

***THE PEACEMAKER Third Edition***  
***A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict***  
**by Ken Sande**  
**Discussion Summary by Mark R. Elliott\***

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Having served in a consulting role for the local church for over three decades, I discovered very early that conflict is a natural part of human existence—even among Christians. It was such an issue that it became the number one reason I was “invited” to assist a local church. Before I encountered Sande’s book, I had gleaned resources from a number of sources and put together a

mini-conference I called *Rubbing Elbows without Causing Friction*. I encouraged pastors to invite me to their church in a time of relative peace, because I knew if there was already open conflict I would be wasting my time and theirs. When I was invited, my opening line would be something like, “I have a catchy title for our time together, *Rubbing Elbows without Causing Friction*, but let me be honest with you, when people rub elbows we create friction. Conflict is inevitable, but how we handle conflict does not have to end in broken relationships.”

I wish I had encountered Ken’s book earlier. It is Biblically based, and it provides a comprehensive, deep dive into the real world where people rub elbows and cause friction. I can’t promise that you will “enjoy” every part of the journey, but join me in a personal discussion of *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*.

### **PREFACE:**

I. In the Preface of the second edition, Ken wrote, “My interest in peacemaking has grown considerably since I became a lawyer. When I first began to practice law, I was excited about the prospect of helping people solve problems and settle disagreements. Before long, however, I learned that our courts are not equipped to deal with the personal side of conflict. The Adversarial process is designed to resolve legal issues, not to reconcile people or help them change the attitudes and habits that lead to conflict. In fact, lawsuits usually drive people further apart and often ingrain the beliefs and behavior that lead to controversy.”

“Finding little help in contemporary text books, I was forced to dig deeper into the one book that consistently provided me with reliable guidance: the Bible. As I applied the peacemaking principles presented in God’s Word, I discovered that they are remarkably effective in today’s complicated society.” (pg. 9 of the second edition)

Question: Have you ever thought of a lawyer as a peacemaker and the Bible as a lawyer’s text book? Why or why not?

Q: If a Christian lawyer who desired to be a peacemaker can find great principles for maintaining healthy relationships in the Bible, why do you think the average professing Christian struggles to develop and maintain healthy relationships?

Q: To what extent do you believe every Christian should be a peacemaker?

Activity: I hope you already have the book in hand as this discussion summary isn’t an attempt to replace the book, but to help you process the insights you will find in the book. Take a minute and thumb through the pages of the book. Did you notice that scripture quotations and references permeate the book? The Bible is filled with theological insights and principles that are usually our focus as we read the Bible. My prayer for you is that as you continue to read the Bible you will notice that it is also cram packed with relational insights, principles, and examples. May your mind continue to be transformed by the theological AND relational insights you will gain from The Book as well as Ken’s book. (Romans 12:2)

II. As Ken studied the Bible and made application of its truths in his law practice and in his personal life, he discovered that “When Christians learn to be peacemakers, they can turn

conflict into an opportunity to strengthen relationships, preserve valuable resources and make their lives a testimony to the love and power of Christ. This book is designed to help you become this kind of peacemaker. It provides a simple yet comprehensive approach to resolving conflict. Because this approach is based solidly on God's Word, it is effective in every type of conflict." (pg. 12)

He summarizes his approach in four basic principles he calls the Four G's. They are used as the outline for his book with three chapters explaining each of the principles. The major sections all begin with a real life example of how the principles, when they are effectively applied, resulted in a peaceful resolution of a difficult situation. The four principles are:

- *"Glorify God* (I Cor. 10:31). Biblical peacemaking is motivated and guided by a desire to bring honor to God by revealing the reconciling love and power of Jesus Christ. As we draw on His grace, follow His example, and put His teachings into practice, we can find freedom from the impulsive, self-centered decisions that make conflict worse, and [instead] bring praise to God by displaying the power of the gospel in our lives.
- *Get the log out of your eye* (Matt. 7:5) Attacking others only invites counterattacks. This is why Jesus teaches us to face up to our own contributions to a conflict before we focus on what others have done. When we overlook others' minor offenses and honestly admit our own faults, our opponents will often respond in kind. As tensions decrease, the way may be opened for sincere discussion, negotiation, and reconciliation.
- *Gently restore* (Gal. 6:1). When others fail to see their contributions to a conflict, we sometimes need to graciously show them their fault. If they refuse to respond appropriately, Jesus calls us to involve respected friends, church leaders, or other objective individuals who can help us restore peace.
- *Go and be reconciled* (Matt. 5:24). Finally, peacemaking involves a commitment to restore damaged relationships and negotiate just agreements. When we forgive others as Jesus has forgiven us and seek solutions that satisfy other's interests as well as our own, the debris of conflict is cleared away and the door is opened for genuine peace." (pgs. 12-13)

Q: Describe a time when you have seen the Four G's practiced? If you can't, what do you think keeps people from using these principles?

Q: Think about a current relationship you have that needs some attention. From the brief summary above, which principle do you think needs your immediate attention, and what are you going to do to incorporate it into your life?

III. Sande states, "The Lord has also provided a powerful support system for peacemaking. It is the church. When we are unable to resolve a conflict on our own, God commands the local church to step in and bring its wisdom, resources, and authority to bear on the problem (Matt. 18:16-17; Phil. 4:2-3; I Cor. 6:1-8). I thank God for the many churches that are fulfilling this important responsibility so faithfully. They are teaching their people to be peacemakers, training gifted members to serve as conflict coaches and mediators, and reinstating the ministry of loving, redemptive accountability as a means to restore members who have become entangled in destructive sin. As you will see throughout this book, this kind of training and assistance from local churches has often proven to be the key to restoring relationships, averting divorce, and resolving seemingly hopeless conflicts."

He then contrasts the above picture with the reality that “although many Christians and their churches believe they have held onto God’s Word as their standard for life, their responses to conflict, among other things, show that they have in fact surrendered much ground to the world. Instead of resolving differences in a distinctively biblical fashion, they often react to conflict with the same avoidance, manipulation, and control that characterize the world.” (pg. 14)

Q: As you reflect on the two very different descriptions in the paragraphs above, which one best describes your church?

Action: If you said the first paragraph, let me encourage you to continue reading the book and processing the questions you will find in it and in this discussion summary to gain new insights into how you can still grow in the area of being a peacemaking church.

Action: If you said the second paragraph, let me suggest you jump to Appendix F in the book and in this discussion summary as Sande provides in it a “practical strategy for developing a genuine ‘culture of peace’ in your church.” (pg. 15)

Having painted a contrasting picture of how churches handle conflict, Sande states that “the primary focus of this book will be on how God can help *you* as an individual Christian throw off worldly ideas about resolving conflict and become a true peacemaker.” (pg. 15)

## **Part I: Glorify God**

Each major section of the book begins with a real life story of a devastating conflict that turned into a win-win situation through God’s grace when people chose to become peacemakers. Every one of the stories is worth a read.

### **Chapter 1: Conflict Provides Opportunities**

**I. The Slippery Slope of Conflict.** Ken opens with a personal experience when he was hiking in the Beartooth Mountains of Montana with friends. He described a particularly dangerous stream crossing and compares his response and those of his fellow hikers with how people respond to conflict.

He then states, “there are three basic ways that people respond to conflict:” escape, attack, or seek peace. The Escape Response he calls **Peace-Faking**. The Attack Response he refers to as **Peace-Breaking**. He provides a graphic that pictures the three responses “arranged on a curve that resembles a hill.” (See next page) The balance of the chapter provides an in depth overview of the book.

**A. Escape Responses:** Sande then begins to describe the three conflict responses starting with the Escape Response. He states that people tend to use the Escape Responses “when they are more interested in avoiding a conflict than in resolving it.” I have personally found that this attitude is common within the church, because many Christians believe that all conflict is wrong or dangerous. I would also add that because Christians are taught to forgive, we

incorrectly assume that forgiveness means we shouldn't address the conflict or the undergirding issues that have caused it.



He then defines the three responses on the far left side of his Slippery Slope model: *Denial*, *Flight*, and *Suicide*. *Denial* is described as an effort to escape conflict by pretending it doesn't exist, or when we can't do that we refuse to do anything to resolve it. *Flight* is defined as our attempt to run from conflict. "This may include leaving the house, ending a friendship, quitting a job, filing for divorce, or changing churches." An extreme response to conflict is *Suicide* or an attempt to take one's life—a desperate cry for help. Sande points out the generational decline in our culture's ability to deal with conflict. "Suicide has become the third leading cause of death among adolescents in the United States, partly because so many children have never learned how to deal with conflict constructively." (pgs. 22-24)

Q: Describe a specific time when you chose an Escape Response in the midst of conflict. How effective was that effort in actually resolving the conflict and sustaining relationships?

