

Greetings

Prince of Peace

A well known passage to meditate upon at this time of the year is Isaiah 9:6-7a

“for to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.”

What an amazing gift. All parents rejoice when they have a baby, whether son or daughter. It is certainly an event which is indelibly imprinted in our memories (more so for Mum than Dad!) Some kids grow up and bring much pleasure to parents and others can bring grief and sadness. In the above verse the child born is a child of great promise. “Government” and “peace” are the two words repeated in the passage.

At Christmas we can look forward in hope to a change of government, not the same old, same old with a different colour but here we are promised a government that will increase and keep on increasing. God’s rule and reign is coming and in ever increasing visibility. Is his government increasing in your life?

This child is The Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of his peace. That is a staggering thought and incomprehensible. I think we have a view of peace which is too shallow. We will see a peace that is complete and perfect even as God is complete and perfect.

Don’t let the commercial activities and the busyness of the season rob you of peace.

The promise of peace is established by God. Isaiah 26:12 says:

“Lord, you establish peace for us, all that we have accomplished you have done for us.”

We can’t boast in anything we have done. God has done it all.

I would encourage all of us to be thankful this season and to remember the great hope we have in a Saviour born 2000 odd years ago. Enjoy the measure of peace you now have in Christ knowing this is but a foretaste of the ever increasing peace He will bring.

Neil Evans

Newsletter

Summer 08/09

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Meet our new Marketer

Rachel Waters

In 2009 Rachel Waters will be joining the team at Resolve on a part-time basis. Having had over six years experience in the not-for-profit sector, working for organisations such as Carey Baptist College, Bibles In Action, The Leprosy Mission, Rachel will be focusing on the development of Resolve’s profile and customer base within New Zealand.

Rachel is originally from Australia having moved to New Zealand just over four years ago. The daughter of missionaries, Rachel grew up in a remote Aboriginal community in the outback of Australia. When she was 11 years old she moved with her family to Papua New Guinea. Returning to Australia some three and a bit years later, Rachel settled in Melbourne, finished high school, then went on to University and competed a Bachelor of Business.

Rachel will want to make contact with our communities for Resolve. If you can help and/or would like Resolve involved in your sphere of influence please contact this office.



An occasional publication to members and friends of the Christian Service for Dispute Resolution Inc.

Trusting God's People Again

Finding Healing when you've been hurt by the Church

By Erin Gieschen

When Blake Coffee left his law firm of ten years, he wasn't sure exactly what God had in mind. All he knew was that both he and his wife Cappie felt a strong leading to get ready for something very different.

Then he got a seemingly random call from the Texas Southern Baptist Convention: Would he be interested in getting some basic training to become a church mediator? As a pastor's son, Blake had been in churches his entire life, and his job experience had him involve with mediations on a regular basis. So this sort of side work would no doubt be a piece of cake.

Years before, his previous home church had gone through a major split, but Blake had nearly forgotten how agonizing such in-house conflict could be – the pain, the misunderstanding, the character assassination, the taking sides. But now, as a neutral mediator sent onto the battleground to do damage control, he experienced the memories flooding back. He was now the official guy in the middle – the one to whom everyone went, expecting him to figure out their core issues.

Over the years, what began as a part-time job grew into a full-scale ministry. The need was great; churches and organisations of every size and denomination were calling.

In Touch magazine spoke with Blake about how to resolve conflict within Christian circles – and why unity is non-negotiable to God.

IT: In your experience, what's at the root of most of the situations you encounter?

BC: Most of the conflicts are about interpersonal relationship issues – people getting their feelings hurt. People say the wrong thing or speak in a mean way; someone ignores them; the pastor doesn't visit them at the hospital. Somehow they've been wounded or feel wounded by someone else in their church.

Whether the issue is sexual abuse or some affront at a committee meeting, the core pain is the same: a sense of

betrayal. This woundedness comes with a lingering feeling of "I thought I could trust so-and-so. I can't believe he/she would do this to me." That's what's really at the core of all this.

And then we often shoot our wounded in an attempt to make the problem go away. We're not sure how to deal with people who have been hurt, so we just ignore them or label them as troublemakers; we push them away.

IT: Some people feel hurt because of simple misunderstandings or personality differences, but what about those who have been victimised by vicious smear campaigns and character assassination? What can they do to deal with the situation in a godly way?

BC: Aren't those people like Joseph? No one was more of a victim than him – he did nothing to deserve what happened to him: being sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, harassed and then falsely accused of rape by his master's wife, thrown into prison, and forgotten by those he helped.

For people dealing with harsh treatment from other church members, we talk at length about what forgiveness really looks like. Often, you don't want to budge because you just want the truth to be told, or whatever other ideal you're holding onto as your "battle banner". But you have to offer that up to the Lord and ask yourself if it's actually more important than your relationship with your brothers and sisters. Once you get God's perspective on that and begin to see the relationship as something worth fighting for, then forgiveness will come more into focus for you.

IT: Is there an appropriate time for someone to leave a church because of conflict?

