

ONE

CONFUSED, DIVIDED, AND PARALYZED

Not long ago we were on a video call with a young couple from the Midwest. They were business owners, influencers in their city, and leaders in their church. They had recently completed a three-month course with their faith community called “The Mission of God.”

As we listened to their experience unfold, we noticed that they kept referring to the elusive “one day” when they would join God on mission. Concepts like “getting our house in order” and mission “over there” crept into the conversation, causing us to wonder what they had discovered about the what, where, who, and how of God’s mission. And so, finally, we paused the conversation with a question:

“What *is* the mission of God?”

They stared at us. We stared back, waiting for them to wax eloquent about the very topic they had just given three months of study to.

Silence.

Finally he said something about “love” and then, after a nervous laugh, admitted, “I . . . I guess we’re not sure.”

Not long ago, “We’re not sure” was our response as well when asked about the mission of God. We knew we were supposed to “follow Jesus” and “save lost souls” and “love God and love people,” but if you really pushed us, we were confused about who God was, what God actually did in Jesus, and who God did “it” for.

The ramifications of this mission confusion were significant for us. Rather than engaging every day with clarity about our part in God’s mission, we meandered through the landscape of a violent world, disturbed by the interpersonal, local, and international conflicts that were tearing our world apart. We imagined that Jesus had something to say about the pain of broken relationships, broken systems, and broken lives, and we anticipated that God would eventually do something about it. We longed to follow God in ways that were helpful, but because we weren’t sure how to do that, we simply hung on to a moral existence. We hoped that the conflicts raging around us would resolve themselves and that if we lived well enough we’d go to heaven when we died. From our limited theological and cultural perspective, God was singularly concerned with the redemption of the human souls. So we and our churches were too.

And then everything changed. For both of us.

JON

My wife, Jan, was seven months pregnant with our first child and we figured we should go on one more adventure before the new adventure of parenting got underway. As a pastor, seminary student, and academic nut, my dream was to go to Israel and study the Scriptures while walking through the historical contexts of Jesus. The dream came true and from the moment we

stepped off the plane in Tel Aviv, I was filled with wonder like a kid on Christmas morning.

We stayed in the Christian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem and woke up to the sound of the call to prayer that was both beautiful and mystical as it echoed through the narrow streets. Each day would involve “field trips” to biblical locations like Jericho, Bethlehem, Hebron, and Masada. I was in heaven, soaking up every piece of information and new experience.

Before we headed out for the daily pilgrimage, we would go through the breakfast line in the hotel and interact casually with the restaurant staff. We were especially drawn to one man, who one morning asked my wife the bold question, “How far along are you?”

“Seven months,” she responded.

He broke into a smile from ear to ear and said, “My wife is too!” His name was Milad.

In that moment something shifted between us as we moved from acquaintances living on opposite sides of the world to parents who were about to embark on a life-changing adventure. From that point on our conversations deepened and our time with Milad became a highlight of the day. One morning he pulled me aside after I finished breakfast and said, “I get off work late tonight. Do you want to meet me on the roof for a drink and conversation?” I immediately said yes.

Little did I know saying yes would change my life forever.

As we stood on the roof overlooking Herod’s Palace, the Dome of the Rock, the Mount of Olives, and all of the Old City, we had a casual conversation about the World Cup, parenting fears, and our families. Then his cadence began to slow. He turned to me somberly and asked, “Why do your people think I’m a terrorist?”

I was so shocked I just squeaked, “Excuse me?”

“I’m an Arab Christian Palestinian who lives in the West Bank. I love Jesus just like you do. He is my Messiah! My village, Bethany, is just on the other side of the Mount of Olives and is the place where Jesus raised Lazarus to life. How can you American Christians pray for your meals each morning and go look at all your holy sites when just five minutes away your brothers and sisters in Christ are experiencing daily oppression and occupation?”

I was paralyzed.

My worldview had blown up and my heart had broken. I didn’t understand all of what Milad was saying, but I knew I was changed forever in that moment. He went on to tell me that the reason he served food and cleaned rooms at the hotel was to make enough money to run a nonprofit organization in his village that taught reconciliation to children surrounded by violence.