**B. Attack Responses:** "The three responses found on the far right side of the slippery slope are called the attack responses. These responses are used by people who are more interested in winning a conflict than in preserving a relationship." He defines *Assault* as our attempt to "overcome an opponent by using various forms of force or intimidation, such as verbal attacks (including gossip and slander), physical violence, or efforts to damage a person financially or professionally." As Ken talks about *Litigation*, he briefly touches on Biblical teachings that say a Christian should not take an issue to court. A more in-depth discussion on this topic is found in Appendix D of the book. The extreme position on the Attack side of the curve is *Murder*. It is when we try and kill those who oppose us. (pgs. 24-25)

Q: Describe a specific time when you have chosen an Attack Response in a time of conflict. How effective was that effort in resolving the conflict?

C. Peacemaking Responses: The six responses on the top center portion of the slippery slope are called the peacemaking responses. “These responses are commanded by God, empowered by the gospel, and directed toward finding just and mutually agreeable solutions to conflict.” The three responses on the left he describes as “Personal Peacemaking” efforts. He states that “the vast majority of conflicts in life should and can be resolved in one of these ways.”

The first one he defines is *Overlook*. He states, “Overlooking an offense is a form of forgiveness and involves a deliberate decision not to talk about it, dwell on it, or let it grow into pent-up bitterness or anger.” The next is *Reconciliation*. It is necessary when an offense is too serious to overlook or has damaged the relationship. This step will require confession, loving correction, and forgiveness. The third one is *Negotiation*. It is necessary when material issues related to money, property, or other rights are involved. He states, “This should be done through a cooperative bargaining process in which you and the other person seek to reach a settlement that satisfies the legitimate needs of each side.” (pgs. 25-26)

Q: Describe a specific time when you chose one of the Personal Peacemaking Responses. How effective was that effort in resolving the conflict?

Ken then begins to discuss the three responses on the top-right of the curve. He notes, “When a dispute cannot be resolved through one of the personal peacemaking responses, God calls us to use one of the next three peacemaking responses, referred to as ‘Assisted Peacemaking.’” They are *Mediation*, *Arbitration*, and *Accountability*.

*Mediation* is when two individuals invite one or more objective outside people to meet with them. The goal is to create more effective communication and to explore possible solutions. Mediators may ask questions and give advice, but they have no authority to force a solution. *Arbitration* involves the same process as Mediation with the exception that an arbitrator is granted the authority to render a binding decision to settle the dispute. The final one he mentions is *Accountability*. It refers to a dispute involving a Christian who refuses to be reconciled and do what is right. “Jesus commands church leaders to formally intervene to hold him or her accountable to Scripture and to promote repentance, justice, and forgiveness.” (pgs. 26-27)

Q: Describe a specific time when you were involved in an Assisted Peacemaking effort. How effective was it in resolving the conflict?

**II. Interesting trends on the Slope.** Ken steps back and gives us a big picture view of his Slippery Slope graphic.

- “As we move from the left side of the slope to the right (clockwise), our responses tend to go from being private to being public.”
- “Moving from left to right on the curve also involves a move from voluntary to forced solutions.”
- “The further you move away from the personal peacemaking zone in either direction, the greater your costs will be, whether in time, money, effort, relationships, or a clear conscience.”
- “There are three noteworthy parallels between the two sides of the slippery slope:  
1) Both extremes result in death.

- 2) Assault and Flight picture the classic fight or flight behaviors.
- 3) Litigation is often nothing more than professionally assisted Denial and Attack.
- He also notes three contrasts between the various responses
  - 1) Focus: Escape Responses focus on me. Attack Responses focus on you. Peacemaking Responses focus on us.
  - 2) Goals: Escape Responses are intent on Peace Faking. Attack Responses are prone to Peace Breaking. Neither of them will result in Peacemaking.
  - 3) Results: A person earnestly pursuing the peacemaking responses has a greater likelihood of eventually seeing reconciliation. While those who pursue an Escape or Attack response almost always result in KYRG: *kiss your relationship good-bye*.

The section ends with a story that clearly illustrates the different responses to conflict and the associated dynamics they will create. (pgs. 27-29)

Q: What struck you the most as you read Ken’s “big picture” summary?

Q: As you reflect on your current conflict response style, would you describe it more as Peace Faking, Peace Breaking, or Peacemaking?

**III. A Biblical View of Conflict.** He opens this section by listing some basic principles behind the Biblical view of conflict, but before he does, he provides a definition of conflict: “a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone’s goals or desires.”

He then lists four primary causes of conflict. As he does throughout the book, here he also provides Bible verses.

- Poor Communication.
- Differences in values, goals, gifts, calling priorities, expectations, interests, or opinions.
- Competition for limited resources. I’m going to insert “perceived limited resources.” I’ve discovered that God will always supply the resources we need to do His will.
- Sinful attitudes and habits which lead to sinful words and actions.

He points out that there is an upside to conflict. They can help us understand how God has created us as unique human beings. We have different opinions, convictions, desires, perspectives, and priorities. Our God given diversity and personal preferences can make life more interesting. We can learn to rejoice in the diversity of God’s creation and learn to accept and work with people who simply see things differently than we do.

He circles back to the fourth cause of conflict and states that “When a conflict is the result of sinful desires or actions that are too serious to be overlooked, we need to avoid the temptation to escape or attack. Instead we need to pursue one of the peacemaking responses to conflict, which can help us get to the root cause of the conflict and restore genuine peace.”

“Most importantly, the Bible teaches that we should see conflict neither as an inconvenience nor as an occasion to force our will on others, but rather as an opportunity to demonstrate the love and power of God in our lives.” (pgs. 29-31)

Q: What would you add or change about his definition of conflict: “a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone’s goals or desires?”

Activity: Describe a conflict you have had in each of the four areas that Ken describes: poor communication, basic differences, competition for limited resources, sinful actions.

After giving us an overview of what we will read in the book through a description of his Slippery Slope graphic and after providing us with a Biblical view of conflict, Ken shares a great sermon outline of I Cor. 10:31-11:1. He refers to the three points of his outline as the opportunities that conflict affords us.

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” (KJV)

A. Glorify God. Paul said, “Do all to the glory of God.” Ken states, “The best way to glorify God in the midst of conflict is to depend on and draw attention to His grace, that is, the undeserved love, mercy, forgiveness, strength, and wisdom He gives to us through Jesus Christ.”

- 1) *We Can Trust God.* “Ask God to give you grace to depend on Him and follow His ways, even if they are completely opposite to what you feel like doing (Prov. 3:5-7)...As you trust the Lord in these ‘unnatural’ ways, people will have the opportunity to see that God is real and praise Him for His work in your life (Acts 16:22-31).”
- 2) *We Can Obey God.* Sande quotes parts of John 15:8, 14:15-31, I John 5:3, and II John 5-6. Then he states, “If you want to honor Jesus and show that He is worthy to be loved more than anything in the world, learn His ways and obey his commands.”
- 3) *We Can Imitate God.* He states, “When we live out the gospel in our lives and mirror Jesus’ humility, mercy, forgiveness, and loving correction, we surprise the world and give concrete evidence of the lord’s presence and power in our lives.”
- 4) *We Can Acknowledge God.* Ken wrote, “As God gives you grace to respond to conflict in unusual and effective ways, other people will often take notice and wonder how you do it. If you are silent, they may give you credit for the remarkable things you have done, which would rob God of His glory.”

He provides some application points with additional supporting scriptures.

- “Every time you encounter a conflict, you will inevitably show what you really think of God. If you want to show that you love Him ‘with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ (Matt. 22:37), then ask Him to help you trust, obey, imitate, and acknowledge Him.”
- “A God-centered approach to conflict resolution is that it makes you less dependent on results. Even if others refuse to respond positively to your efforts to make peace, you can find comfort in the knowledge that God is pleased with your obedience...By your actions you will show either that you have a big God or a big self and big problems.”
- “Ask yourself these questions: How can I please and honor God in this situation? In particular, how can I bring praise to Jesus by showing that He has saved me and is changing me? (pgs. 31-34)

Q: As Ken lays the foundation for becoming a Peace Maker, he challenges us to move beyond Orthodoxy (knowing what is right) to Orthopraxy (doing what is right). When it comes to glorifying God, do you emphasize more what you know or what you do and why?

Q: In what specific ways do you try to balance knowing and doing?

B. Serve Others. Paul said that he did “not seek his own profit, but the profit of many.” Ken quotes our Lord’s exhortation to “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27-28). He then states, “God calls us to be merciful to those who offend us, just as he is merciful to us” (Luke 6:36). Ken then provides five points of application.

