

A CHRISTIAN GUIDE
TO HANDLING OUR CONFLICTS



PURSUING
PEACE

ROBERT D. JONES

Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts

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Preface

Why am I passionate about pursuing relational peace? Because relationships wither without it.

In 2004 my wife Lauren and I and our two sons moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, where I teach at nearby Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest. Having lived in apartments and then a church parsonage for nineteen years, we bought our first house. After looking at twenty-three options in two days, we settled on our top choice: roomy for our family foursome, modestly priced, and nestled in a traffic-free cul-de-sac. And to top it all off, it was situated on my ideal-sized property, a whopping .19 acres (yes, the decimal point is accurate; I figured I could handle mowing that size lawn, or paying a teen, when my sons moved out).

What we didn't bank on was the condition of that little lawn. It was a weedy mess, a field not of dreams but of orchard-grass clumps. One of my sons tells of a 2:00 a.m. return home only to discover, as his car approached the house, that our little yard was a late-night hot spot for local deer. (We've contemplated posting a "Weed Buffet" sign and charging our dear deer friends a \$9.95 all-you-can-eat fee.)

What did we do? We added a truckload of topsoil, seeded it, and then did the various things that the experts recommended at the proper intervals—fertilizing, spreading lime, aerating, reseeding, and so forth. But the reseeding, we were warned, had to be preceded by another vital step. To sow grass seed on top of the weeds would yield little grass; we had to weed out the orchard grass.

Relational conflict is like that orchard grass. We long to grow relationships marked by trust and joy and goodwill and honesty, but as we pursue these we find patches of unreconciled conflict underneath. Few maladies plague our lives more than relational conflict. Whether in our homes, our workplaces, our schools, or even our churches, tensions continue and disputes quickly sprout. Conflicts happen in every relationship: husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister,

supervisor and employee, church member and church member—the list goes on. As a young counseling student I once asked a doctoral mentor whether I was unusual for having more conflicts with my wife than with other people. He assured me that my experience was quite common. Conflicts can mark, and mar, many of our relationships, even the dearest ones.

So what should we do? Your decision to pick up this book tells me three things about you. First, you are experiencing conflict in your life (or someone you care about is). Second, you are honest enough to admit it. Third, you are humble enough, or desperate enough, to seek help.

This book has two simple goals: to provide you with a step-by-step process for pursuing peace in all your relationships and to give you a tool you can use to help others. I wish to provide a clear path down which you and your friends and family members can walk with confidence and hope. It's a *biblical* path, one that relies on the absolute authority, sufficiency, and life-giving power of God's Spirit-breathed Word. It's a *Christ-centered* path, one that depends on the forgiving and empowering grace of Jesus our Redeemer and one that imitates the life of Jesus our example. It's a *practical* path, one that provides concrete action steps, case examples, and suggested language to handle specific situations. And it's a *proven* path, one that God has enabled me to follow in my life (albeit imperfectly), and one down which I have had the privilege of leading many hundreds of individuals, couples, churches, and Christians schools for nearly thirty years as a pastor, professor, certified biblical counselor, and certified Christian conciliator and church-conflict interventionist and trainer.

My own interest in biblical peacemaking began in the mid-1980s when I graduated from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and, at twenty-six, became the pastor of a small church in Hurricane, West Virginia. The church had suffered a severe split, and the congregation I joined was the bleeding remnant. The aftershocks of that conflict were real, and I knew little about handling them. In time I became increasingly hungry to know how to better shepherd my people, so I began attending the annual biblical counseling training week provided each June by the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) in a northern suburb of Philadelphia. As my wife and church family would attest, that training changed my life and ministry radically.

The guest plenary speaker one summer was Ken Sande, president of Peacemaker Ministries, who presented an early version of his Peacemaker seminar materials. As a young pastor I was attracted to both Ken's wise, biblical content and his winsome, gracious manner. His teaching that week sparked a special interest that God has fanned for over two decades now. Along with my ongoing training in biblical counseling through CCEF, the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors, and Westminster Theological Seminary (DMin), I began to attend the annual conferences of Peacemaker Ministries. I soon entered their conciliator training program and was invited to serve on their church intervention teams. I continue to serve adjunctively with Peacemaker Ministries in various roles.

