

FAITH BIBLE SEMINARY

ANALYSIS OF A BIBLICAL COUNSELING BOOK

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Since the fall of mankind, our world has been filled with conflict. From the beginning of the Bible in Genesis 3:15 where God said to the serpent, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman," hatred, discord, envy, covetousness, selfishness and the like have characterized man's relationships. His relationship to God became stained with sin and rebellion that day. Instead of loving intimacy, man now was at war with God (Rom. 8:7, Jam. 4:4). Not only that but he was now at war with others (Jam. 4:1-2). From man's beginning, there has been a great need for peace.

God has gone to great lengths to create peace for mankind. God knew that first and foremost, man's greatest need was reconciliation with God. Man was on pace to be at odds with God for both this life and the next. He was destined for God's judgment (Matt. 25:31-46). But how could he find peace?

God promised to provide a way to peace. From the very moment that He promised conflict due to sin, He also provided the hope of peace. Once again, Genesis 3:15 says, "And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." This is the first occurrence of God promising a Messiah who would attain peace for mankind. We now know that Messiah was Jesus Christ. Jesus lived in perfect peace with God by His sinless life and deserved no judgment unlike the rest of mankind. Jesus chose to take man's judgment upon Himself and die on the cross (Col. 2:13-14) and give man new life with God. This new life is characterized by peace (Rom. 5:1).

Those who believe are now at peace with God. Because of this, they are now able and called to live at peace with one another (Eph. 2:14-18). This is the peace that Ken Sande focuses on in his book *The Peacemaker*. God gave up His Son because He so desired peace with His enemies. We, as believers, should have the same mindset. We should do all we can to make peace with others because God has done all He could to make peace with us.

Conflict is rarely something believers desire, and it warrants many types of responses from those who have to go through it. Many people avoid conflict at all costs. Sande calls these people "peace

fakers” (page 22). They may deny conflict even exists. They might run from it. They may even be so distraught over conflict that they commit suicide. All of these responses are escape mechanisms that don’t honor God in conflict nor fulfill His purposes for the conflict.

On the other end of the spectrum that Sande refers to as “The Slippery Slope,” you have those who take on conflict with a “guns blazing” approach. Sande calls these people “peace breakers” (page 22). They commit verbal or physical assault. They might pursue litigation. They may even choose to murder someone in their fierce desire to end conflict. These responses attack the other person involved in the conflict and these responses aren’t God-honoring either.

Instead of these “peace faking” or “peace breaking” responses, Sande suggests the biblical way to resolving conflict. It’s a way that honors God, honors the other person involved in the conflict, and promotes peace. This way is called “peacemaking.” A variety of responses to conflict can create peace. Sande breaks these up into individual peacemaking responses and assisted peacemaking responses (pages 25-26).

Individual peacemaking responses begin with overlooking an offense (page 25). This is rooted in the gospel-centered idea found in Psalm 130:3-4. “If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? ⁴But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.” Love keeps no record of wrongs (1 Cor. 13:5). God is gracious by nature and doesn’t a record of the sins of the believer. He’s covered those through Christ. Additionally, if we had to repent of every single sinful motive, thought, or action, we’d be too busy to do anything else. God graciously overlooks most of our offenses without bringing them to our minds.

Another individual peacemaking response is seeking reconciliation (page 25-26). If an offense is serious enough to warrant discussion with someone, reconciliation should be sought (Gal. 6:1). This is an aspect of peacemaking that focuses on repairing the damaged relationship. This is something God takes

very seriously. He takes it so seriously that He tells us to reconcile with someone before coming to Him in worship. He tells us that it's better to leave your gift to God on the altar and go be reconciled with your opponent than to offer your gift to Him and the conflict remain unresolved (Matt. 5:23-24). This should be done with an attitude of humility and forgiveness. If not, you can "KYRG". This means "Kiss Your Relationship Goodbye." God values relationships and so should we.

The last individual peacemaking response is negotiation (page 26). Negotiation is needed if the relational aspect of the conflict is solved but material things still need to be resolved. We see this in the life of Zacchaeus when he realized his sin against others. He had stolen from them, so he paid them back fourfold what he owed them (Luke 19:8). For one to be willing to give up time and money to make things right shows a godly desire for peace. There is a price to be paid for peace, but it is worth it to save the relationship. As Sande points out, Christians should make every effort and literally agonize for peace and unity (Eph. 4:1-3).

At times though, conflicts can be too difficult to resolve one on one. This means another trusted person needs to come in and help those in opposition resolve matters and be at peace. These responses include mediation, arbitration, and accountability (page 26). Trusted individuals come alongside those involved and ask questions, give advice, render binding decisions, and hold individuals accountable for their actions (page 26).

In all these peacemaking responses, they move from more passive and less effort to more aggressive and intentional and more effort involved. No matter where the conflict is located on the slippery slope though, certain attitudes and principles should always be in applied.