- 1) God may help you develop creative ways to satisfy both your needs and the needs of your opponent. God can help you learn to work with your opponent to solve a common problem.
- 2) The Lord may give you an opportunity to carry your opponent’s burdens by providing for his or her spiritual, emotional, or material needs.
- 3) God may use you to help others learn where they have been wrong and need to change.
- 4) Conflicts can provide opportunities to encourage others to trust in Jesus.
- 5) Serving others in the midst of conflict is a powerful way to teach and encourage others by your example. “This is particularly important if you are a parent or grandparent. Your children constantly observe how you handle conflict. If you are defensive, critical, unreasonable, and impulsive, they are likely to develop the same behavior. But if you breathe grace, your children will be encouraged to imitate you. What they learn about peacemaking from you may have a profound impact on the way they handle conflict at school, in the workplace, and in their own marriages.” (pgs. 34-36)

Q: How easy is it for you to serve someone with whom you are having conflict? What’s one thing you can change in your life to make it easier?

C. Grow to Be Like Christ. Paul challenged the believers in Corinth to “imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” Ken also points to Paul’s words to the church in Rome: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. For those God foreknew He also predestined *to be conformed to the likeness of His Son*, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:28-28). Ken again provides some applications.

- 1) “God’s highest purpose for you is not to make you comfortable, wealthy, or happy...He plans to conform you to the likeness of His Son!” Conflict is one of the many tools that God uses to help us develop a more Christ-like character.
- 2) Conflicts expose our sinful attitudes and habits. This provides us an opportunity to see ourselves better.
- 3) After seeing ourselves as God sees us, we can draw on His grace and develop new attitudes and actions.
- 4) When we understand the “ABCs of spiritual growth:” Adversity Builds Character, we will worry less about *going through conflict* and focus on *growing through conflict*. (pgs. 36-37)

My personal experience and observations from years of ministry is that we become self-contented and prideful in times of prosperity and peace and find our greatest reliance on God and spiritual growth in times of adversity.

Q: What has been your personal experience related to times of greatest spiritual growth?

**IV. The Four G's of Peacemaking.** Sande points back to the previous section and states that "The three opportunities of conflict [mentioned in I Cor. 10:31-11:1] give rise to the four principles for peacemaking." He listed these in the Preface. He states that, "The four principles may be summarized in four basic questions, which we consider thoroughly in subsequent chapters.

- *Glorify God:* How can I please and honor God in this situation?
- *Get the log out of you own eye:* How can I show Jesus' work in me by taking responsibility for my contribution to this conflict.
- *Gently restore:* How can I lovingly serve others by helping them take responsibility for their contribution to this conflict?
- *Go and be reconciled:* How can I demonstrate the forgiveness of God and encourage a reasonable solution of this conflict?

I believe that one of the most powerful statements in the book is found in this segment: "I have used these four principles in hundreds of conflicts over the past two decades, and I have yet to encounter a situation in which they did not provide practical and effective guidance. Whether I was facing a defiant five-year-old, a split congregation, or an attorney demanding a million dollars, the Four G's have always given me a reliable track on which to run as we pursued peace." (pg. 38)

Q: Biblical principles transcend time and culture. Which of Ken's four G's comes more naturally to you?

Q: Which of the four G's is the greatest challenge for you?

**V. Stewarding Conflict.** Ken states, "Seeing conflict as an opportunity leads to an amazingly effective approach to managing conflict, which I refer to as 'stewarding.' This approach gives the phrase *conflict management* a unique emphasis...A steward is not supposed to manage things for his own pleasure, convenience, or benefit. Instead, he is expected to follow his master's instructions and look out for the master's, interests even if they conflict with his own personal desires or convenience (John 12:24-26)...Whenever you are involved in a conflict, God has given you a management opportunity."

He states that if we want to be an effective steward, we need to develop character traits listed in the Bible. We need to be:

- 1) Motivated to respond to conflict constructively.
- 2) Informed by God's word realizing we will never understand all of God's ways, but we can respond to life God's way in the areas where we have knowledge
- 3) Strengthened by the knowledge that the Holy Spirit is with us and that God answers prayer.

- 4) Dependent on the support of spiritually mature Christians who love us enough to tell us the truth.
- 5) Faithful to God's ways no matter how the situation turns out, knowing that having done so we will earn the commendation "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matt 25:21a) (pgs 38-40)

Q: Have you ever thought in terms of stewarding the conflicts that occur in your life? What would that look like from your perspective?

Activity: Review the five character traits Ken listed and rate on a scale of one to ten with ten being the best, how you are doing in each area.

**VI. Summary and Application.** "Conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, to serve others, and to grow to be like Christ." We find these principles throughout scripture. "In Micah 6:8 we are told, 'He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.' In the same way, Jesus teaches us to pay attention to 'the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness'" (Matt. 23:23)

He concludes each chapter with a list of questions. I'll not repeat them here, but would suggest you take time to review them. (pgs. 40-42)

## **Chapter 2: Live at Peace**

**I. The Three Dimensions of Peace.** After stating, "God loves peace. From Genesis to Revelation, He communicates a deep desire to bless His people with peace and to use them to bring peace to others," Ken lists the following along with multiple scripture references:

- "Peace is part of God's character, for He is frequently referred to as 'the God of peace.'
- Peace is one of the great blessings that God gives to those who follow Him.
- God repeatedly commands His people to seek and pursue peace.
- God describes His covenant with His people in terms of peace.
- God taught His people to use the word peace (Hebrew *shalom* and Greek *eirene*) as a standard form of greeting.

As the supreme peacemaker, Jesus sacrificed His life so we could experience peace with God and with one another now and forever" (pgs. 43-44).

Q: When you are asked to list the attributes and qualities of God, how quickly do you mention that "God is love" (I John 4:9)? When you are asked to do the same for Jesus, how often have you included that He is the "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6)?

Q: If you are a pastor or Bible study leader, when was that last time you did a series or lesson on peace?

Ken writes, "There are three dimensions to the peace that God offers to us through Christ: peace with God, peace with one another, and peace within ourselves...it is impossible to know genuine internal peace unless you also pursue peace with God and others."

A. Peace with God. Ken states, “Peace with God does not come automatically.” He then quotes ten Old and New Testament passages pointing to the reality that all of us have sinned and alienated ourselves from Him...That is the *bad* news. The *good* news is that by sacrificing Himself in our place on the cross, Jesus has made it possible for us to have peace with God.”

He then says, “Believing in Jesus means more than being baptized, going to church, or trying to be a good person.” It means “admitting that you are a sinner and acknowledging that there is no way you can earn God’s approval by your works...It means believing that Jesus paid the *full* penalty for you sins when He died on the cross...As you believe in Jesus, accept His gracious gift of salvation, and draw closer to Him through the power of His Spirit, the study of His Word, the privilege of prayer, and the fellowship of His church, His peace can fill every part of your life.”

B. Peace with Others. “This peace, which is often referred to as ‘unity’ is not simply the absence of conflict and strife. Unity is the presence of genuine harmony, understanding, and goodwill between people...The rest of this book is devoted to showing you how to pursue peace with others when conflict has disrupted your relationships.”

C. Peace within Yourself. “Internal peace is a sense of wholeness, contentment, tranquility, order, rest, and security...Genuine internal peace cannot be directly obtained through our own efforts; it is a gift that God gives only those who believe in His Son and obey His commands. In other words, *internal peace is a by-product of righteousness.*” “By God’s design, the three dimensions of peace are inseparably joined...Therefore, if you want to experience internal peace, you must be reconcile to God by trusting in His son and seek harmonious relationships with those around you” (pgs. 45-47).

Q: To what extent do you agree with Sande’s list and description of the three dimensions of peace?

Q: In which of the three dimensions Sande lists do you have the greatest peace and why?

Q: In which of the three dimensions do you have the least amount of peace and why?

**II. Jesus’ Reputation Depends on Unity.** Ken states, “When peace and unity characterize your relationships with other people, you show that you are God’s child and He is present and working in your life.” He then points to NT passages that support his statement.

He begins with what is called Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer in John 17. “After praying for Himself and for unity among His disciples, Jesus prayed for all who would someday believe in Him.”

‘My prayer is not for [my disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them *may be one*, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory that you gave Me, that they *may be one as We are one*: I in them and You in Me. *May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You send Me and have loved them even as you have loved Me*” (John 17:20-23 emphasis added).

“Jesus did not pray that His followers would always be happy, that they would never suffer, or that their rights would always be defended. *Jesus prayed that His followers would get along with one another*” (pgs. 47-48)

Q: Read John 17:20-23 once more and think about how important unity is to God. How important is it to you?