This book is based on a simple three-step model with a four-word memory hook: Step 1—Please God; Step 2—Repent; and Step 3—Love. In other words, focus on God, then me (and my part in the conflict), and then the other person. We begin with two introductory chapters. In chapter 1 we behold the “God of peace” and trace his peacemaking work through the book of Romans. There we meet him as the God who makes peace with us through the cross of Jesus, pours out his inner peace on us and into us, guarantees us future worldwide peace, and calls and enables us to pursue relational peace with everyone. Chapter 2 overviews a biblical way to look at conflicts from God's vantage point. Conflicts are inevitable and sinful, but they also provide rich opportunities for spiritual growth for us and others. With chapter 3 we begin walking down the three-step peacemaking path, starting with a commitment, in response to God's saving grace, to make pleasing him our life goal and our conscious pursuit amid conflict. In chapters 4–6 we unpack Step 2. We address what it means to humbly identify, repent of, and confess our sins—both our heart sins and our behavioral sins—before both God and others.

With chapter 7 we transition into Step 3—what loving the other person looks like—which covers the rest of the book. Chapter 7 summarizes key attitudes—relational graces—we need to adopt toward the other party. Chapters 8–9 explore forgiveness, starting with God's forgiveness of us and then our forgiveness of others in both the attitudinal (unconditional) and the transacted (repentance-based) levels of forgiveness. We give special attention to dealing with the problem of bitterness. In

chapter 10 we address the loving but oft-neglected practice of rebuke, answering a half-dozen *when*, *how*, *why*, and *what-if* questions. The last two chapters look at the final and ongoing steps, depending on the other person's responses to our previous efforts. Chapter 11 focuses on how to strengthen a reconciled relationship, including principles of communication and joint decision making when you and the other person have a difference of opinion on an important matter. Chapter 12 gives counsel on how to relate—how to minister with God's grace—to someone who hardens himself and will not be reconciled.

1

Finding Hope in the God of Peace

To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:7

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans 12:18



Maybe you can relate to Jen and Rick. Jen had been a believer in Jesus all her life. When she married after high school, she had high hopes for a happy marriage. The first two years sailed by blissfully. She and Rick both proclaimed the joys of marriage. But an assortment of ongoing conflicts soon developed. *Should we have children, and when? How will we cover our expenses? What involvement should we have with our parents who seem so meddling, and why won't my spouse stand up to them?* Along with these questions Jen found herself increasingly upset over Rick's workaholicism and his lack of involvement in her life. Rick concurrently grumbled about Jen's critical spirit toward him. His frustrations grew. He had become a follower of Jesus only a year before they married, and his dreams of a truly Christian marriage were fading fast. If this trend continued unchecked, Rick and Jen would soon become another divorce statistic.

Or maybe your conflict concerns your church. Having worked tirelessly in the children's ministry for six years, Joanie had serious questions about the changes made by Gail, the new children's director. Joanie tried to get to know her, to understand her, and to support her, but their brief conversations proved unfruitful. Gail's answers seemed evasive, and Joanie increasingly sensed that her questions irritated Gail. Yet in the back of her mind her discouragement mounted. *Doesn't Gail know that changing the Wednesday night program will disturb parents? Does*

she even care? Worse, Joanie was not alone. Several of her co-teachers voiced similar concerns to Joanie and each other. And so Joanie wondered, *Maybe it's time for me to take a break from ministering to kids and to consider another ministry.*

We could multiply examples not only from the arenas of marriage and church but also involving parents and children, roommates, and the workplace. Surely we and the many conflicted people around us need help with peacemaking.

But why a book on *biblical* peacemaking? Does the Bible really have something crucial to contribute to the real world of marriage fights, parent-teen breakdowns, job tensions, and church splits?