Going and studying two-thousand-year-old stones that Jesus may or may not have walked on was no longer interesting to me. I wanted to see and experience the way Jesus was presently alive and at work through the life of my friend Milad and his wife, Manar. From that point on my wife and I would cut out of class early, jump on the next public bus crossing through military checkpoints into the West Bank, and spend time with our new friends in Bethany.

What we saw in the lives of Milad and Manar was nothing short of the resurrection Jesus had enacted in the same village two thousand years before. As they walked the streets, kids from all around the village would pour out of their homes to follow them to the “House of Hope.” The space was a busted-out second-story apartment and their infrastructure consisted solely of an archaic laptop, but the glow on the children’s faces turned it into the most magical and beautiful place on earth.

We were finally experiencing the Holy Land, and it looked nothing like we had anticipated. Our time with Milad and Manar led me to begin asking some of the hardest questions I had ever faced—the questions that would launch me into this wild ride of peacemaking.

As a seminary-trained pastor, how could I have been so blind to and complicit in the suffering of my Palestinian brothers and sisters? What theology and politics had I inherited that allowed me to demonize—or at the very least turn a blind eye to—an entire people group? What other blind spots was I unaware of because I hadn't been given the tools to see the way Jesus saw? Why was the church contributing to violence rather than reconciliation? If the church was being used as a pawn of violence in the life of my friend Milad, what might happen if that same energy was used to be an instrument of peace in Milad's life and our world in general?

From that point on I gave my life to seeking and living into the answers to those questions.

JER

In October of 2005 I read a front-page article about a 7.2-magnitude earthquake that had just ravaged the tribal villages of Northern Pakistan. At the time I had no idea where Pakistan was on the globe. Not only did I not have any Pakistani friends, I knew zero Muslims. Just four years removed from 9/11, all I “knew” about Pakistan was that it was enemy territory, that Osama bin Laden, public enemy number one, was believed to be hiding there, and that the Arab Muslims of that land were dangerous terrorists.

As I read the article about the thousands who had perished and the three million who were now homeless in the Himalayas, something broke open inside of me. Two phone calls with

mentors later, I had a connection into Pakistan and the funding to make it happen. A month later I landed at the militarized Islamabad airport and was immediately shuttled eight hours north to a United Nations helipad. I boarded my first helicopter ever and, within ten hours of being in the country, found myself on top of the Himalayas at the epicenter of the earthquake, among the tribal villages of Northern Pakistan, mere kilometers away from the Tora Bora caves.

Because I had a notebook in hand when I arrived, the job assigned me by Mumtaz, the presiding Pakistani general, was to be the communications liaison between the villages, the Pakistani military, and the United Nations. Over the next three weeks Mumtaz and I listened to the requests of 157 sets of village elders who were mourning the devastation caused by the earthquake. I in turn negotiated with the UN to ensure that the necessary supplies were delivered.

In the Pakistani village of Jabba and in the context of friendship with the “enemy,” my understanding of who God is, where God is, whose side God is on, and what God is up to in the world was upended. My experience of intentional displacement within “enemy territory” was causing a very necessary renovation of my theology.

The crisis of my conversion occurred on my last day in Jabba. A final set of elders made their way into the village. But this time the Russian-era machine guns were not hanging at their sides; they were drawn and pointing at those of us sitting around the fire. Immediately my new friends raised their guns in return. Guns were now pointing at faces and every person involved was screaming. The chaos was suffocating.

Slowly Mumtaz was able to de-escalate the situation and the visiting elders were invited, still at gunpoint, to our fire. A four-hour conversation ensued through which I began to understand

the reason for the violent tension: these two tribes had been at civil war for over thirty years. As Jabba was the only village with enough clearance for helicopters to land, the visiting elders knew that the only way their people would make it through the winter was if they brokered peace with their enemy. Mumtaz looked at me and, with more urgency in his voice than I had experienced in our three weeks together, said, “I need you to write a peace treaty.”