Sande notes, “Similar words are recorded in John 13:34-35, where Jesus tells His disciples that their public witness would be closely related to the way they treat one another: ‘A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another’” (pg. 48)

Q: If your daily interaction with family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and strangers were the only measure used for your spiritual maturity, how well would you do?

Q: Have you ever stopped to ask, “How could John call loving one another a ‘new command?’” Take time to consider the idea that as John walked with Jesus, he realized the full depth and meaning of the OT command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18)?

Activity: Take a few minutes to read Leviticus 19 and meditate on how it describes what the Great Commandments to Love God and to love one another look like in real life.

Ken then points out that Paul’s description of love in I Corinthians doesn’t leave room for unresolved conflict.

Activity: As you read Paul’s description, think of what it requires of you if you are in the midst of inter-personal conflict.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (I Cor. 13:4-7).

The final passage Sande mentions is the Sermon on the Mount. In it we read, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:9). Later in that same chapter we read that God will sternly judge anyone who condemns or harbors anger toward his brother (Matt. 5:21-22). And where Jesus commanded, “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23-24).

Ken then concludes the section with a powerful personal story of relational reconciliation that he observed during his law school days. (pgs. 48-50).

Q: Reflect on a time when your life was positively impacted by genuine reconciliation. What made the difference in that situation?

**III. The Enemy of Peace.** “Satan, whose name means ‘adversary,’ likes nothing better than to see us at odds with one another (I Pt. 5:8b). Satan promotes conflict in many ways:”

- He tempts us so we give in to greed and dishonesty.
- He deceives us and misleads us.
- He takes advantage of unresolved anger.
- He uses false teachers to propagate values and philosophies that encourage selfishness and stimulate controversy.

“As long as we see other people as our only adversaries and focus our attacks on them, we will give no thought to guarding against our most dangerous enemy...Of course it would be a serious mistake to blame all conflict on Satan. We need to take responsibility for our sins and encourage others to do the same” (pgs. 50-51)

Q: How would you describe the tension between “Satan made me do it” and “Too often I yield to the temptations of my own flesh?”

A. Strive like a Gladiator. Sande states “that *every* Epistle in the New Testament contains a command to live at peace with one another.” He gives several examples and then focuses on Ephesians. “Paul’s letter to the Ephesians focuses heavily on peacemaking. The first three chapters provide a glorious description of God’s plan of salvation. In the fourth chapter, Paul begins to explain how we should respond to what Christ has done for us. Note carefully what Paul places at the top of his list of practical applications of the gospel: ‘As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace’ (Eph. 4:1-3).”

Ken then points out that “the Greek word that is translated ‘make every effort’ means to strive eagerly, earnestly, and diligently. It is a word that a trainer of gladiators might have used when he sent men to fight to the death in the Coliseum...So too must a Christian agonize for peace and unity. Obviously, token efforts and halfhearted attempts at reconciliation fall far short of what Paul had in mind.”

As you continue to read in Ephesians 4, you discover that peace and unity don’t mean uniformity (4:7, 9-16). “Mature Christians rejoice in the diversity that God has given to His people, and they realize that believers can legitimately hold differences of opinion on ‘disputed matters’ (Rom. 14:1).” Later in the chapter Paul “warns us that we ‘grieve the Holy Spirit’ when we indulge in ‘unwholesome talk...bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander’” (Eph. 4:29-31). “Paul earnestly urges us to ‘be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you’” (v. 32). (pgs. 51-53)

Q: Describe a time when you were willing to “strive like a gladiator” for a relationship. What were things that you were willing to do that are not part of your normal response mechanism?

B. Lawsuits among Believers. Ken includes the text of I Cor. 6:1-8 in which Paul rebukes the believers in Corinth for taking their disputes before the secular courts rather than settling

them within the church. With his lawyer background, Ken points to quotations from two US Supreme Court justices who make the same point.

“The church’s failure was specifically noted in 1982 by Warren Burger:

‘One reason our courts have become overburdened is that Americans are increasingly turning to the courts for relief from a range of personal distresses and anxieties. Remedies for personal wrongs that once were considered the responsibility of institutions other than the courts are now boldly asserted as legal “entitlements.” The courts have been expected to fill the void created by the decline of church, family, and neighborhood unity.’”

“Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia made this observation:

‘I think this passage [I Cor. 6:1-8] has something to say about the proper Christian attitude toward civil litigation. Paul is making two points: first, he says that the mediation of a mutual friend, such as the parish priest, should be sought before parties run off to the law courts...I think we are too ready today to seek vindication or vengeance through adversary proceedings rather than peace through mediation...Good Christians, just as they are slow to anger, should be slow to sue.’”

One of the most convicting statements Sande makes is in regard to this topic. “In my experience, there is not one church in a thousand in the United States that is committed and prepared to obey God’s command to help its members resolve legal issues out of court.” (pgs. 53-55)

Q: From your experience, how would you respond to the criticisms of Burger, Scalia, and Sande as it relates to the church’s ability to assist its members in times of conflict?

Jesus established a format that Christians are to follow when conflict arises. It is recorded in Matthew 18:15-20. It is a process that Sande discusses more thoroughly in chapters 7 through 9. Here he closes the section by listing benefits of resolving conflict in the church rather than the courts.

- Litigation usually increases tensions and often destroys relationships. A court process usually fails to deal with the underlying causes of conflict. The church can actively encourage forgiveness and promote reconciliation.
- Once issues of sin and personal offense are resolved, the legal issues can often be settled with little additional effort. The church can help people change identify harmful habits that need to be addressed so they can enjoy healthier relationships.
- The church can develop more complete and effective remedies than a court. Working together people can develop creative solutions that resolve both material and relational issues.
- The primary benefit of resolving disputes through the church is that it preserves our witness for Christ. (pgs. 55-56)

Q: As you reflect on the benefits of a church based resolution process, why do you think Christian’s are so willing to take their issues to a secular court?

Q: Is your church aware of the benefits of helping its members resolve disputes within the church? If the answer is yes, does your church have an established process to help its members with conflict?

**IV. Summary and Application.** The message of Jesus and the apostles is clear. Peacemaking is not an optional activity for a believer. Token efforts will not satisfy our obligation. God wants us to strive earnestly, diligently, and continually to maintain harmonious relationships with others.

The chapter closes with some excellent questions. (pgs. 56-58)

### **Chapter 3: Trust in the Lord and Do Good**

“The more you understand god’s love and power, the easier it is to trust Him. And the more you trust Him, the easier it is to do His will. This is especially true when you are involved in conflict...In this chapter, you will see why God is worthy of this kind of trust” (pg. 59).

**I. God is Sovereign.** Sande states, “To be sovereign means to be supreme, unlimited, and totally independent of any other influence. God alone has such power.” He then lists the following attributes of God:

- His dominion is so great that He has ultimate control over all things.
- He rules over all governments.
- He alone controls individual lives and destinies.
- He watches over events as small as a sparrow’s fall from a tree.

Our prime example of someone who trusted God in the midst of trials is Jesus. He prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done” (Matt. 26:42). He also lists Paul’s example as he could write from prison, “I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day” (II Tim. 1:12). “When King David tried to understand the wonders of God’s intimate involvement in his life, he could only conclude, ‘Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain’” (Ps. 139:6).

He then moves to the challenge of applying this reality to our lives. “God’s sovereignty is so complete that He exercises ultimate control even over painful and unjust events. This is difficult for us to understand and accept because we tend to judge God’s actions according to our notions of what is right...For His eternal purposes, He sometimes allows suffering and permits unjust acts by men and women whom He decides not to restrain, even though He has the power to do so...Jesus did not die because God had lost control or was looking the other direction. God was fully in control at all times. He *chose* not to restrain the actions of evil men so that His plan of redemption would be fulfilled through the death and resurrection of His Son.”

A paradoxical tension arises in this area as we need to acknowledge that God IS sovereign and that He holds people accountable when we choose poorly. Sande, puts it this way: “The fact that God has ultimate control of all things does not release us from responsibility for our actions. He has allowed us to exercise immediate control over ourselves, and He will hold us fully

accountable for the decision we make... We will never suffer trials or be involved in disputes unless God allows them and is watching over them” (pgs. 59-62)

Q: What is your understanding of the tension between the Sovereignty of God and humanities option to choose wisely or poorly?

Q: Do you agree in principle with Sande’s perspective? If not, how would you describe these two Biblical principles?

**II. God Is Good.** “If all we knew was that God is in control, we could have reason to fear... But this is not the case. God is good—His power is always wielded with perfect love... He is not only in control over us; He is also *for us*.” However, “the fact that God is good does not mean that He will insulate us from all suffering. Rather, it means that He will be with us in our suffering and accomplish good through it... God can use trials and difficulties for good.” Sande then mentions five areas where God can bring good out of bad situations. God can use them...

