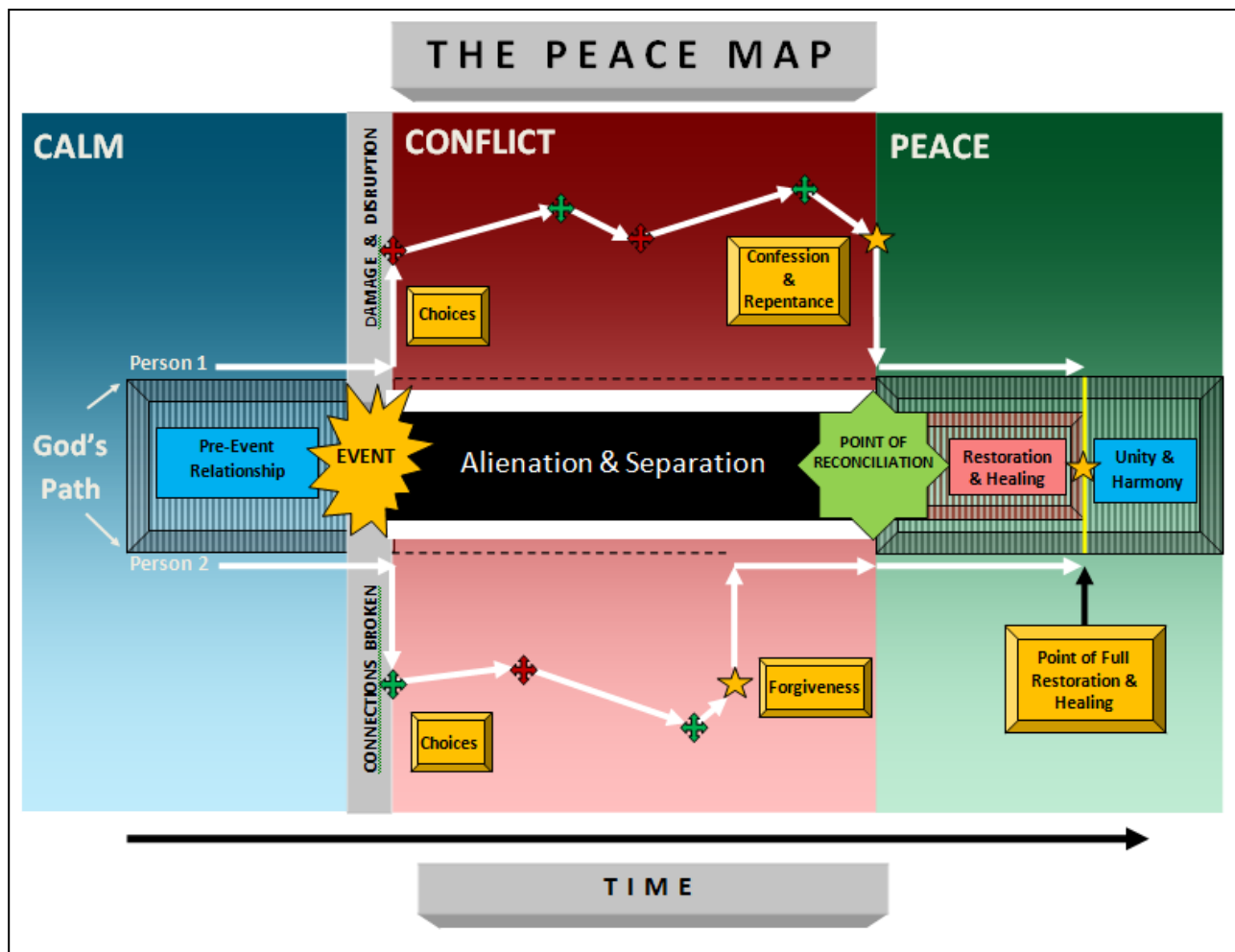


Navigating the Peace Map

NAVIGATING GOD'S PATHWAYS TO PEACE

Over the fifteen years we have been helping Christians embroiled in all types of conflicts, we have seen many people reconcile and restore their relationships. Sadly, we have seen others remain wounded and separated from one another. Those who successfully find their way through conflict to peace and unity follow very similar pathways to get there. PeacePoint developed the diagram below to illustrate those pathways and the milestones passed along the journey. We call it the Peace Map. We hope that the Peace Map and the insights we share from the Bible and our experience will help you find your way through conflict to unity.