Yes, for two reasons. First, peace and conflict are Scripture megathemes. The Bible is all about God and his peace-pursuing, peacemaking activities. Its story line from Genesis through Revelation records conflict—earthly and cosmic, natural and supernatural. The paradise of Genesis 1–2 disintegrates swiftly into the disaster of Genesis 3. There, as the Scripture's curtain lifts, we see the war between God and Satan, and between God's people and Satan's people. Chapter after chapter in the Bible records victories and losses. The casualties are great; souls lie strewn across the Bible's battlefield. The combat continues through human history—raging throughout Israel's history, heightening at the Prince of Peace's birth, intensifying at his cross and resurrection, and culminating in Revelation 20's last battle, where we witness the final revolt, overthrow, and destruction of the Devil and all who belong to him. After that—but not one hour before—will the Peacemaker's work be finally done, as fractured humanity enjoys flawless harmony. In short, the Scriptures breathe conflict out of every pore. Between the Bible's two bookend chapters—prewar peace in Genesis 1–2 and post-war peace in Revelation 21–22—lie nearly twelve hundred chapters of hostility, aggression, alienation, and betrayal. You cannot read your Bible well and miss its militant plot; it is the ultimate “war and peace” novel. We long for the eternal day when, as theologians and hymn writers put it, the church militant will become the church triumphant.

The second reason to view your Bible as indispensable for peacemaking is that Scripture is all about our relationships—with God *and* with others. Are you ever tempted to think that the essence of Christian living

is vertical only? *What really matters is praying unceasingly and communing continually with Jesus. If I can also have peaceful relationships, that would be nice too.* But having God-pleasing relationships is not a dispensable luxury. It is more than icing on a good Christian's cake. It lies at the heart of Christian discipleship. In his two great commandments, Jesus inseparably linked loving God with loving our neighbor, teaching us that the second is like the first and that the two together summarize all the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:37–40). You simply cannot love God without loving your neighbor. The apostle John elaborates, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20). To devour your Bible, enjoy rich corporate worship, maintain personal purity, and tell dozens of people about Jesus—the sum of Christian living for some people—is simply not enough if your interpersonal relationships crumble.

For these reasons this book will help you handle your daily tensions with others. You have conflict in your life. You encounter it, admit it, and somehow endure it. You see it in your own home, in your place of work, and among your extended family. It flows through the water supply of your relational system. Conflict marks your parents, your children, your city, your coworkers, and even your church. (In fact, the odds are high that your church began out of conflict sometime long ago, as many do.) But you are not sure how to handle it, you too often contribute to it, and you sometimes mismanage it.

The Starting Place: Our Peacemaking God

So where do we begin? Like any subject, the proper starting place to think biblically about pursuing peace is God. And here is the central truth about God we need to start with: our God is the God of peace, his Son is the Prince of Peace, and his Spirit brings peace. And what has this God done? He has made peace with us, he pours out his peace on us and into us, and he calls and enables us to pursue peace with others.

The Bible links peace and God in at least four ways: There is the *saving peace* that God made with us at the cross, and the ongoing *inner peace* God gives us in our souls. These twin gifts in turn bring two more blessings for the Christian believer. They enable us to pursue *relational*

peace with others in this life. Moreover, they guarantee us an endless life of future *situational peace* in the world to come, “a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13).

From many authors in many passages, these four divine-peace provisions weave their way through the Scriptures. Let’s think about these promises in light of the whole Bible and along the way envision the help they give to Joanie, Rick, and Jen.

We will start with Paul’s first letter in the New Testament canon, the epistle to the Romans. Hailed by countless scholars as the greatest gospel treatise ever penned, it brilliantly describes and declares the peacemaking work of God. The reason is obvious: the gospel of Jesus is the gospel of peace.

Saving Peace with God

We learn from the opening verses of Romans that this letter is all about the gospel of God, which centers in his Son. It is the good news of God’s saving grace in Jesus for sinners like me and you. And that good news is all about God’s peace. Paul closes his introduction with this promise and blessing: “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:7).

These words come to us as more than mere formalities. They declare life-giving hope to seize and believe. The apostle announces God’s stance—his posture of grace and peace toward us in Christ. Just as the words “loved” and “saints” point back to the designation of God’s people in the Hebrew Scriptures,¹ so this promise of peace calls to mind the great Hebrew word *shalom* and the Old Testament vision of peace, fulfilled in Romans in the person and work of Jesus. It is no wonder that the formal worship liturgy in some Reformed churches frequently begins with an opening salutation, a word of greeting from God through the minister, often taken from texts like Romans 1:7.

Probably the most famous *shalom* prayer-promise comes from Numbers 6:24–26, the benediction assigned for Aaron and his sons to proclaim to God’s people.

¹Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 54.

The LORD bless you
and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace.