1. To bring glory to Himself.
2. To teach us how to minister to others when they are suffering.
3. To teach us to rely more on Him.
4. To conform us to the likeness of Christ.
5. To show us that He will never give us more that we can handle. God is able to remove the problems after they have accomplished their purpose in our life. Or He might leave the problems, but give us the strength to have victory over them.

“As Deuteronomy 29:29 tells us, ‘The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.’ This passage provides the key to dealing faithfully with painful and unjust situations. God may not tell us everything we *want* to know... but He has already told us all we *need* to know. Therefore, instead of wasting time and energy trying to figure out things that are beyond our comprehension, we need to turn our attention to the promises and instructions that God has revealed to us through Scripture” (pgs. 62-65)

Q: Describe a time when you saw the goodness of God as you walked through a very difficult situation. Which of the five areas Sande mentioned would you say were manifested through that experience?

**III. The Path Has Been Marked.** “Trusting God means that *in spite of our questions, doubts, and fears* we draw on His grace and continue to believe that He is loving, that He is in control, and that He is always working for our good.”

The balance of this section is filled with Biblical and contemporary illustrations of men and women who persevered through trials. It is definitely worth the read and supplies a lot of scripture that could be used in a sermon or Bible study. Ken begins by pointing to Job’s suffering, and then he points out how God worked in the midst of all of Joseph’s trials to preserve His chosen people. Sande mentions David’s trials and points us to how David saw God’s hand in the midst of it.

“Do not fret because of evil men, or be envious of those who do wrong. For like the grass they soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. Trust in the Lord, and do good; Dwell in the land, and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; Trust in Him, and He will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun (Psalm 37:1-6).”

Sande follows this with the examples of Peter and Paul who suffered persecution and imprisonment. The section closes as he introduces both Elisabeth Elliot and Joni Eareckson Tada and provides appropriate quotes from both (pgs. 65-70).

Q: Who are some of your Biblical, historical, and contemporary role models? How did God demonstrate His sovereignty and love through their lives?

**IV. Trust Is a Decision.** “Your view of God will have a profound effect on how much you trust Him.” This section includes a powerful letter from a woman who came to Ken for counseling as a last resort before leaving her husband. It is a story of how she chose to stay in the marriage and saw God restore their relationship. A year after she wrote the letter, Ken called her to ask how things were going. She told Ken “that she and her husband were both growing in their faith. Even when she was frustrated with her husband, she seldom struggled with the hopelessness that had plagued her two years earlier. She also said she was confident that God knew what He was doing in her life, and she trusted that things would continue to improve as He kept working in both of them” (pg 70-72).

Q: Do you have a similar story of personal reconciliation or have you seen God’s grace work in the life of someone like He did in this couples life?

**V. Summary and Application.** “When you are involved in a conflict, you too must decide whether or not you will trust God. Trusting God does not mean believing that He will do all you want, but rather believing that He will do everything He knows is good.” The chapter closes with another set of great application questions (pgs. 72-73).

## **Part II: Get the Log Out of Your Eye**

Ken provides a powerful example of what can happen when people get the log out of their own eye. He shares a true story is about an associate who became involved in conflict with church elders as he was being considered to serve as the next pastor for the church. At the end of the second three-day visit by Peacemaker Ministries, the elders and the associate pastor had both prepared written statements that were to be read to the congregation. The elders went first and demonstrated humility and brokenness. The first elder to speak turned to the associate and his wife and stated, “We have sinned against you both and caused you great pain we are so very sorry.” When it was the pastors turn, his prepared statement reflected his anger and hurt, but the elder’s words had put a crack in the wall he had built around his heart. As he stepped to the microphone, he literally dropped his prepared statement on the floor. He then said, “I am actually

the guiltiest person of all. As associate pastor I should have set an example of humility and submission.”

Ken states, “This incident is one of many true examples of the “Golden Result.” The Golden Result is a corollary to the Golden Rule, which calls us to do to others as we would have them do to us. The Golden Result says that *people will usually treat us as we treat them*. If we blame others for a problem, they will usually blame in return. But if we say, ‘I was wrong,’ it is amazing how often the response will be ‘It was my fault too.’”

The Golden Result occurs most often with people who understand and cherish the gospel. When we admit that our own sins are so serious that Jesus had to die for us, and remember that He has forgiven us all our wrongs, we can let go of our illusion of self-righteousness and freely admit our failures” (pgs. 75-78).

Q: Describe a time when you experienced or observed the Golden Result. How did it impact your life?

Activity: If you have never experienced or observed the Golden Result, stop and ask God to use the Biblical insights in this book to help you become part of the solution in the midst of conflict so that God can produce the Golden Result.

#### **Chapter 4: Is This Really Worth Fighting Over?**

The Biblical principle behind this chapter is Jesus’ statement in Matthew 7:3-5.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in our 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.”

Ken states that this passage does not forbid us from talking to others about their faults, “Rather it forbids *premature and improper* correction. Before you talk to others about their faults, Jesus wants you to face up to yours...As you examine your role in conflict, it is helpful to look for two types of faults. First, you may have an *overly sensitive attitude*, which causes you to be offended too easily by other’s behavior. Second, you may have contributed to the conflict through your own *sinful behavior*. We will look at attitude issues in this chapter and at behavior issues in the following two chapters” (pgs. 79-80).

Because our culture has not addressed the epidemic of hyper-sensitivity we are experiencing, we will encounter conflict that Ken defines as having an “overly sensitive attitude” much more often than we have in the past.

Q: Describe a time when you have encountered conflict because of someone's hypersensitivity. How did you handle it?

Activity: Ask your spouse or a friend, "When have I recently responded to you with an overly sensitive attitude?" Then be patient, listen carefully to what they say, and respond with humility.

**I. Define the Issues.** Ken writes, "Conflicts generally involve two kinds of issues: material and personal. *Material* issues involve substantive matters such as property, money, rights, and responsibilities... These issues should usually be resolved through cooperative *negotiation*, which will be described in chapter 11. *Personal* issues relate to what goes on inside or between persons. These matters involve our attitudes and feelings toward others that result from how we have treated one another... These kinds of issues must generally be resolved either by *overlooking* an offense or through *confession, loving correction, and forgiveness*, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters."

"Some disputes involve only material issues and others only personal issues. In a large majority of conflicts, however, both kinds of issues get tangled up together." Ken then points to Jesus' interaction with a younger brother in Luke 12:13-15 as an example where both issues were present.

He then gives a personal example where both issues were present in a disagreement he had with his wife and then processes that disagreement with critical clarifying steps. "Once these combinations of issues emerge, you can seldom resolve the initial material issue satisfactorily unless you also address the associated personal issues. First you must stop dragging in more issues, and then you must sort through the issues that have already surfaced. Try to agree on the primary material issue or issues. Then identify the primary personal issues. Then list the secondary issues. Once you have sorted the issues out, you can begin to decide what steps to take to resolve the problem" (pgs. 80-81).

Activity: Read Luke 12:13-15, and identify the material and personal issues in the story.

Q: Reflect on a recent conflict you experienced and identify the material and personal issues you faced. Reviewing the steps Ken suggested in the above paragraph, how well did you get to the heart of the issues? How would Ken's steps have helped you better resolve the problems?

In the balance of the chapter Ken discusses four principles that will help you discern when an issue should be overlooked.

**A. Overlook Minor Offenses.** "In many situations, the best way to resolve a conflict is simply to overlook the personal offenses of others. This approach is highly commended in Scripture." After providing a significant number of scriptures, Ken states, "When we overlook the wrongs of others, we are imitating God's extraordinary forgiveness toward us... Since God does not deal harshly with us when we sin, we should be willing to treat others in a similar fashion."

“Overlooking offenses is appropriate under two conditions: First, the offense should not have created a wall between you and the other person or caused you to feel differently toward him or her for more than a short period of time. Second, the offense should not be causing serious harm to God’s reputation, to others, or to the offender. (We will discuss these criteria more fully in chapter 7.)”

“Overlooking is not a *passive* process in which you simply remain silent...Instead, overlooking is an *active* process that is inspired by God’s mercy through the gospel. To truly overlook an offense means to deliberately decide not to talk about it, dwell on it, or let it grow into pent-up bitterness. If you cannot let go of an offense in this way, if it is too serious to overlook, or if it continues as part of a pattern in the other person’s life, then you will need to go and talk to the other person about it in a loving and constructive manner” (pgs. 82-83)

Q: Describe a time when you have been willing to overlook a minor offense. As you recall the incident, have you been able to forgive like God forgives you? “For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:11-12).

B. Check Your Attitude and Change It. Ken notes that sometimes, “we have an overly sensitive attitude or a tendency to dwell on what others have done. One way to guard against this problem is to check your attitude in light of God’s Word.”

