How Can People Make Peace?

In R3//china- lots of people

Frank and Jerry were good neighbors—that is, until Jerry held a late-night party.* When Frank complained about the noise, Jerry took offense at his manner. They argued. After that, they avoided each other.

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* Names have been changed.

FRANK and Jerry faced a common problem. When two people have a difference, both often go away angry, perhaps blaming each other. If they maintain this stance, estrangement may develop.

Perhaps you have experienced a similar situation. If so, you likely took no pleasure in it! Indeed, most of us want to live in peace and harmony with our friends and neighbors. How, though, can we do so despite occasional upsets? Can we rise above negative attitudes and hurt feelings? Can we settle our differences amicably?

Consider Frank and Jerry's predicament. Basically, their friendship began to unravel when they took several wrong steps: (1) Jerry was inconsiderate, (2) Frank expressed his annoyance in a way that upset Jerry, (3) both lost their temper, and (4) both refused to yield.

In time, however, reason prevailed. The two men put their differences behind them and made peace. What helped them to succeed? They applied some practical principles that have helped many friendships not only to survive rocky times but also to grow even stronger afterward.

The principles involved can be found in the world's most widely distributed book —the Bible. It encourages us to cultivate qualities that promote peace and heal emotional wounds—qualities such as discernment, insight, kindness, love, and patience.—Proverbs 14:29; 1 Corinthians 13:4, 5.

Frank and Jerry are just two examples of the Bible's power to change lives for

the better. There are many other examples, including people who overcame deeply entrenched negative traits. For instance, Robert, who lives in Australia, overcame deep-seated anger. Nelson, in Timor-Leste, cast aside long-standing animosity and made a close friend of a former enemy. How did the Bible help Robert and Nelson? *Awake!* interviewed them to find out.

Robert grew up angry and violent and even spent time in prison

ROBERT, tell us a little about your background.

I grew up in an unhappy home. My father, for example, had a violent temper and often beat me. At times, he even left me bloodied and unconscious. As a result, I became increasingly angry and violent. During my teens, I spent two years in a reform school. Later, I committed a brutal assault that landed me in a maximum-security prison. When I was finally released, I moved to Australia, hoping for a fresh start.

Did the move help you to change your ways?

It was not so much the move that changed me but the Bible, which I studied with Jehovah's Witnesses. That said, I still struggled to control my temper and often felt frustrated and worthless. Then one day I reflected on Proverbs 19:11, which says: "The insight of a man certainly slows down his anger, and it is beauty on his part to overlook an offense." Eager to develop that insight, I began to think about what lies behind our feelings, words, and deeds. As a result, I gradually became more understanding, patient, and forgiving.

Would you give us an example?

I once upset a friend unintentionally, and he angrily rebuked me in front of others. I was humiliated, to say the least! However, I recalled the Bible's advice to "return evil for evil to no one," and I quickly apologized. (Romans 12:17) When my friend cooled down, I approached him privately and learned that he was struggling with family problems. We made peace, and later he gave me a beautiful coat as a gift. I shudder to think what might have happened had I been my old self when I was humiliated.

How do you deal with family problems?

My wife and I have a 20-year-old son, and like other families, we have our disagreements. But I've learned a lot from the Bible, including the importance of saying, "I'm sorry." It's amazing how those words, when sincerely expressed, can prevent or defuse a conflict.

NELSON, you have a warm smile and a friendly manner. At one time, though, you burned with hatred. Correct?

Yes! As a young man, I joined a political group in opposition to the government. I also hated a rival political party that was vying for control of my district. To become a better fighter, I learned martial arts, and then I beat up anyone who upset me.

What motivated you to change?

I began to study the Bible and to apply its teachings, two of which especially touched my heart. The first states: "All things . . . that you want men to do to you, you also must do to them." (Matthew 7:12) The second reads: "You must love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39) I observed that the Witnesses, who taught me the Bible, displayed that kind of love, regardless of their racial or ethnic background. I wanted to be like them. Evidently, I succeeded, for my old acquaintances were amazed and soon no longer feared me.

Did you ever have a relapse?

Not in public. But sometimes I struggled to control my temper at home. In fact, I once got angry and hit my wife, which I deeply regret. She kindly forgave me, though, and this made me even more determined to master my emotions.

You said that people stopped fearing you. Can you give us an example?

Yes. One day I encountered a prominent member of the rival political group that I mentioned earlier, a man named Augusto. At first, he was very cautious. But I greeted him warmly, suggested that we forget our differences, and invited him to my home. He accepted my offer and was amazed at the changes I had made—so much so that he too began to study the Bible. Now Augusto and I are not just close friends but also spiritual brothers.

"Be Peaceable With All Men"

The causes of conflict are complex and varied, and not everyone is eager to respond to overtures of peace. Hence, the Bible offers this realistic advice: "If possible, *as far as it depends on you,* be peaceable with all men."—Romans 12:18.

The people mentioned in this article are living proof that the wisdom found in the Bible really works—that it has the power to overturn even "strongly entrenched" negative attitudes when we let it. (2 Corinthians 10:4) Concerning that wisdom, Proverbs 3:17, 18 says: "Its ways are pleasant, and all its paths are peaceful. It is a tree of life to those who take hold of it, and those who keep firm hold of it will be called happy."

Do you want to become more happy and peaceable? Do you long for friendships that will not unravel when put to the test? If so, you will not be disappointed if you allow the Bible to show you the way. ■

Bible Principles That Promote Peace

Think before you speak or act. —James 1:19.

When provoked, do not retaliate. —Proverbs 26:20.

If anger wells up, "take your leave."—Proverbs 17:14.

Be willing to apologize. —Matthew 5:23, 24.

Forgive freely.—Ephesians 4:32.

LOVE—A Key to Peace

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous. It does not brag, does not get puffed up, does not behave indecently, does not look for its own interests, does not become provoked. It does not keep account of the injury. . . . It bears all things, . . . endures all things. Love never fails." —1 Corinthians 13:4-8.

Nelson and Augusto are now good friends