BC: If that time comes, it's because you have a clear understanding of God's assignment for you, and it's no longer consistent with the church's understanding of its assignments. And it's after you have really tried and invested time and energy in reconciliation. Consider Paul and Barnabas in Act 15:36-41. The Bible doesn't say so explicitly, but we know

from inference (e.g. Colossians 4:10) that after splitting up their ministry to work with different churches, they tried to work out their [own] conflict and eventually did. But at some point, they must have come to this understanding: "We have so much work to do, you and I. I've got an assignment; you've got an assignment. And we really don't have time anymore to be self-absorbed. We've both got work that needs to get done. So, you go your way; I'll go my way. We'll get back to the work God gave us – and somewhere down the road, we'll figure this out." And that's what they did; they later reconciled.

IT: While there is a valid time for leaving a church, what are some reasons you should stay in spite of painful conflict?

BC: One reason for staying is that it honours the Lord and preserves the testimony of the church. When you buckle down and work through the conflict instead of fracturing it sends a message to the community that God's got some answers to our real-life problems. It's communicating that we can figure this out God's way – which causes others to take note and watch how we handle it. The church can show there's a different way to do it than the way the world does it.

Unfortunately, Christians often respond to conflict the same way the people outside the church do: fight or flight. To make others stop hurting us, either we inflict pain on those we perceive to be our enemies or we run from the conflict. We claim to believe the Word of God but often don't really live a life that indicates we do. The Bible tells us so much about practically dealing with relationships and working through conflict, and we just have to decide whether we believe it or not. We know what it says, but we just don't really believe it'll work, so we give up.

But I do recognise that there's a limit. There can be a time when you just have to say, "I've really tried; I've given my best effort to work through this, and it's not going to work out if I stay."

IT: There are many Christians who aren't part of a church because they've gotten burned in the past. What advice would you give them?

BC: You might not want to go through the healing process – maybe you think, I'm really OK being broken. I'll survive. But think of it this way: If you broke your leg, you would never say "I

don't want to walk again – that's how it broke in the first place. I'm okay with just leaving it broken." Sure, the healing process can often be painful, just like setting a broken bone. But it's a necessary process. We can run from it, but the pain will never go away until we decide to go through that healing.

IT: What concrete step would be the place to start – just plugging backing into a church and being willing to make relationships?

BC: Definitely. And on your own, you've got to look at those broken relationships from your past, hold them before the Lord, and ask Him, "What do You want me to do about this? Tell me what I can do that would honour You."

IT: In your book*, you mention that worship music is a common area of conflict that often escalates into vicious back-stabbing and even causes church splits. How should a church deal with this sort of issue that so painfully exposes the generational divide?

BC: Well, the older generation grew up with music that's a sort of language to them. It's not just a style of music – it's how they express themselves in worship. Then there's the younger generation in the church, who speak an entirely different language musically and have the same need to express themselves in worship. So what can you do? You've got to learn how to "translate." Make the choice to love each other enough to learn the other's language.

IT: How does this pan out in real life? How could both generations practically reach out to dialog about these things in a deliberate way?

BC: One of the most effective ideas I've ever seen in action took place in West Texas, where a church was dealing with conflict over worship music. The young adult Sunday School class understood that they could begin to break down the generational barriers in their church by simply seeking to cultivate basic relationships with the older generation. They all showed up at the oldest Sunday School class and extended a formal invitation to a game night in one of their homes. They said, "We want ya'll to come over and teach us your favourite games. We've never

played 42**, but we know y'all do, so we want you to show us how."

They understood the real problem: there were really no cross-generational relationships in their church, and they needed to purposefully forge some real friendships with their elder brothers and sisters.

The fact is that if you don't fix the relationships in your church, it doesn't matter which worship style you choose. And if you do fix the relationships in your church, the worship style won't matter so much as it did before.

Being the church always comes back to relationships. We've got to learn each other's languages and show love in ways that are meaningful in the midst of our diversity. We'll be more of the church Christ intended us to be when we figure that out.

From "In Touch" Magazine November 2008. Used by permission.

**Trusting God's People Again – \$23 from In Touch Ministries NZ - 0800446868*

*** 4 player game of Dominoes*

3 Touchstones of the Healing Process

Recommitment: Take your pain to God and surrender it. Allow the Lord to draw you closer to Him, not just in spite of the pain but because of it. Let Him teach you something through the hurt that will make you a more mature follower of Christ.

Reconciliation: Get alone with God, and ask Him what He wants you to do about the broken relationships in the church you left. The rest is about your obedience to His directions, believing He will honour your efforts and work healing in you – regardless of the outcome.

Reengagement: Take a deep breath and roll up your sleeves. Let God give you the courage to walk back into your former church (or a new one, if need be), pick up your tools, and get back to work.

Resources

All available from the Resolve office

Guiding People Through Conflict
The nuts and bolts on how to help.
Includes Case Studies - \$14

Peacefakers, Peacebreakers, Peacemakers
by Ken Sande and Kay Moore.
An excellent 6 week plus Bible Study resource for adults or teens
Leaders Guide \$17.00
Members Guide \$14.00

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Words that Cut # ____ @ \$1.50 \$ ____

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