Ken then points to one of my favorite passages. When I preach Philippians 4:2-9, I begin by asking people if they are familiar with the following verses: “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” And “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.” (pgs. 83-84)

Then I ask them if they are familiar with the context of these great memory verses. Most people are shocked when I point out that Paul is dealing with two ladies in the church who are in conflict with one another. It is ironic that the name of one of the ladies was Euodia, which means the “good way,” and the name of the other was Syntyche, which means “our fate is together.”

Q: Paul then provides eight commands on how to help these two ladies work things out. Have you ever viewed this passage in Philippians as a blueprint for dealing with conflict? If so, how have you outlined the verses? If not, read on and see how Ken lays out the clear principles that are within the text.

Ken uses a little different outline than I do and probably what you have used, but since we are discussing his book and not our sermons, we will focus on his. He highlights five basic principles.

- 1) *Rejoice in the Lord always.* Ken asks the obvious question, “What on earth is there to rejoice about when you are involved in a dispute?” He gives a great response by including

a written prayer on pages 84-85 that's worth your read and reflection. Then Ken states, "Satan does not want you to think like this; he wants to keep you worried about your conflict, wrapped up in yourself, and looking anywhere except at God."

- 2) *Let your gentleness be evident to all.* Sande notes that "The Greek word translated as 'gentleness' in this passage is rich in meaning. It means, 'forbearing, large-hearted, gentle, courteous, considerate, generous, lenient, moderate.' In summary, it is describing a quality that is the opposite of irritability, rudeness, and abrasiveness." Before closing the section with a great personal illustration, Ken reminds us that "gentleness is especially appropriate if the person who wronged you is experiencing unusual stress. If so, the wrong done to you may be a symptom of a deeper problem. By responding in a gentle and compassionate manner, you may minister powerfully to the other person" (pgs. 85-86).

Let me reinforce this point from thirty-plus years of working with churches. I have observed that conflict in the church is often caused by someone whose source of contention is not directly related to what was happening in the church. When we are under stress, we will react in ways that generally will create more stress for us and in others. This is where Ken's counsel to overlook minor offenses becomes an imperative. A couple of idioms I grew up with make this point: "cut them a little slack," and "give them a break."

- 3) *Replace anxiety with prayer.* "Paul knew that we cannot just stop being anxious. Worried thoughts have a way of creeping back into our minds, no matter how hard we try to ignore them. Therefore, he instructs us to *replace* worrying with 'prayer and petition, with thanksgiving.'"

"When you remind yourself of God's faithfulness in the past and ally yourself with Him today, you will discover that your anxiety is being steadily replaced with confidence and trust (cf. Isa. 26:3)."

"When you place your focus on God through prayer, you can begin to experience something that does not seem logical: The hostility, anxiety, and inner conflict with which you have been dealing will begin to give way to a peace so unexpected that Paul says it will 'transcend all understanding.' Although this peace may only be internal at first ('guarding your heart and mind'), it will often grow into an external peace—or reconciliation—that will likewise surpass the comprehension of those who have been observing your conflict" (pgs. 86-87).

- 4) *See things as they really are.* When we are in conflict with someone, our perspective of that person becomes distorted as we magnify their negative qualities. "The more distorted your perspective becomes, the more likely you are to imagine the worst about the other person... The best way to overcome this tendency is to think deliberately about aspects of others that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8). Paul is not saying that we should think *only* about the good things in others, for he clearly understood the necessity of addressing sin and encouraging repentance (Gal. 6:1-2; Col. 3:16). Rather, Paul is teaching us to counterbalance our natural tendency to focus *only* on what is bad in those who oppose us."

Ken then points to two positive outcomes that can happen when we are able to see things as they really are.

- a. As you regain a more balanced view of the other person, you will often find it easier to overlook minor offenses. Again Ken provides a great personal experience to illustrate his point.
- b. The process of focusing on the good in others can trigger the Golden Rule. As you shift your focus from personal to material issues both of you can bring your attention and energy to bear on fewer, more clearly defined issues. As this happens, you are more likely to find workable solutions (pgs. 87-89).

5) *Practice what you've learned.* “When you find yourself estranged from another person, especially when that person professes to be a follower of Jesus, it is not good enough simply to study the Bible. Knowledge isn't really knowledge (in a Biblical sense) unless you put it into practice. When you use God's principles to check your attitude and make needed changes, you will be surprised how often you can overlook offenses and experience the truth in Paul's marvelous promise: ‘The God of peace will be with you’” (pgs. 89-90).

Activity: Reread Philippians 4:2-9 and quickly review the five principles Ken draws from this passage.

Q: We are created by God to be unique individuals. Which of the five principles comes most naturally to you and how has it helped you in times of conflict in the past?

Q: Conversely, which of the five principles is the most difficult for you to implement? How could this principle help you in the future if you were to apply it correctly?

C. Count the Cost. “Unresolved disputes can consume large amounts of time, energy, and money, leaving you emotionally and spiritually exhausted. Worst of all, as long as a disagreement is unresolved, there is the potential for further damage to a relationship... Unresolved conflict can lead to many types of ‘prisons’ and can exact penalties we never anticipate...ongoing hostility can destroy you from the inside and alienate you from God” (Matt. 5:21-26).

Before Ken provides another great illustration to make his point, he states, “It is all too easy to ignore these costs when we are actually embroiled in a dispute. This is why we need to make a conscious effort to count the costs of a conflict at the outset of a dispute and compare them to the benefits of quickly settling the matter.” At the close of his illustration, Ken quotes one of the four men who had been involved in the conflict. “When I look back, I have a hard time understanding why we didn't settle it much earlier. It sure wasn't worth all that fighting” (pgs. 90-91).

Q: As you reflect upon a current conflict you are having, take time to write down the cost it is extracting in time, energy, money, and relational health. Now ask yourself, is it really worth all this to keep on “fighting for what's right?”

D. What about “Rights?” As I wrote the last question, I kind of set you up for Ken’s next section in the book. Sometimes conflict is unresolved because we are asserting, “I have my rights—and it wouldn’t be *just* to let him off so easily.” Ken says, “Whenever I hear this comment from a Christian I ask, ‘Where would you spend eternity if God administered justice that was not tempered with mercy?’”

Ken then states, “Many conflicts arise or grow worse because people use their rights wrongly. For example, church leaders may use their authority in a heavy-handed way, or members may use church bylaws to manipulate an entire congregation. It is sometimes possible to avoid moral obligations or liabilities by pleading the statute of frauds (“I gave my word, but there’s nothing in writing”) or the statute of limitations (“I may have wronged him, but it’s too late for him to complain”). Others reap windfalls from less powerful people by rigidly enforcing contract rights or business advantages. In addition, some of what employees and employers can do by law today is inconsistent with Biblical teachings regarding the workplace.”

Ken provides several Biblical examples of men who were willing to give up their rights to sustain peaceful relations with others. But he also pointed to two specific situations where Paul asserted his rights. Then he states, “As these examples indicate, there are times when it is proper to assert rights, as well as times when we should willingly lay them aside. How can you know when to do which?” After pointing to several passages in I Corinthians and specifically 10:31-11:1, Ken writes, “Rights are not something you deserve and possess for your own benefit. Rather, they are *privileges* given to you by God, and He wants you to use them for His glory and to benefit others, especially by helping them know Christ.”

At this point in his discussion, he asks four great processing questions:

Q: Will exercising my rights honor God by showing the power of the gospel in my life?

Q: Will exercising my rights advance God’s knowledge—or will it advance only my interests at the expense of His kingdom?

Q: Will exercising my rights benefit others?”

Q: Is exercising my rights essential for my own well-being? (pgs. 90-94)

Ken went back to his Biblical examples and pointed out how they had wisely stewarded the conflicts they encountered. Ken then states, “By exercising or laying down their rights with God’s kingdom in mind, all of these people drew attention to the goodness and power of God, brought Him praise, expanded the ultimate outreach of the gospel, and sought the good of others.” He continues by stating, “asserting rights may sometimes be the best way to help others learn that they are accountable for their decisions and must ‘pay the penalty’ for their wrongs” (Prov. 19:19).

Ken closes the section with a very powerful example of how a new Christian, Ted, set aside his right to receive a settlement from his employer over a work-place injury. Someone who had heartily supported his claim asked him if he had dropped the claim because he was a Christian.

When Ted told him it was, the guy walked away and commented to a bystander, “Well, that’s the first time I’ve ever seen a Christian’s faith cost him anything.” The section closes with the following: “Three years later I asked Ted whether he regretted his decision to give up the settlement. ‘No,’ he replied, ‘that was the best five thousand dollars I ever spent. God used those events to bring several people to Christ. He also helped me to overcome some major sins in my life. I only wish I had settled in more quickly’” (pgs. 94-98).