Conflicts usually involve multiple issues and varied relational dynamics which create confusion and hinder reconciliation. While harmony and unity are the ultimate objectives, they

often seem elusive. The journey from conflict to peace is never easy. It is not as difficult, however, if one knows and can recognize the milestones one must pass along the way to peace.

When you travel, maps help you see how to navigate from where you are to where you want to be. A map provides a “big picture” of the journey ahead. Maps help you prepare and plan so that you can stay on course and avoid wrong turns that might lengthen your trip or lead you astray.

In the same way, you need a reliable map to help you see and follow God’s pathways to peace. Rather than marking out a route to a physical destination, the Peace Map shows the way through conflict to unity. If you follow God’s directions and stay on the pathways He prescribes, you will find the genuine peace He has promised.

Having a Peace Map helps you in a variety of ways:

- It provides a “big picture” of the journey to peace and transforms intangible concepts like confession, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration into tangible, practical steps.
- It helps you locate where you are on your journey. Recognizing the progress you have already made is encouraging, and seeing the goal ahead gives you focus and resolve.
- It defines the individual steps toward peace and illustrates that you *can* achieve reconciliation, restoration, and ultimately, harmony and unity.
- It shows how each party can return to God’s path and experience genuine peace *regardless* of the responses and actions of other people.

All maps have limitations. No map shows everything. The Peace Map is no exception. What you see along your journey may differ from what you might expect to see based on the map. While the Peace Map provides helpful guidance, you must be sensitive to the following limitations:

- The path to peace is seldom linear and sequential. In fact, the journey may feel more like wandering in the wilderness. Many are tempted to take shortcuts and skip critical steps. They make progress but then stall or even backslide. You must guard against becoming discouraged and remember that it is always possible to return to God’s path.
- Conflict seldom involves only one issue. The Peace Map illustrates the resolution of a conflict in which one person wrongs another in a single event. Conflict, however, is almost always multidimensional and often involves many people and many different issues. One party may be the offender and the other party the offended in one aspect of the conflict, and in another aspect of the conflict, the positions may be reversed. On

one issue in the conflict, a party may need to take the initiative to repent and confess. On another issue, that same party may need to extend grace and forgiveness.

- Timelines are seldom uniform. Parties act and react in different ways and at different times concerning different aspects of the conflict. While a single Peace Map can help you visualize the pathways through conflict to unity for one aspect of your conflict, most conflicts are best and more accurately depicted by several maps laid one on top of another showing the parties in different places and facing different decisions and challenges.

The Peace Map is based on the principles and promises God has provided for you in the Bible. While His directions are completely accurate and always reliable, He never forces you to follow them. God always provides the guidance and the strength you need for the journey. The path you take, however, is always yours to choose.

Relationship (Connection before the Conflict)

Usually Persons 1 and 2 have some type of relationship and some degree of connection with each other before the conflict occurs. The relationship may be longstanding, and the connections between them may be many. Examples of this would be husbands and wives, business associates, or fellow church members who have known each other for many years. Persons 1 and 2 may have only been in a relationship for a brief time, such as two Christians who meet as customer and shopkeeper. In rare cases, Persons 1 and 2 have no connection prior to the event that sparks the conflict between them. An example of this would be when one person is careless and seriously injures another in a car accident.

Persons 1 and 2 may also be at different places in their respective walks with God before the event. One or both may be walking on or close to God's path. One or both may be distant from God and struggling to find His path. It is possible that one or both do not know God at all. The farther either person is from God before the event, the less likely they will be to accept the direction God provides and follow it. However, God may use an event and the conflict that results to bring Person 1 or 2 closer to Himself and back to His path.

Event (Damage and Disruption/Existing Relationship Broken)

BANG! An event occurs. Something is done or said or not done or not said that disrupts and damages the relationship between Persons 1 and 2. An event may occur in an instant or over a significant period of time. It is impossible to list all of the events that might separate Persons 1 and 2. All events, however, break the connections previously existing between Persons 1 and 2. The degree to which the connections between Persons 1 and 2 are broken depends on whether the event is minor, catastrophic, or somewhere in between. The event is not the conflict. The event is the set of circumstances, acts, or omissions that creates the conflict between Persons 1 and 2.