This peace is more than the absence of war and strife. It is the positive presence of harmony, salvation, joy, blessing, and reconciliation—“the state of perfect well-being created by God’s eschatological intervention and enjoyed by the righteous.”² In the context of Romans, it is the reconciliation of believing Jews and believing Gentiles both with God and with each other—both vertical and horizontal. We taste it now whenever we enjoy the fruits of repentance, confession, and forgiveness with each other. One day we will experience it fully.

Who will experience this final peace? Only those who belong to God. The apostle both promises and warns, “There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism” (Rom. 2:9–11). Whether Jew or Gentile, the one who knows and follows the Redeemer God will treasure God’s saving gift of *shalom*. On the other hand, the unbeliever who rejects God’s “way of peace” (Rom. 3:17) will only reap God’s judgment.

How does someone gain God’s peace? Romans 5:1–2 replies, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” In this compact summary of gospel blessing, Paul tells us (1) that we now have peace with God; (2) that this peace is built on our justification through faith, God’s grace-work of declaring us righteous in Christ; and (3) that this peace produces deep joy. As hymn writer Francis J. Van Alstyne (1820–1915) exclaimed,

The vilest offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

²Ibid., 139. The term “eschatological” refers to God’s final saving work at the end of time, which we begin to enjoy now.

Similar themes emerge in Ephesians 2:11–18, where Christ and his cross form the centerpiece of our peace.

What does this gospel assurance have to do with pursuing peace in our *relationships*? Everything. It fills us with joy, power, and confidence as we gratefully obey God in our relationships. It provides a model of grace to convey to others. And it reassures us that, even if the other people don't respond in kind, our relationship with the most important and ultimate Person in the universe remains secure. Thanks be to God for Jesus our Lord!

The saving work of God in the Christian, however, does not merely consist of a right standing with God. In salvation God has done something not only for us, but also *in* us. Our Christian growth—sanctification in its past, present, and future aspects—began with a decisive act by God of severing the spinal cord of sin and making us new people who are now inclined to love and obey him. The apostle Paul describes this internal transformation: “The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God” (Rom. 8:6–8). The sinful mind is hostile to God, but the saved mind—the mind captured and controlled by the Holy Spirit—reflects the very life and peace of God’s Spirit, albeit imperfectly.

Isaiah pictures a similar reality with a vivid metaphor in Isaiah 57:18–21 concerning God’s own promise to restore his people.

“I have seen his ways, but I will heal him;
I will guide him and restore comfort to him,
creating praise on the lips of the mourners in Israel.
Peace, peace, to those far and near,”
says the LORD.³ “And I will heal them.”
But the wicked are like the tossing sea,
which cannot rest,
whose waves cast up mire and mud.
“There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.”

³The apostle Paul also cites these words in Eph. 2:17, in the context of God’s peace-making work between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11–18) in the cross of Jesus. While I choose to walk through Romans, we could have profitably traced our theme through other epistles such as Ephesians or Philippians.

In other words—to join Isaiah and Paul—death marks the unbeliever; life and peace mark the believer.

Relational Peace with Others

The twin gifts of God’s reconciling peace through Christ’s cross and God’s inner peace through his Spirit lead to the third peace blessing, namely, relational peace with others. In one of the Bible’s most realistic texts concerning human relationships, Romans 12:18 exhorts us, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” In many ways, our entire book will address these themes.

We find a fourfold call in this passage and its context. First, we must pursue peace as our Christian duty. The apostle commands us to live at peace. To fail to seek peace with people is to disobey God. We have no option.

Second, we must pursue peace with everyone. The peacemaking charge in this text is comprehensive; we must address all of our relationships. Our Lord does not permit us to ignore even one relationship or dismiss any individual. As the apostle declares in Acts 24:16, “So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.” While this “with everyone” standard is admittedly high, God’s power makes his commands less daunting.

Third, as we actively pursue peace, the apostle urges us to leave the results to God. “If it is possible,” Paul reminds us, we should live at peace. He acknowledges that a peaceful result may not be possible; we have no guarantee that the other person will follow God’s peacemaking plan. As the old saying goes, “It takes two to tango.”

Fourth, keeping in mind the larger context, we must pursue peace in light of God’s mercy toward us in Christ. The entire twelfth chapter of Romans flows from God’s saving grace expounded in detail in Romans 1–11. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (12:1). In other words, we must apply Romans 12:18 against the backdrop of 12:1–2 and the preceding eleven chapters. Peacemaking is but one way we offer ourselves to God in sacrificial worship, and that obedience, like every other command in Romans 12, arises from the gospel of God’s mercy in Christ.