Q: Can you describe a time when you were willing to relinquish your “rights” and experienced the Golden Results that Ted experienced?

Q: Can you describe a time when you humbly and graciously asserted your “rights” and experienced the Golden Results as the other party was able to finally see their part more clearly?

**II. Summary and Application.** There are many conflicts that require a lot of time and effort to resolve. But there are far more that can be resolved simply by overlooking minor offenses or relinquishing rights for the sake of God’s kingdom. Therefore before focusing on your rights, take a careful look at your responsibilities. Before you go to remove the speck from your brother’s eye, ask yourself, ‘Is this really worth fighting over?’

The chapter again closes with some excellent processing questions (pgs. 98-99).

## **Chapter 5: Conflict Starts in the Heart**

Ken opens the chapter with a personal illustration that he refers to throughout the chapter. Then he points to the teachings in James 4:1-3, Matt. 15:19, and Luke 12:13-15 stating, “These passages describe the root cause of conflict: *desires in our hearts*. When we want something and feel that we will not be satisfied unless we get it, that desire starts to control us. If others fail to meet our desires, we sometimes condemn them in our hearts and fight harder to get our own way.” The balance of the chapter discusses this pattern of digression and Biblical solutions for it.

### **I. The progression of an Idol.**

**A. I Desire.** “Conflict always begins with some kind of desire. Some desires are inherently wrong, such as vengeance, lust, or greed, but many desires are not.” Ken then lists several good desires. He then states that “If someone is standing in the way of a good desire, it is appropriated to talk together about it.”

Ken then asks, “What if the other person persistently fails to satisfy your desire?” He points out that in the work place an employer may need to fire someone who fails to satisfy the demands of the job, or an employee may need to look for another job if they are unable to satisfy the demands of the one they have. “But what if the other person is your spouse, a child, a longtime, friend, or a member of your church? These relationships should not be easily forsaken.” At this point, Ken states we can choose to seek God’s wisdom and pursue His ways for our self and the other person. OR we can keep fighting to achieve our desire, dwelling on our disappointment, and allowing our desire and disappointment to control our lives. Obviously the latter option will continue to move us into a downward spiral (pgs 100-102).

Q: Think about a recent conflict and list the various desires you felt in YOUR heart. Be honest and list all of them. How many of them were Godly, healthy desires and how many would be categorized as inherently wrong? It might help to talk through the conflict with a close friend to make sure you are doing an honest self-evaluation.

B. I Demand. “Unmet desires have the potential of working themselves deeper and deeper into our hearts. This is especially true when we come to see a desire as something we need or deserve and therefore must have in order to be happy or fulfilled. There are many ways to justify or legitimize a desire.” He then lists several.

“When we see something as being essential to our fulfillment and well-being, it moves from being a desire to a demand...In Biblical terms, it has become an idol...An idol is anything apart from God that we depend on to be happy, fulfilled, or secure. In Biblical terms, it is something other than God that we *set our heart on*, that motivates us, that masters and rules us, or that we trust, fear or serve.”

“Even sincere Christians struggle with idolatry. We may believe in God and say we want to serve Him only, but at times we allow other influences to rule us...It is important to emphasize the fact that idols can arise from good desires as well as wicked desires.” Ken then asks, “How can you discern when a good desire might be running into a sinful demand? You can begin by prayerfully asking yourself ‘X-ray questions’ that reveal the true condition of your heart.” Here are some questions he suggests:

Q: What am I preoccupied with? What is the first thing on my mind in the morning and the last thing on my mind at night?

Q: How would I answer the question: ‘If only \_\_\_\_\_, then I would be happy, fulfilled, and secure?’

Q: What do I want to preserve or to avoid at all costs?

Q: Where do I put my trust?

Q: What do I fear?

Q: When a certain desire is not met, do I feel frustration, anxiety, resentment, bitterness, anger, or depression?

Q: Is there something I desire so much that I am willing to disappoint or hurt others in order to have it?

In the balance of the section, Ken returns to his opening illustration and does an exegesis of his thoughts and makes personal applications of the principles he has just discussed (pgs. 103-106).

C. I Judge. “When [people] fail to satisfy our desires and live up to our expectations, we criticize and condemn them in our hearts if not our words...When we judge others, and condemn them in our hearts for not meeting our desires, we are imitating the devil. In doing so, we have doubled our idolatry problem: Not only have we let an idolatrous desire rule our hearts, but we have also set ourselves up as judging minigods.”

“I am not saying that it is inherently wrong to evaluate or even judge others within certain limits... We cross the line, however, when we begin to sinfully judge others, which is characterized by a feeling of superiority, indignation, condemnation, bitterness, or resentment.”

Ken then points to a problem that I have often observed and warned others to acknowledge. “The closer we are to others, the more we expect of them, and the more likely we are to judge them when they fail to meet our expectations. For example, we may look at our spouse and think, *if you really love me, you above all people will help meet my need*. We think of our children and say, ‘After all I’ve done for you, you owe this to me.’ We place similar expectations on relatives, close friends, or members of our church.”

Ken closes the section by pointing to another undergirding issue of many conflicts I have observed. “Instead of giving people room for independence, disagreement, or failure, we rigidly impose our expectations on them. In effect, we expect them to give allegiance to our idols.” Personality differences and the processes people have used in the past magnify this issue as we expect others to do and act as we would in any given situation. Again I reflect on idioms I’ve heard from childhood: “There’s more than one way to skin a cat.” “We’re obviously not on the same page.” (pgs. 106-108)

Q: How quickly do you slide into the judgment mode? Do their thoughts on minor theological issues automatically make them a heretic?

Q: How flexible are you in permitting others do things differently than you do them? Is there actually only one way things can be done? If the outcome is the same, then isn’t the process someone uses irrelevant?

D. I Punish. “Idols always demand sacrifices... Whether deliberately or unconsciously, we will find ways to hurt or punish people so that they will give in to our desires.”

“As we grow in faith and awareness of our sin, most of us recognize and reject overt and obviously sinful means of punishing others. But our idols do not give up their influence easily and they often develop more subtle means of punishing those who do not serve them.” Ken mentions three of them. “Withdrawal from a relationship is a common way to hurt others. This may include acting cool toward the other person, withholding affection or physical contact, acting sad or gloomy, refusing to look him or her in the eye, or even abandoning the relationship altogether.”

A second is by “Sending subtle, unpleasant cues over a long period of time.” He states that being perpetually critical and unhappy with others creates superficial, splintered relationships. He returns to James 4:1-3 and states, “Inflicting pain on others is one of the surest signs that an idol is ruling our hearts. When we catch ourselves punishing others in any way, whether deliberately and overtly or unconsciously and subtly, it is a warning that something other than God is ruling our hearts” (pgs. 108-109).

Q: Reflecting on the ways we can punish others, ask God to show you how you need to change the way you are treating someone else. As you listen to the Holy Spirit, who did He bring to mind and for what idol are you sacrificing that relationship?

**II. The Cure for an Idolatrous Heart.** Regarding idols, Ken states “To put it another way, [an idol] is something we love, fear, or trust.” Then he notes that, “*Love, fear, and trust* are words of worship.” He then lays out a three pronged approach to help us cure our idolatrous heart.

A. Deliverance from Judgment. “There is only one way out of this bondage and judgment. It is to look to God Himself, who loves to deliver people from their idols.” This section provides God’s plan of salvation for humanities brokenness.

B. Deliverance from Specific Idols. “God wants to deliver us not only from our general problem with sin and idolatry, but also from the specific day-to-day idols that consume us, control us and cause conflict with those around us...God calls us to identify and confess our idols one by one and then cooperate with Him as He steadily removes them bit by bit from our hearts. God uses three vehicles to convey His grace to help us in this identification and deliverance process: His Bible, His Spirit, and His church.”

- 1) “The Bible is ‘living and active. Sharper than any double edged sword, it penetrates even to divide soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart’ (Heb. 4:12).”
- 2) “The Holy Spirit aids our deliverance from idols by helping us understand the Bible, identify our sin, and pursue a godly life.”
- 3) “God has established the church...Through the church, we are surrounded by brothers and sisters in Christ, who can teach us, lovingly point out our idols, and provide encouragement and guidance in our spiritual growth.

Ken suggests that “This miraculous process involves several key steps.”

