine-foot cell in the maximum-security unit, he started to read classical philosophy, which eventually led him to read the New Testament. Thomas especially spent time in the Gospels. He writes,

As I read the Gospels in my prison cell, my eyes were open in a way that went way beyond simply understanding the words on a page. As the true meaning of God's word became clearer, so did its relevance to me. . . . As this process unfolded, my sins came to mind, one after another. Conviction grew, and with that tears of repentance. I needed God's forgiveness. And I knew it came only through trusting Jesus Christ, who had given his life to pay for my sins. One night I knelt on the concrete floor of my cell and prayed a simple prayer, confessing my sins and asking Jesus to forgive me, take over my life, and do whatever he wanted to do with it.<sup>20</sup>

The next morning, Thomas woke up a transformed man. He had a deep desire to read the Bible. God removed the poisonous hate from his heart, and he began to develop friendships with black inmates. He even became friends with the FBI agent who "orchestrated my initial capture as well as the Jewish lawyer who helped me."<sup>21</sup> After serving eight years in prison, something miraculous

happened: he received a parole grant to attend university. After attending university, the next forty years of his life led him first to a campus ministry, then a pastoral ministry in a racially diverse church (including speaking and writing on racial reconciliation), and finally to a long ministry of teaching, discipling, spiritual mentoring, and writing at the C. S. Lewis Institute.

Wow, grace is amazing! Who would have ever thought that a white supremacist terrorist, who tried to blow up a Jewish man, who had two gun battles with authorities, would one day be a peacemaker and champion of ethnic reconciliation for the glory of Jesus? Grace catches us by surprise, doesn't it?

## A Theology of Racial (Ethnic) Reconciliation

You've probably noticed that I have written about race, or ethnicity, quite a bit. For some of my white brothers and sisters in Christ, this may be rare, and could even seem like a distraction from gospel. However, this way of thinking is a tool that dark powers use to keep God's people divided, disunified, and disloyal to the gospel. A divided church along ethnic lines loses credibility to a watching world. This segregation diminishes the beauty of the bride of Christ.

What if I told you that talking about ethnicity was quite common in the early church? Even Jesus, the head of the church and a Jew, told his Jewish disciples to go "make disciples of all nations" (*ethnos*) (Matt. 28:19). Can you imagine how difficult this must have been for these disciples when the existence of the Jewish people was threatened by Gentiles (non-Jews) who enslaved them in Egypt, took them captive in Babylon, and were now oppressing

them in Israel? It's as if Jesus were saying, "Go to the people who have enslaved and oppressed you and share my gospel with them."

If we, as followers of Jesus, strip the ethnic tension out of the gospel, we will lose much of the power of the gospel.

One of the reasons the early church was able to transform the Roman world was because the resurrected Messiah brought different ethnic groups and classes of people together in unity. Neither the Jewish establishment nor the pagan Romans could believe the unity of Jesus' church.

Research by sociologist Michael Emerson shows that churches that lack ethnic diversity "reproduce inequality, encourage oppression, strengthen racial division, and heighten political separation."<sup>22</sup> As followers of Jesus, when we isolate ourselves in bubbles of homogeneity, we will stay trapped in echo chambers of ignorance. We are sanctified faster in the context of ethnic and social difference. God the Holy Spirit uses our differences to make us more Christlike.

Renowned New Testament scholar Scot McKnight writes:

The church is God's world-changing social experiment of bringing unlikes and differenters to the table to share life with one another as a new kind of family. When this happens, we show the world what love, justice, peace, reconciliation, and life together are designed to be by God. The church is God's show-and-tell for the world to see how God wants us to live as a family.<sup>23</sup>

## “Stop Talking about Race!”

A few years ago I preached a sermon on Ephesians 2:8–22 titled “Grace Creates New Race.” In my sermon, I said, “You can’t spell *grace* without spelling *race*. Because of Jesus’ accomplishments, a new race of grace is created. This new humanity is called the church.” Early the next week, I received an email requesting that I stop preaching about race (ethnicity). I responded, “Okay, but do you know what you are asking me? If you want me to stop talking about ethnicity when I preach, I have to leave out the fact that Jesus and Paul are Jewish. That Peter was a Jewish man meeting with a Roman named Cornelius. That the Israelites were slaves in Egypt and taken captive by the Babylonians. That the woman at the well was a Samaritan, and the new heavens and new earth will be populated with a redeemed community of people from every nation, tribe, and tongue. Do you want me to leave all of that out?”