With whom must we seek peace? While the context of Romans 12:18 primarily concerns pursuing peace with non-Christians, chapters 14–15 address our relationships with each other in the body of Christ. In the middle of his discussion he tells us what God treasures above all in his church: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men” (Rom. 14:17–18). Five observations about the peace that Jesus prizes flow from this passage:

1. Peace, in this context, concerns our relationships with one another, that is, horizontal peace with each other more than vertical peace with God.
2. This peace is linked with “righteousness” and “joy” as central to God’s kingdom.
3. Christ values these virtues over a person’s individual convictions related to disputed areas of conduct like “eating” (kosher versus non-kosher food) or “drinking” (wine perhaps associated with idolatrous rituals).
4. This peace comes to us through the work of God’s Holy Spirit (as seen in 15:13 below).
5. This peace concerns our relationships with one another (horizontal peace), and it pleases both God and other people.

Paul then inserts a summary challenge: “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (14:19). “Make every effort” translates a Greek word elsewhere used for pursuing, tracking down, or persecuting someone or something. Like a hunter relentlessly hounding his prey, we must pursue peace with both Christians and non-Christians.

Thankfully, God has not left us alone in pursuing relational peace; he promises to be with us. The apostle rounds out the larger unit with a hope-giving wish prayer in Romans 15:13: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” The joy and peace the gospel promises come to us solely as God’s gifts. They come to us from God himself, the triune God of hope and peace. They come to us through the Holy Spirit’s power, since “the fruit of the Spirit is love,

joy, peace, patience,” and so forth (Gal. 5:22–23). While this text could refer to inner peace (below), it likely refers to relational peace between members of the body.⁴

How do we actually receive these gifts? Do they somehow drop down from heaven or automatically pop up inside us? No. Romans 15:13 says that you receive these gifts “as you trust in God.” While the cooperative working between God and the believer is a delicate subject, we must not overlook the fact that these blessings do not come to us apart from our faith. Only as we trust God will we experience his joy, peace, and hope in our relationships. By faith we can know these gifts in increasing measure. And as we practice biblical peacemaking—as we “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3)—we will experience the Holy Spirit’s help.

Inner Peace Enjoyed with the God of Peace

Our next two peace texts in Romans fasten our eyes on God himself by calling him “the God of peace” (15:33; 16:20; see also 1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20–21). In Romans 15:33, Paul again brings a wish prayer for God’s people, a glorious benediction flowing from God’s grace: “The God of peace be with you all. Amen.” While the context does not specify the kind of peace Paul has in mind, his similar reference to the Lord as the “God of peace” in Philippians 4—a passage of promised blessing—suggests a reference to an inner peace of mind.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. . . . Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Phil. 4:6–7, 9)

Paul first refers to the “peace of God”—the internal peace that God gives, in contrast to anxiety, as we pray and follow the apostle’s life and teaching. Then he ends the section by designating this God as “the God of peace” who will be with us. If God himself is filled with peace (and he is), and if we are connected to him by faith (and we are), then we

⁴Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 881.

can and will experience this inner peace—his peace—in all its fullness. Here Paul echoes the promise of our Lord Jesus, “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). As J. I. Packer puts it, “There is no peace like the peace of those whose minds are possessed with full assurance that they have known God, and God has known them, and that this relationship guarantees God’s favour to them in life, through death, and on for ever.”⁵

Future Global Peace Established by the God of Peace

Lastly, as the God of peace, he promises one more mighty *shalom* blessing: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom. 16:20). Here the apostle Paul spans salvation history—from start to finish—in a single verse. He alludes to Genesis 3:15 and God’s first redemptive promise to bring forth the “seed of the woman” (a reference to the Messiah) to destroy Satan. And who, says Paul, is the God who will act to fulfill salvation history? Paul explicitly calls him the “God of peace.” In other words, it is God both as Redeemer and as *Peacemaker* who sent his Son to complete his saving program, destroy the Devil, and end the warfare begun in Genesis 3. In his return the Lord Jesus will bring about the final situational peace of paradise restored on earth. All our conflicts will be over forever, and books like the one you are reading will be unnecessary. “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

God: Our Hope for Peacemaking

Until then, what is our hope? God. Our God is the God of peace. He has made saving peace with us through Jesus Christ, he pours out his inner peace on us and into us, he promises future global peace, and he calls and enables us to pursue relational peace with others. There is not a person on the planet—including your spouse, child, parents, or business partner—with whom you cannot pursue peace. Herein, then, we find our own identity as we walk in the ways of God our Father. “Blessed are the peacemakers,” said Jesus, “for they will be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:9). As we pursue peace in all our

⁵J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 26.

relationships and help others do the same, we reflect the character of our peacemaking God.