Conflict (Alienation and Separation)

The event alienates Persons 1 and 2 from each other and places them in conflict. That conflict takes both Person 1 and Person 2 off the path that God (who highly values unity among His people) wants them to follow. Even though they may be off of God's path, God promises both Person 1 and Person 2 that He will never leave them, even in the midst of the conflict.

Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. (Hebrews 13:5)

Choices (Following God's Way or the World's Way)

Once in conflict, each person involved must choose to engage the conflict God's way or the world's way. They must choose whether or not to submit to God as the Supreme Authority and resolve the conflict in a way that glorifies Him. They must choose whom they will serve.

I am the LORD, your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:1-5)

Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, ...but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:14-15)

God's expectations are very clear. He expects you to glorify and honor Him in your words and actions, even when you struggle with conflict that stretches you to your limit. He expects those who love Him to obey and serve Him. Those who obey God enjoy living close to Him who loves them and who alone provides true peace and security.

What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

He who has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He loves me and will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and manifest Myself to him. (John 14:21)

As human beings, our first inclination is to often wander from the God who loves us. Our natural impulse is to respond as the world does. The world endorses two responses to conflict: fight and flight.

The fight responses seek to intimidate and overpower. Any type of assault or use of pressure to overcome an opponent is a fight response. Although it may seem more civilized, litigation is a fight response that God commands His followers to avoid with other Christians (1 Corinthians 6:1, 5-6). Sometimes we use puffing, guile, and manipulation to fight with others.

Flight comes in many different forms as well. All of them, however, seek to avoid the conflict rather than deal with it constructively. Sometimes, people flee conflict through denial. They

simply act like the conflict does not exist. Other times, people run away from the conflict and the other people involved in it. They may physically run away to another place. They may also “run away” into their work, hobbies, sports, alcohol, or drugs. Flight may also disguise itself in a premature capitulation or compromise that looks godly but leaves the real issues unaddressed and the relationship broken.

Regardless of their form, fight and flight always prevent peace and share a common source: **FEAR**. If Person 1 or 2 fights or flees, it is always because they are afraid of something or someone. Fight and flight always increase the separation between Person 1 and 2 and the distance back to God’s path.

In striking contrast to the ways of the world, God’s ways promote reconciliation, not separation. He knows that you will remain estranged until you are reconciled. He knows that you cannot find your way back to His path until you accept your responsibility in the conflict and respond as He directs you through His Word. This is why He so strongly commands you to seek peace and unity.

Seek peace and pursue it. (Psalm 34:14)

Strive mightily to maintain the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 3:4)

God expects action. He expects you to love Him, to follow Him, and to engage the conflicts you face His way, not the world’s way. To do so you must trust Him and believe that He knows what is best for you. His ways are based on **FAITH**, not fear.

In conflict, the circumstances constantly change. Nothing stays the same. Persons 1 and 2 must continuously choose between God’s ways or the world’s ways. As time passes, the choices Persons 1 and 2 make propel them either closer or farther away from each other and God’s path. When they choose the world’s ways, they move farther away from each other and God. When they trust, serve, and obey God, they move closer to each other, to God, and to the peace and security God intends for them to enjoy.

Engaging Conflict God’s Way (The Reconciling Responses)

The Responsibility of the Offender: Confession and Repentance

Person 1 is the offender. A natural reaction when you offend someone is to justify or minimize your mistakes or divert attention toward others. Jesus clearly forbids shifting blame.

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. (Matthew 7:3-5)

Person 1 must first examine himself and then confess any wrongful actions or attitudes to God and to Person 2. When he confesses his wrongs to God, God promises to forgive him and clear away the stain of his wrongdoing (1 John 1:9). When he confesses to Person 2, God promises healing internally and relationally (James 5:16).

The blessings God promises to those who confess and repent come only if they “CONFESS” well.

Contact everyone affected. Go quickly.

Own it all. Be thorough and specific.

No excuses. No qualifications. No ifs, buts, or maybes.

Fix the harm. Make things right. Repair the damage as much as possible.

Express sorrow. Apologize and accept the consequences.

Seek forgiveness. Ask for it but allow time for it to come.

Set a new course. Changing behavior shows sincerity!

Confession brings mercy, forgiveness, and healing. As soon as Person 1 confesses, he immediately returns to God’s path.