Sadly, I didn’t get a response back.

The point of my response is that it is impossible to properly interpret the Bible properly without understanding the ethnic conflict of the ancient world of Jesus. I firmly believe the church needs a theology of ethnic reconciliation, which, of course, is the gospel. We need peacemakers who build bridges so the body of Christ can be an ethnically unified family, bearing witness to the world of our love for one another.

## Ethnic Peacemaking

I want to share with you how you can become a cross-cultural peacemaker. First, understand that the gospel is about God getting

his family back, as he promised to Abraham. Paul writes: “Now the Scripture saw in advance that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and proclaimed the gospel ahead of time to Abraham, saying, All the nations will be blessed through you” (Gal. 3:8). Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, not only are we forgiven, made righteous, regenerated, and indwelt with the Spirit, but we are also adopted into God’s transcultural united family. As God’s family, we are not color-blind; we are color-blessed. We are a diverse and beautiful community of siblings.

Second, the gospel creates a family of oneness where ethnocentrism, classism, and sexism are crucified by the cross. Paul writes: “For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is no Jew or Greek,

.....  
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.....

slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:27–29). If we belong to Christ, we are clothed in Christ, and we are the promise that God fulfilled in Christ Jesus. It’s hard to look down on someone who is clothed in Christ, just like you are. Our ethnic, class, and gender differences are transformed, so that they are no longer points of division, but points to celebrate. In the gospel, our differences become tools of grace to grow us.

Third, the gospel creates peace and reconciliation between ethnic groups. Paul writes:



*the good life*

For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace. He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death. (Eph. 2:14–16)

As Jesus' multicolored family, our peace with God and one another is secured by him. Grace indeed creates a new ethnicity of "differents."

Fourth, as a result of God's grace, we seek to build intentional relationships with brothers and sisters of different ethnic groups. Because we love our siblings, we cultivate a posture of listening and learning, seeking to understand before being understood. This will require us to "put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another" (Col. 3:12–13). Robert Jones writes:

White Americans' notions of race and fairness are shaped by their everyday experiences (already vastly different from those of African Americans), which are reinforced by interactions with neighbors and friends. . . . Despite the demise of Jim Crow laws and race-restrictive housing ordinances and the rise of integrated workplaces, white Americans' most meaningful relationships are almost exclusively with other white people. This

effectively closes the door to interactions with people who might challenge what feels like a natural and “common sense” perspective on the events they see on cable television.<sup>24</sup>

It’s time to break bread together, to pull up a chair and get to know people who aren’t like us. As we break bread, barriers of separation will be broken down and the new people of God will be built up. Being the lead pastor of an intentionally gospel-shaped, multiethnic church has made me a better human being. It’s our differences that make us more like Jesus.

Fifth, if the demographics of where your church is located allow for ethnic diversity, help your church begin to reflect the ethnic diversity of the community. How can you do this?

First, pray for the senior leadership of the church to catch a vision for God’s heart concerning the church on earth looking like the church in the new heavens and new earth.

And they sang a new song:  
You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
because you were slaughtered,  
and you purchased people  
for God by your blood  
from every tribe and language  
and people and nation.  
You made them a kingdom  
and priests to our God,  
and they will reign on the earth.  
(Rev. 5:9–10)

Second, share with the senior leadership of church the two-day roundtable experience that I, along with my staff, lead churches through called the HD Leader Roundtable. This experience is an opportunity for church leaders from around the country to dig deeper into God's Word together, encourage one another, and learn more about multiethnic church planting and leadership. Roundtable sessions cover theology, vision casting, cross-cultural competency, soul care for leaders, and best practices of a multiethnic church.<sup>25</sup>

Third, pray and ask God the Holy Spirit to connect you with your people of different ethnicities. It is impossible to build a multiethnic church if you are not living a multiethnic life. Who sits around your dinner table? Who are your friends?