Now let’s be honest. I was a Midwestern-born-and-raised young white pastor from the San Francisco Bay Area. Nothing in my life had prepared me for the three weeks I had already spent in Jabba, much less for drafting a peace treaty between warring Pakistani tribes. But I had a notebook and a pen in my hands, and I had an understanding of the agreements being made. I had earned the trust of the Pakistani general, the elders of Jabba, and the UN commander. Apparently Mumtaz thought I had everything I needed, so I began to write. After a couple rounds of edits, each of the presiding elders signed the treaty, as did Mumtaz, the UN commander, and I.

As I watched the visiting elders being escorted out of Jabba, no longer at gunpoint, the gospel became clearer to me than it had ever been before. In Jesus, God had waged a decisive peace that worked, and it meant that people who weren’t going to survive would now flourish. As I looked down at the peace treaty in my notebook, mission also became crystal clear: as a follower of Jesus, I had just joined God in making peace real in the world. I realized in that moment that while the redemption of the human soul was in God’s peacemaking focus, so was the restoration of interpersonal relationships, broken systems, and global conflicts.

Peace wasn’t only of value to God; it’s central to who God is.

Peacemaking wasn’t one of God’s peripheral practices; it’s God’s mission.

Could it be that peacemaking is central to what it means to follow Jesus?

OUR STORIES MERGED

Both of us were being formed by God in beautifully bizarre corners of our global village. With newfound clarity on the gospel of peace and the mission of peacemaking, we each returned to the United States with a lot to learn about living every day as Jesus-following peacemaking practitioners.

Our learning was experiential—we found our lives intersecting more and more with the painful divides in our families, neighborhoods, and cities—and it was also traditional; we were enrolled as students at Fuller Theological Seminary, Jer in Northern California and Jon in Southern California. Unbeknownst to the other, we each spent as much of our learning as possible focusing on the biblical concepts of peace, justice, and reconciliation. Our experiential and traditional learning fused near the end of our coursework when we both traveled to Israel-Palestine to study peacemaking under the instruction of the late Dr. Glen Stassen.

It was there that our stories collided.

The conflict was our classroom, but it was our instructors who captured our attention. While we had studied peacemaking and even practiced it in our own contexts, we had never met peacemakers like these: men and women whose faith in Jesus compelled them to spend their lives in costly and creative ways so that the severed divides between their peoples could be mended.

Throughout those two weeks we started asking a set of questions:

- What is peace?
- Who is a peacemaker?
- Are there practices of peacemaking? And if so, what are they and where would we find them?

- Where does peacemaking happen?
- How would we train the people in our churches in the way of peace?
- What would be different in the world if North American Christians understood peacemaking as central to following Jesus?

These questions were the genesis of the Global Immersion Project. Today, Global Immersion is a leading peacemaking training organization that is activating the North American church as an instrument of peace in our world. Through our immersive trainings, peacemaking is becoming reintergrated into the North American church's understanding of who God is, what God did in Jesus, what God is doing now, and what role we get to play in it.

In the chapters to follow, you're going to learn about the journey we took as individuals, local practitioners, and faith leaders into the peacemaking heart and mission of God. As we go, you'll discover the theological odyssey we had to take and you'll meet some of our friends, mentors, and heroes who are faith-based peacemaking practitioners within the contexts of their own homes, neighborhoods, cities, and countries. Ultimately, throughout this book you're going to discover a big God with an expansive, restorative wingspan who invites us to join in ushering in the new world God is making.

THREE DISCLAIMERS

By now you might have some questions. What does peacemaking really have to do with the Christian faith? Isn't this more a conversation for activists, humanitarians, politicians, and the United Nations than for the church? With the stories of violence, armed conflict, broken relationships, and systemic injustice that saturate

our social media feeds, isn't peacemaking unrealistic at best and a colossal waste of time at worst?

Don't worry; ten years ago we were asking the exact same questions. As far as we were concerned, peacemaking was about the political activism of idealistic noninfluencers on the fringes of society.