Sande views all peacemaking through the grid of the four "Gs". The first "G" is to glorify God. This is the chief end of man and we are commanded to glorify God in all that we do (1 Cor. 10:31). God Himself is called "the God of peace (Rom. 15:33)." He has done everything to reconcile Himself to

mankind and bring us peace with Him. When we act like God we bring glory to God, therefore let us be people of peace. His Word says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Matt. 5:9)." The natural outflow of acting like God and bringing glory to Him is we are blessed. Those who seek to be peacemakers are blessed and a blessing to others. We have been called to live at peace as far as it depends on us (Rom. 12:18). We've been called to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3)." We have been called to not repay wrong for wrong (1 Thes. 5:15). We have even been called to bless those who persecute us (Rom. 12:14)! This is a high, challenging calling, but we look like Jesus and bring glory to Him when we do it.

This kind of commitment to peacemaking requires trust in the Lord. We must trust His sovereignty and His goodness. Even when we don't understand, we trust and commit our way to obeying Him. Sande shared a story about a very difficult marriage situation in which his counselee said, "I am so glad that I trusted God and didn't go my own way (page 72)." We do what He says even when we don't know the outcome or understand. That's what faith is all about.

The second "G" is to get the log out of your own eye. Our tendency in conflict is to minimize our faults and to maximize our opponent's faults. This is not right. Jesus said in Matthew 7:3-5. "'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.'" Jesus tells us to self examine first. Where did you sin in motive, thought, word, or deed? We ought to view our part as the bigger deal in the conflict we have. When we do that first, we are in a position to seek the good of the other person and humbly help them in their sin.

As one follows the second “G” principle, they must remember the Golden Rule that is found in Luke 6:31. “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” We would want others to examine themselves before they lay into us and point out our sin. We should do the same for them. Sande talks about how following the Golden Rule often yields the “Golden Result.” The “Golden Result” states that people will usually treat us as we treat them (page 78). This should cause us to look at conflict very differently. We would want others to also focus on the good in us during the conflict, not just the bad (page 89). We grant them that same grace. We would be in awe of someone giving up their supposed “rights” to save their relationship with us (page 93). We should do the same for them.

Sande reminds us that conflict really starts in the heart. We have unmet desire that can become demands. Then if demands aren’t met, we can judge others. As we become the judge of others, we then can seek to punish them for their supposed wrongdoing against us (pages 100-108). This echoes the words of James in James 4:1-2. Fights and quarrels come from the battling desires in your heart that get out of control. Smashing these idols and letting God become our true object of worship from our hearts is the solution.

Inspecting the log in one’s own eye should lead that person to repentance. Sande gives a great practical order and guideline to understand what biblical confession and repentance should look like. He calls this the seven “A’s” of confession (pages 126-132). Following these steps demonstrates to those one has sinned against that he or she is truly sorry before God and before them. All these things help accomplish the second “G” of peacemaking.

The third “G” of peacemaking is to gently restore (page 139). We see Paul talk about this in Galatians 6:1 where he states, “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.” Sande points out that sometimes we can view restoration as confrontation that just shows others their faults

(page 144). It's more than that and Scripture uses many other words that should accompany our restoration. Words like "help", "save", and "forgive" are used many times in connection with restoration (page 144). Confronting sin head on isn't always the wisest or most effective way to gently restore someone. Sande points out that Jesus often times used parables in a roundabout way to help people see their sins (page 145). If the goal is help restore the other person and to save your relationship, then you want to be as gentle as you can be. Our goal is to release the person "caught" in sin and help to "mend" and "repair" them (page 155). This requires speaking the truth but in love. Reap the Golden Response by treating the person in sin the same way you'd want to be treated in someone dealing with your sin. If you treat them with gentleness and respect, most likely they'll respond in a similar fashion. Sande reminds us to breathe grace in how we interact with those in sin (page 170).

Breathing grace and speaking truth, even when done in the gentlest of ways, can still be hard to hear. If someone who is caught in sin chooses not to repent, others may need to become involved. This process is outlined in Matthew 18. The goal of the entire process is restoration. As Matthew 18:15 says, if they listen to you as you point out their sin, then you've won them over. Celebrate in what God has done! If not, your concern for their spiritual well-being is too important to not pursue them. If needed, you take a brother or sister with you to talk to them. If they still don't listen, have the church pursue them. If they still don't listen, remove them from your church. This process can be painful but the goal is restoration. You hope to never reach the last step!

The fourth and final "G" of peacemaking is to go and be reconciled. This involves several things. It's based off of Matthew 5:24, "leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." Reconciliation is more important than worship to God! It needs to be important to us as well.

One thing to keep in mind is Colossians 3:13. "Forgive as the Lord forgave you." What does this mean? Well, forgiveness doesn't require a feeling, forgetting the offense, nor excusing the offense (page 206). Forgiveness is not passive or soft. It's active and intentional (page 206). In fact, Sande points out that two of the original Greek words for forgiveness (aphiemi and charizomai) involved active decisions we make. One word means to "let go" or "release", especially in conjunction with a debt. The other word means to "bestow favor freely (page 207)." The offended party must decide to absorb the debt incurred and release it to God. When someone does this, it is best they make four promises to show true forgiveness. The promises are:

"I will not dwell on this incident."