The Responsibility of the Offended: Forgiveness

Person 2 is the offended party. As one forgiven by God through Christ, Person 2 must be quick to forgive Person 1 in the same way God has forgiven him.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:13)

God-like forgiveness is not about feeling nor forgetting. God-like forgiveness is a conscious and deliberate decision to:

- Get rid of bitterness and anger.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-21)

- Take no revenge and trust God to act justly.

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge. I will repay,” says the Lord. (Romans 12:18)

- Unconditionally release the offender from responsibility for the personal pain caused by the offense.

[Love] keeps no record of wrongs. (1 Corinthians 13:5)

- Offer the offender the same grace and mercy God extends to you.

But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

- Remain ready to reconcile and restore the relationship.

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

Forgiveness is a unilateral, unconditional act. It is always completely within Person 2's control and power to forgive. It is not contingent upon any action by Person 1. Jesus instructs and expects Person 2 to forgive Person 1 freely and without reservation because it honors God who has done the same. Indeed, Jesus says there will be consequences for Person 2 if he refuses to forgive.

Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you?" In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. "This is how my Heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." (Matthew 18:32-35)

Forgiveness glorifies God and benefits His people. That is why He does not merely suggest it; He commands it. As soon as Person 2 forgives, he immediately returns to the path God desires and has provided for him.

The Return to God's Path

Person 1 might not confess and repent. Person 2 might not forgive. Whether or not Person 1 or 2 choose to return to God's path is solely their prerogative as individuals. God only expects each person to fulfill his individual responsibilities.

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Romans 12:18)

The responsibilities God assigns to Persons 1 and 2 are unilateral and personal, not conditional or contingent. The one who faithfully fulfills his responsibilities immediately returns to God's path and remains in right relationship with Him even if he remains alienated from the others involved. While there may be consequences for past attitudes, words, and actions, nothing and no one can prevent Person 1 or Person 2 from instantly making things right with God and walking with Him on His path.

Point of Reconciliation

Reconciliation occurs when both Persons 1 and 2 have fulfilled their respective responsibilities and have returned to God's path. At that moment, they reach the point of reconciliation. They are no longer alienated or separated from one another but are now rightly realigned with each other on God's path. While reconciliation itself is healthy, the journey for Persons 1 and 2 is not over because their relationship should be restored. Reconciliation repositions them for restoration and healing to begin.

Process of Restoration and Healing

Damaged relationships must be repaired and rebuilt. The stressed and torn connections between Persons 1 and 2 that existed prior to the event must heal. This requires both time and attention. The amount of time and attention required varies in direct proportion to the significance of the event, the intensity of the conflict, and the duration of the estrangement. Restoration and healing are hard work, but the benefits are always worth the effort.

Point of Full Restoration and Healing

Persons 1 and 2's relationship is now restored to where it was before the event. This level of restoration is not reached in every case. Sometimes circumstances prevent willing parties from reaching this point. Sometimes one of the parties is not willing to pursue restoration and healing to this point. Sometimes, God's path for the parties takes them in different directions. The responsibility of the parties is to diligently pursue restoration and healing to the fullest extent God allows.

Peace (Unity of Spirit and Harmonious Interaction)

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! (Psalm 133:1)

When Person 1 and 2 are reconciled and their relationship has been fully restored and healed, they will enjoy the harmonious interaction and unity of spirit God intends for all of His people. They are moving beyond the point of full restoration and healing and building a relationship that is even closer and more satisfying than they could have imagined.

LESSONS FROM THE JOURNEY

Those who follow the map God provides and find His pathways to peace learn much on the journey. They learn that the event and the resulting conflict, though painful, provided new and unexpected opportunities to grow, to love and serve others, and to experience God's presence and power. They realize that God was with them during the entire journey even when He may have

seemed far away. They see that while God never forced them to take a particular course, He provided reliable direction every step of the way.

In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

In the end, both parties realize that there was always a way to make things right, and the only thing that delayed their return to God's path was their reluctance to take it. They understand that experiencing the best God has for them is never contingent upon the actions and decisions of others but only on their own obedience. They realize that God did, in fact, make everything work together for their good, just as He promised. Seeing all of this, they can be grateful for the journey completed and better prepared for the next journey.

In a fallen world, conflict is inevitable. You can expect it. Reconciliation, restoration and unity are always God's desire, but they require the cooperation of everyone involved. Sometimes, that does not happen. You, however, can be confident that if you trust God's map and faithfully follow His pathways, you will always find your way through any conflict you face and back to His path and His peace. That is all He expects of you.