

## **Build a Bridge**

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Bridges are major travel conveniences. They can connect land divided by water. They can span the distance separating two sections of a city. Also, bridges make travel more efficient. Reducing travel can help reduce emissions, save gas money, and save time. A bridge can give you years of your life back that you would otherwise spend driving the long way home.

Bridges are a metaphor for life. In life, our relationships can be broken. Angry words. Betrayals. Violence. There are many reasons friends, family, and Christians can have their relationships ruptured. Sometimes separations are needed. Time apart can allow for cooler heads and hearts to prevail.

Eventually, though, bridges need to be built. Paul wrote, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph. 4:26). The longer we delay solving our conflict, the harder it becomes to solve it. We become further entrenched in our pride. Paul brings a sense of urgency to resolve conflict; to build bridges.

### **Peace-Making & Reconciliation**

The Bible does not describe building bridges to repair strained relationships. The Bible uses other terminology: peace-making and reconciliation. Jesus taught, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God” (Matt. 5:9). Later, the apostle Paul wrote, “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

Like all skills, peacemaking and reconciliation are learned and developed. The work is challenging. Few are willing to engage in the work. Due to heightened conditions of hostility, peacemakers are often ridiculed and maligned. They are viewed as weak and compromising. Yet, they are rightly motivated by the Savior’s desire for unity.

Jesus prayed for unity before His death. He acknowledged that His disciples would experience scorn and hatred in the world. Yet, they needed to remain united for the sake of making family from their enemies: “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:20-21).

### **Tools for Building Bridges**

**1. Humility.** Division is frequently caused by pride. One or both parties become hardened by the deception of their self-image. Ego drives them to ruin a relationship that might have taken years to build. Therefore, humility is an indispensable tool for building bridges and restoring peace.

But, how is humility displayed in bridge-building? Well, humility can be shown by admitting wrong. James wrote, “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (Jas. 5:16). Regardless of the situation, blame is typically found on both sides of a dispute. Accepting personal responsibility can help warm an icy relationship and foster the goodwill needed for reconciliation.

**2. Long-suffering.** Peacemaking takes time and energy. People at odds with one another must be willing to listen to one another. We must try to appreciate the other’s perspective. Often, people just want to know that they have been heard. Patiently listening to someone’s perspective can be disarming in a conflict.

**3. Forgiveness.** As peace talks progress, involved parties must demonstrate a willingness to forgive. Unless and until forgiveness is genuinely extended, forgiveness will be replaced with a grudge. Grudges will only prolong the conflict and increase the distance between disputants. Forgiveness will help bridge the gap.

**4. Love.** Love is always needed in the work of peacemaking. Humility, long-suffering, and forgiveness are gestures of love. These demonstrate one’s sincerity in seeking reconciliation. Love proves we are of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul gave wrote about the work of peacemaking. He wrote the Colossians, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:12-14). Most want perfect harmony in their relationships. Sadly, some are unwilling to do what is required to gain it.

## Conclusion

Peacemaking and reconciliation are always needful topics to consider. Today, there are many reasons relationships have been hurt. Families, friends, and churches have been torn apart by what has gone on in the world politically and socially. Rather than peacemaking, our leaders have frequently harnessed the public’s anger for self-serving agendas. Our times have brought out the worst in many people.

Thankfully, we seem to be coming out of the pandemic. This has fueled much of the fighting that has gone on in the last couple of years. Many relationships have been damaged. How, then, will we move forward?

Someone suggested that we must lament, forgive, and rebuild as we come out of the pandemic. Lamentation is born from the faith that God will set the world aright. We must be willing to forgive rather than assign blame. We must rebuild by putting the needs of the weakest to the forefront. Be a peacemaker. Build a bridge.