As you're soon to discover, we were dead wrong. But before we head into the fray, we want to offer three important disclaimers. You see, as we continue our personal journeys of following Jesus in today's world, we are humbled by how many blind spots we have based on our limited worldview as white, straight, male, Christian leaders living in the United States. Because we know shining light on these blind spots is critical to our formation and faithfulness to the one we follow, we have individually and collectively invited a diverse network of friends, mentors, and guides to accompany us along the path. In other words, we have handed them a flashlight and asked them to expose the stuff remaining in the dark. While we acknowledge blind spots that still need revealing, here are a few things we want to own up front.

First, we don't believe God is male or female but genderful. In other words, both females and males are image-bearers of a God who both encompasses and transcends gender. Because Scripture was written and compiled in a patriarchal culture, most of its authors were male and the majority of pronouns used to describe God are male . . . although, thankfully, not all! We think language matters and we in no way want to diminish the male or female characteristics of God. For the most part we use gender-neutral pronouns for God, but not completely. We acknowledge that our language falls short of the full characteristics of God and also want to acknowledge the equality of women and men from creation to the present.

We also write from the unique vantage point of being middle-class white men in the United States. At times this worldview will omit an important perspective and vantage point that we should not only consider but value. We apologize in advance for ways our cultural blind spots may be exposed as a result. That said, we have spent our lives working to learn from minority voices in the majority world as a way to help us better understand the beautiful complexity and contribution of people from a variety of racial, geographic, religious, political, and economic contexts.

Finally, we want to be up front about the fact that we see a distinction between peacemaking and justice. We see justice as a critical and nonnegotiable element of peacemaking that has to be pursued if we are to embrace a holistic understanding of God's work in the world and our central part in participating in God's mission of peacemaking. We will zero in on a variety of definitions, perspectives, and practices of justice in chapter seven when we outline our third everyday peacemaking practice, *contend*. With that said, we'd encourage you to engage the content of this book not solely through the lens of a "justice genre" but through a whole new framework of life and discipleship we call *everyday peacemaking*.

JOINING THE MOVEMENT

Although the glowing ember of peace continues to build into a flame, our world is still experiencing pain, trauma, and division. In the moment we celebrate our relative peace, someone in our home, on our street, or on the other side of the world is navigating the high seas of interpersonal, local, or international conflict.

The stakes are high.

In the last few years we have heard many stories of conflict, from broken identities to broken interpersonal relationships.

The stories have spanned local systemic injustice all the way to global conflict.

Sarah grew up the daughter of a powerful father and an insecure mother. Dad spoiled her while mom ignored her. Despite her endless attempts, she could never attain the attention and affection she craved from her parents, so she searched elsewhere to find both. Over time she learned how to thrive through disintegration. On the outside she was a Christian overachiever while behind closed doors she was dangerously experimental. While others saw her as the epitome of success, she understood herself to be a fractured, lonely failure. When she turned eighteen, she bought a one-way ticket to San Francisco, caught a cab to the Golden Gate Bridge, took in the unspeakable beauty around her, climbed over the rail, and jumped.

Michael grew up in a rough, impoverished, lower-class neighborhood. His father was incarcerated and his mother did everything she could to help him and his three siblings succeed. He beat the odds and graduated from high school, taking extra coursework to qualify for college. So proud was his mother of her college-accepted son that she encouraged him to soak up the summer with his friends doing what they loved most: writing and recording rap lyrics that expressed their experiences of growing up black in America. And then there was an altercation with a white police officer that left him shot multiple times and bleeding to death in the sun-baked streets of Ferguson, Missouri.

Stephanie married the love of her life. Together she and her husband raised their daughter and created space for foster children to have a semblance of home. And then her husband started disappearing. One night turned into one

week and then one month. He would always return, she would take him back, and life would seemingly return to normal. But the time he was gone for three months, things changed in the neighborhood. Late at night strange cars with unfamiliar people started showing up at her home. She would let them in, but only for a short time. Police presence increased and she grew distant from friends and neighbors. She was burdened and shamed by their heavy stares and whispers but felt she had no other choice than to hide behind locked doors that opened only for the exchange of the money she so desperately needed. She needed to put food on the table for her kids. Sex and meth were the quickest ways to do it.