What does this look like for Jen, Rick, and Joanie? In Jesus and the power of his Spirit each one of them can find help and hope in this fourfold perspective: First, amid their conflicts with others, God has already acted to bring them peace with himself. However much they have failed, God has accepted them, forgiven them, adopted them, and declared them righteous in Christ. However many people may be against them, God is for them. Second, God has given them in his Word all the wisdom they need to know what to do, and God has given them in his Spirit all the power they need to do it. The rest of this book will unpack that wisdom, but humming in the background is the promise of God's enabling Spirit. Third, God promises by that same Spirit to grant each of them inner peace, the assurance that he is with them as they trust in him. Fourth, all their peace pursuing in their daily relationships is but a precursor to the final global peace that God will one day bring about, in his timing. Their current conflicts will all be resolved.

Conclusion

As we pursue what God says in his Word through the ensuing chapters, let's hear and believe, by faith, God's special promise of blessing. This is my prayer as we journey forward together through this book:

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 13:20–21)

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How should recognizing our previous hostile state against God and our present reconciled state with God change the way we as Christians relate each day to people around us? How does the gospel of Jesus Christ affect our relationships with others, especially amid conflicts?
2. Recall God's four peace provisions/promises in this chapter:

- a. God made relational peace between him and us at the cross of Jesus.
- b. God enables us to pursue relational peace with others.
- c. God gives us his inner peace within our hearts.
- d. God guarantees future, global situational peace when Jesus returns.

How might each of these four truths help you with a conflict you face now?

3. Write a prayer to God in which you acknowledge and thank God for the help and hope he provides in Christ, and in which you commit yourself afresh to following his ways to pursue peace.

A GUIDE TO RESOLVING RELATIONAL CONFLICT

You have conflict in your life—we all do. You encounter it in your home, your workplace, your school, or even your church. All around us tensions exist and disputes persist.

Offered here is a step-by-step process for pursuing peace in ALL your relationships and a tool you can use to help others. This guide is:

- **BIBLICAL** — relies on the absolute authority, sufficiency, and life-giving power of God's Spirit-breathed Word
- **CHRIST-CENTERED** — depends on the forgiving and empowering grace of Jesus
- **PRACTICAL** — provides concrete action steps, case examples, discussion questions, and suggested language to handle specific situations
- **PROVEN** — offers tried-and-true methods from a pastor, professor, counselor, and certified Christian conciliator who has led couples, churches, and Christian schools to make peace for over twenty-five years

Packed with wisdom and practical techniques, this manageable book on reconciliation will send you on your way to pursuing peace while helping others to do the same.

“Jones brings his many years of pastoral and counseling experience to bear on this topic—providing a fresh perspective on how to approach conflict in a grace-filled and gospel-centered way.”

KEN SANDE, President, Peacemaker Ministries; best-selling author, *The Peacemaker*

“With uncanny insights and sharp clarity, Jones addresses and then makes sense of normal, everyday conflicts and how they should be handled so that full resolution might be experienced.”

THOM S. RAINER, President and CEO, LifeWay Christian Resources

“I urge you not only to read this volume, but also to use it as a guide for what to do next time the peace is disturbed. This will save loads of grief and future headaches, as well as possible loss of the joy of the Lord.”

WALTER C. KAISER JR., President Emeritus, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

“Jones's presentation is judicious, wide-ranging, balanced, biblical, and full of grace. Every counselor and struggler needs to know these things.”

DAVID POWLISON, faculty, Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation; Senior Editor, *Journal of Biblical Counseling*

ROBERT D. JONES (DMin, Westminster Theological Seminary) is a biblical counseling professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is also a church elder, a certified biblical counselor, and an adjunct instructor and church reconciliation trainer with Peacemaker Ministries.

CHRISTIAN LIVING / RELATIONSHIPS