Our ethnic unity in Christ is a living portrait of Jesus' gospel. Paul's first-century church in Colossae was comprised of the Jews and non-Jews (which consisted of various Gentiles like barbarians and Scythians, who were considered poor and ignorant), the rich (free), and the poor. This church was at one another's throats. Paul reminded the ethnically diverse church in Colossae the gospel truth that they were "in Christ."

Our in Christ-ness is the glue that holds us together.

Our in Christ-ness defines us, not our ethnicity or social status.

Our in Christ-ness makes us brothers and sisters.

In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all. (Col. 3:11)

People who do not know Christ want a *demonstration* of the gospel before they get an *explanation* of the gospel. Our togetherness speaks the language of God's love.

Fourth, traveling internationally and experiencing the rich variety of God's people in their contexts are helpful. My Christian brothers and sisters in Kolkata, India, transformed me with their love for Jesus, wisdom, and perseverance. I thought I was going there to make a difference, but God sent me to India so my Indian brothers and sisters could make *me* different.

Meditate on Paul's words and how our cross-cultural unity brings God glory.

Now may the God who gives endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, according to Christ Jesus, so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with one mind and one voice. Therefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted you, to the glory of God. (Rom. 15:5–7)

As you and I engage in peacemaking and building bridges of ethnic reconciliation in the church and outside the church, we will be called sons and daughters of God (Matt. 5:9). Wouldn't it be nice for us as followers of Jesus to be known for making peace? This is the good life.

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Marinate on This

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*Prayer*

Holy Spirit,

Blow up the doors of my heart so the  
peacemaking grace of the Lord Jesus can come in.

Open my mind to the reality that it was his  
grace that eternally changed my status from foe  
to friend, from enemy to family.

Father,

In Christ, your beloved Son, I am now a child  
of yours. I now have your DNA swirling and  
pulsating in me and through you.

Jesus, our King,

Release your peacemaking love through me.

May I cast seeds of peace wherever I go so they  
can take root, mature, and produce fruit to feed  
the world.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the  
Spirit, amen.

*Questions to Study*

1. Becoming a peacemaker comes from the overflow of being empowered by God the Holy Spirit to live a righteous and merciful life. Is this how you have understood peacemaking in the past? Does this challenge your definition for being a peacemaker?
2. This chapter includes a six-question diagnostic assessment (see pages 169–70). As you read and meditate on those questions, what conclusions do you draw? What are some opportunities for growth that you are able to identify?
3. As a son or daughter of God, peace is now in your DNA. How can you embrace this part of your identity?
4. Racial (ethnic) reconciliation is now possible thanks to the cross of Jesus bringing all nations (ethnos) together. How can you be an agent of reconciliation in your community? How can you begin to build a bridge to unify God's family? How can you be a cross-cultural peacemaker?
5. Are you part of a multiethnic church? What is your experience with the multiethnic church? How can you intentionally seek out relationships with others who are not like you?

*Things to Remember*

1. Peace, love, and forgiveness seem like beautiful ideas until we are called upon to be peaceful, loving, and forgiving toward those who aren't.
2. Forgiveness of sins is the pathway to peace with God and peace with God's other image-bearers.
3. The Beatitudes are a manifesto of hope that enables humanity to reimagine how beautiful and life-giving our species could be under the rule and reign of King Jesus.
4. Becoming a peacemaker comes from the overflow of being empowered by God the Holy Spirit to live a righteous and merciful life.
5. The good life, a life of happiness, is loving God, self, and all of humanity.
6. One of the reasons why the early church was able to transform the Roman world is because the resurrected Messiah brought different ethnic groups and classes of people together in unity.

### Chapter 8: *Happy Are the Peacemakers*

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18. Ibid.

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20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Michael Emerson cited in Mark DeYmaz, *HUP*, 8. See <https://www.markdeymaz.com/glue/2011/08/should-pastors-accept-or-reject-the-hup.html>.

23. Scot McKnight, *A Fellowship of Different* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 16.

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25. Learn more about the HD Leader Roundtable. We would love to host and connect with your senior leadership team. <https://www.derwinlgray.com/hd-roundtable-open>.