

Dear Friend,

When I was a child I remember regularly visiting several great aunts and uncles. Each of these families warmly welcomed our family into their home each time we visited. However, as I got older I discovered that these brothers and sisters, the siblings of my mom's mom, had not spoken to each other in over 20 years. They loved my mom and our family but they couldn't get along with one another. Unfortunately this sort of estrangement is not at all unusual. I am sure that all of us are personally acquainted with people whose differences have resulted in this kind of permanent, hostile separation.

I've not kept a count, but I would guess that well over half of the people I talk to in crisis situations are in distress because of broken, conflicted relationships. It is a simple fact of our fallen, sinful lives that we find it very difficult to get along with one another. Parents daily deal with children bickering, married couples regularly find themselves at odds with one another, our places of employment are often full of strife and even the best of friends often encounter times of disagreement and conflict. The Scriptures are correct in their assessment of our condition, "Ruin and misery mark their ways and the way of peace they do not know" (Romans 3: 17)

It is to people like us that God gives this command: "Live in harmony with one another... Do not repay evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." (Romans 12:16-18) All of us would agree with the psalmist when he said, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity." (Psalm 133:1) We long to live in families and communities where love and affection are freely shared. We desperately want to live with people who accept one another and us. However, many of us have been disappointed enough times that we have become cynical about the possibility of ever experiencing the unity and camaraderie that we long for.

It is one of my greatest desires and prayers that our families and our church experience the kind of unity that the Scriptures teach. I know that one of the greatest barriers to this unity is our inability to deal with hurt, disagreement and conflict. That is why our leadership team has invited Peter McClanathan of Peacemaker Ministries to conduct a seminar titled, "Peacemaking, A Biblical Guide to Conflict Resolution", January 18-19. If it were within my power I would require every teenager and adult in our congregation to go to this seminar. Conflict is inevitable but it doesn't need to be destructive. In fact, I am convinced that it is God's purpose to use conflict to cause us to discover his sufficiency in greater ways. This seminar will help us use conflict to better love God and people. I hope you will come and bring your friends and family also.

Aiming to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,

P.S. This month will also bring our annual "Week of Prayer" (Jan. 6-12). I hope you will participate as we pour out our hearts to the One who is our refuge.