"I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you."

"I will not talk to others about this incident."

"I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship (page 209)."

This is all impossible without the strength of the Spirit. We need him to help us not dwell on the offender's faults and instead help us commit to the replacement principle (page 221). This means we choose to dwell on the positive about the other person. We see Paul outline this in Philippians 4:8. It's a choice we make in forgiveness and part of the four promises we make to the other person. We need a perspective of how much we've been forgiven by God to actively forgive others in this way.

Another principle in reconciliation is negotiation. This means helping both parties see eye to eye and do all they can to meet one another's needs and desires. Sande calls this "cooperative negotiation (page 226)." It operates off of the principle in Philippians 2:4 which says, "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." As with the previous steps, this process is others-minded and filled with grace. How does the other party see the problem? How do they see the solution? What conversations do you need to have together to help one another? These are all questions to consider in negotiation.

The last thought in the fourth “G” of go and be reconciled is to overcome evil with good. Sometimes, despite going through all the aforementioned steps, conflict remains unresolved. If this is the case, we are still called to “overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21).” Sande points out that both Paul and Peter show that this is not passive process either (page 249, 251). We are to overcome evil by doing good according to Paul. To do good is to actively seek the good of your opposition. Peter echoes this in 1 Peter 2:12 encouraging believers to live such good lives among pagans that their good deeds would cause their opposition to glorify God. So despite evil and those who seem determined to not reconcile with us, God calls us to love our enemies and bless those who persecute us.

In all this, Sande provides a wonderful manual for how to deal biblically with conflict. By identifying the slippery slope and the four “Gs” of peacemaking, he flips the typical thinking about conflict upside down. Conflict is an opportunity, not a burden. It’s an opportunity for us and for our opponent to grow. No one looks forward to conflict, but when seen in this light, they can understand that God has a great purpose in conflict and wants to use them to breathe grace in the situation. Peacemaking is what God is all about. He wants us to be as well.

This book is immensely practical and theologically solid. Sande uses an abundance of Scripture to back up his principles and points. His approach is very Christ-like and gracious. It meets conflict head on but not in the way we’d typically think. Conflict resolution need not be angry, emotional, and selfish. It can be solved without any of those things.

Everyone deals with conflict at some level nearly all the time. I met with a couple for premarital counseling today, and we talked about conflict. I was able to help give them a quick, simple grid on how to classify conflict by showing them the slippery slope. They were already better able to understand if their responses to recent conflicts were peace-faking, peacemaking, or peace-breaking. They saw that

depending on the situation, there are a range of peacemaking responses that can be acceptable to resolve the conflict.

The four “Gs” also provide a great step by step process of how to resolve conflict. I would have couples look at the basic ideas and some Scriptures behind these four principles and ask themselves the questions that Sande brings up related to these. This would be a great practical tool for counseling.

There’s plenty of homework that could be assigned to your counselee from this book.

1) Have your counselee try and identify if they’ve done any of the 4 “Gs” in their current conflict. If so, have they followed the steps in order or done them out of order? Are any of the steps incomplete to resolve the conflict?

2) Have your counselee look at the slippery slope. Have them ask themselves, “Do I tend to be a peace-faker, peace-breaker, or a peacemaker?” In their current conflict, have them identify where they are at on the slippery slope. What needs to be changed about their approach to their current situation?

3) Have your counselee read pages 43 and 45 about God’s love for peace and subsequent Scriptures that accompany it. Have them write down two or three Scriptures that stand out to them the most about God being a God of peace. Why are those Scriptures meaningful to them?

4) Have your counselee write down ten things about their opponent that are “excellent or worthy of praise (Phil. 4:8).” This will help them cultivate a positive, gracious attitude towards that person.

5) Have your counselee develop their trust in God for their situation by reading Psalm 37 and 73 as Sande points out on page 73. What do these psalms warn you not to do? What do they instruct you to do? List the comforting promises they provide.

6) Use Philippians 4:2-9 to help your counselee develop the proper attitude toward their situation and toward each other. See if they can identify the five truths to help them that Sande outlines on pages 84-87.

7) To understand what the conflict is costing or may cost the counselee in the future, use Sande's question on page 99 about the effect of the conflict. How is this conflict impacting your witness for Christ, your family life, your occupation, your finances or property, your friendships, your relationship with God, and/or your service to your church and community?

8) Help your counselee identify potential idols in their life by asking some questions about idol progression outlined in chapter five. How am I punishing others? How am I judging others? What am I demanding to have? What is the root desire of that demand?

9) Have your counselee read through the seven "As" of confession. In their current conflict, have they completed the seven steps? What is left undone that they need to confess biblically to their opponent?

10) Have your counselee memorize the four promises of forgiveness on page 209. Have them identify which of these promises they have trouble keeping.

Sande provides many other practical thoughts and questions at the end of each chapter to help the reader process and think through conflict. Depending on where the reader might be with their conflict, they can use these questions in each chapter to provide further help. Again, this was an immensely helpful, practical, and biblical guide to the tough topic of conflict.