Gloria spent her young life surviving the violence of Guatemalan drug lords, gang wars, and extreme poverty. Her grandmother was painfully aware that her granddaughter's future in Central America carried the inevitable threats of rape, prostitution, and death. So grandma made an unthinkable decision: she gathered what little she had and sent her teenage granddaughter, alone, on one of the most dangerous migrations in the world. This young, beautiful, innocent girl risked her life and had her innocence stripped from her on the tops of freight trains so that she could have a shot at a safer, more livable future in the United States. Tragically, she never made it. Along the way Gloria was kidnapped, gang raped, trafficked, and enslaved in the red light district of Tijuana where she was sold over and over again to satisfy the appetites of lonely men.

Contemporary stories of pain, conflict, broken identity, severed relationships, injustice, and revenge could fill the shelves of countless libraries. Sadly, many of us remain oblivious, indifferent,

or paralyzed by the realities experienced by many in our homes, neighborhoods, cities, country, and world.

But God's mission is the redemption of all things—broken lives, broken relationships, and broken systems. The good news is that, embedded throughout the country and world, men and women are refusing to simply sit with the hard questions, lament, and pray for healing. Instead they are committed to becoming the answers to their prayers by actively joining God in the work of restoration.

As we work with individuals and churches across the United States and the world, we are inspired and fueled by the lives of Jesus-followers who are taking this peacemaking way of life seriously. From small-town streets and remote villages to bustling urban centers, the everyday peacemaking movement isn't just beginning. It is already well underway.

Bri and Adam sat in our one of our peacemaking workshops visibly coming alive as the story of Jesus' movement toward the other in pursuit of loving his enemies captured their minds and hearts and began to stir their actions. Soon after, they leveraged their privilege by choosing a countercultural life of downward mobilization and moving into a low-income neighborhood in Des Moines, Iowa. They began to immerse themselves in the lives and stories of their neighbors not as a project, but as a way of life. Their home is now a space to host new friends—most of whom don't look like them—and is a signpost of the healing God has in mind for all humanity.

Steve is the pastor of a majority white congregation in the suburbs of Minneapolis. After going to Israel-Palestine with us to learn from our Jewish, Muslim, and Christian friends working for peace, he discovered that everyday

peacemaking isn't an add-on to his faith but the very embodiment of it. He embraced peacemaking knowing that moving toward the other and loving his "enemies" could cost him his reputation and even his life. Upon arriving back home, he created space for his community to identify who they considered "the other" or "the enemy" in their own city. It was a process both of confession and awakening. A couple of months later, Philando Castile, an unarmed black man, was killed by police. Rather than sit on the sidelines paralyzed by fear, misunderstanding, or apathy, the community was on the front lines of lamenting the tragedy with their friends of color and calling for restoration on the streets of Minneapolis.

Diane is a middle-aged woman who lives in Phoenix with a heart for walking alongside those in pain and suffering, but she wasn't sure where her gifts could tangibly meet the needs of her neighbors. Knowing very little about Muslims or the plight of refugees, she discovered that her city was full of families who had fled violence in Africa and the Middle East and were now trying to make a home in Phoenix. So in 2011, Diane and others founded a multifaith community that intentionally creates opportunities where women of different faiths can gather together, meet "the other" in a safe environment, and break down the walls of fear through events such as service projects, book clubs, and prayer events.

We were recently with our friend and mentor Daoud Nasser, a Palestinian Christian whose family chooses the way of peace fueled by the message "We refuse to be enemies." Having shared his story of peacemaking in the Holy Land, he closed by saying, "The world will be a different place when North American Christians follow the Jesus they talk about."

We agree. And every day we are given more reason to believe it to be true as Christians choose cross-shaped lives and take seriously their call to follow an enemy-loving God. This is the new world God is making and we all get to be part of it.

This book is designed to equip you to live a similar story and be a partner in the movement.

REFLECT AND DISCUSS

1. Before reading this chapter, how did you define the mission of God? What did participation with God in that mission look and sound like?
2. What are your perceptions and misperceptions of peace-making? How have you been a part of restoration in simple and profound ways?
3. What is the interpersonal conflict, local injustice, or global conflict you currently find yourself within or compelled toward?