- When you find yourself in conflict, work backwards through the progression of an idol to identify the desires that are controlling your heart. Ask yourself these questions: How am I punishing others? How am I judging others? What am I demanding to have? What is the root desire of that demand?
- Prayerfully ask yourself the “X-ray questions” (on page 105 of the book and page 26 in this summary).
- Keep track of your discoveries in a journal so that you can identify patterns and steadily go after specific idols.
- Pray daily that God would rob your idols of their influence in your life by making you miserable whenever you give in to them.
- Describe your idols to your spouse or an accountability partner and ask him or her to pray for you and to lovingly approach you when there are signs that the idol is still controlling you.
- Realize that idols are masters of change and disguise.
- If you are dealing with an idol that is difficult to identify or conquer, go to your pastor or some other spiritually mature advisor and seek his or her counsel and support.

- Most of all, ask God to *replace* your idols with a growing love for Him and a consuming desire to worship Him and Him alone.”

He closes this section with a great analogy. “If someone told you that you had a deadly cancer that would take your life if you did not get treatment” what would you do? Then he states, “Well, you do have cancer—a cancer of the soul. It is called sin and idolatry” (pgs. 110-112).

Q: The question becomes are you willing to acknowledge you have idols? Are you willing to do what it takes to identify them? And once you have identified them, are you willing to let God and others help you rid your life of them?

C. Replace Idol Worship with Worship of the True God. “If we are not fulfilled and secure in God, we will inevitably seek other sources of happiness and security. Therefore, if you want to squeeze the idols out of your heart and leave no room for them to return, make it your top priority to aggressively pursue an all-consuming worship of the living God...Replacing idol worship with worship of the true God involves several steps.

- 1) *Repent before God.* Repentance and confession of our faith in the one God is true worship (I John 1:8-10).
- 2) *Fear God.* “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of [all wisdom]” (Prov. 1:7).” I would add Ecc. 12:13, “Fear God and keep His commands, for this is the whole duty of man.”
- 3) *Love God.* “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). Jesus is quoting the Shema (Deut. 6:5).
- 4) *Trust God.* “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man” (Ps. 118:8).
- 5) *Delight in God.* “Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:4).

“As you learn to delight more and more in Him, you will feel less need to find happiness, fulfillment, and security in things of this world.” Again, Ken closes this section by returning to his opening illustration. He states, “This is what happened the morning I blew up at my children. The Holy spirit graciously exposed my idolatry through my son’s insightful question, ‘Daddy, do you think you should pray to Jesus and ask Him if it’s rightful anger?’” (pgs. 112-114).

**III. Summary and Application.** Ken returns again to state that “James 4:1-3 provides a key principle for understanding and resolving conflict.”

He closes the chapter by stating, “If you are presently involved in a conflict, these questions will help you apply the principles presented in this chapter to your situation.” The questions are worth your read (pgs. 114-116).

## **Chapter 6: Confession Brings Freedom**

Ken opens the chapter by quoting John 3:16 and stating, “This incredible news reveals our radical sinfulness—nothing could save us except the death of God’s only Son. But it also reveals the depths of God’s radical mercy—He gave His son to die for us! As we reflect on and rejoice in the gospel of Christ, two things happen. [First], our pride and defensiveness are stripped away, and we can let go of our illusion of self-righteousness, honestly examine ourselves, and find

freedom from guilt and sin by admitting our wrongs. [Second], the gospel shows us how important reconciliation is to God, which inspires us to do everything we can to repair any harm we have caused to others and to be reconciled to those he have offended. This restoration process involved four activities: repentance, self-examination, confession, and personal change.”

**I. Repentance Is More than a Feeling.** “To repent literally means to change the way we think. Thus, repentance is sometimes described as ‘coming to our senses’...If this change in thinking is genuine, it will lead to a renouncing of sin and a turning to God.”

“There is a world of difference between mere remorse and genuine repentance. As Paul explained to the Corinthians, ‘I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance...Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death’ (II Cor. 7:9-10).”

“Worldly sorrow means feeling sad because you got caught doing something wrong or because you must suffer the unpleasant consequences of your actions...In contrast, godly sorrow means feeling bad because you have offended God...regretting the fact that what you did was morally wrong...It implies a change in thinking, which should lead to changes in behavior” (pgs. 117-119).

Activity: Describe a recent situation where you felt “worldly sorrow.” Then describe a recent time when you felt Godly sorrow.

Q: What made the difference in the two situations?

**II. Examine Yourself.** “One evidence of sincere repentance is a willingness to thoroughly examine ourselves so that we can uncover both our mistakes and our sins...Even seemingly small wrongs against other people are serious in God’s eyes, because every wrong is a violation of His will...In fact, we can sin against God by omission...As James 4:17 tells us, ‘Anyone, then who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.’”

“Because most of us do not like to admit that we have sinned, we tend to conceal deny, or rationalize our wrongs...We will minimize our wrongdoing...shift blame to others...[or] believe our sins have been more than canceled by another’s sins.” However, I John 1:8 reminds us that “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

When it is difficult to identify and confess your wrongs, Ken suggests we do two things.

- 1) Ask God to help you see your sin clearly and repent of it, regardless of what others may do. “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23-24).
- 2) Ask spiritually mature friends to counsel and correct you.

Q: When you encounter interpersonal conflict, what do you do to make sure you are listening to God and not just seeking to conceal, deny, or rationalize your own sins?

Ken writes, “As you examine your role in a conflict...here are a few areas where you are most likely to sin when you are at odds with others.”

A. Using your Tongue as a Weapon. James warns us that. “The tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:5-8). And sinful speech can take many forms.

- 1) *Reckless Words.* “We simply say whatever comes to mind without thinking about the consequences. In the process, we may hurt and offend others, which only aggravates conflict.”
- 2) *Grumbling and Complaining.* “When others feel we are critical of them or ungrateful for what they do, it is only a matter of time before conflict breaks out.”
- 3) *Falsehood.* This “includes any form of misrepresentation or deceit, including lying, exaggeration, telling only part of the truth, or distorting the truth by emphasizing favorable facts while minimizing those that are against us.”
- 4) *Gossip.* This “means to betray a confidence or to discuss unfavorable personal facts about another person with someone who is not part of the problem or its solution, Even if the information you discuss is true, gossip always sinful and a sign of spiritual immaturity.”
- 5) *Slander.* This “involves speaking false and malicious words about another person...the Greek word *diabolos*, translated as ‘slander’ or ‘accuser,’ is used thirty-four times in the Bible as a title for the devil, the world’s chief slanderer.”
- 6) *Worthless Talk.* “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Eph. 4:29). Jesus said, “I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken” (Matt. 12:36). (pgs.121-122)

We need to recognize that “using our tongue as a weapon” pertains not only to our spoken words, but also to those we write in an e-mail, text, or post on social media. In recent years as I have worked with churches in the midst of conflict, I have observed that written words most often pour gas on an existing spark instead of putting it out. I counsel pastors and church leaders to NEVER respond to a text, e-mail, or social media post that has the smallest hint of tension in it. If it is something you feel needs a response, call or visit with the individual in person. Ask something like, “Can you help me clarify what you meant when you wrote \_\_\_\_\_?” I have known a few Christian leaders who seem to use social media as an attack venue without any apparent awareness of how offensive their comments are.

Q: With the reality of how the written word can impact others, describe a recent experience where you were offended by someone’s post. How did you handle it?

Q: Of the six ways Ken mentions where our words become sinful, which is the most problematic for you?

Q: What are some of the things that you will seek to do in this area in the future to minimize your words creating more problems?

B. Seeking to Control Others. “Few things cause as much conflict as trying to control other people...The more common type of control involves trying to persuade, manipulate, or force people to do things that simply make our lives more comfortable and convenient.”

Activity: This might be one of the most difficult to self-diagnose. Talk to your spouse or a close and ask them, “In what ways do I seek to control you?”

C. Breaking Your Word. “A great deal of conflict is the direct result of someone’s failure to keep a commitment, whether it was expressed in a contract, a marriage vow, an oath to God or by a simple yes or no...If you have made an impulsive commitment or if unforeseen circumstances make it difficult to keep your word, you may appeal to the other person for mercy and ask (not demand) to be released from your obligation...If you cannot be released in a Biblical way, ask God to help you keep your word and learn from your mistake.” (pg. 123)

Q: Describe the last time you were confronted with the reality that you would not be able to keep your word. How did you handle it?

Q: If you are someone with an emotional or impulsive personality, what are you doing to guard your heart and mouth so that you are not constantly in a situation where others view you as a person who lacks integrity?

D. Failing to Respect Authority. This can be defined as “the abuse of or rebellion against the authority God has established in the church, the government, the family, and the workplace. All legitimate authority has been established by God, primarily for the purpose of maintaining peace and order.”

“When leaders misuse their authority and use it for their own ends, God Himself will eventually hold them accountable for that sin. At the same time God commands those under authority to submit to those over them, both for His sake and for their own good.”

“Because submission to authority is not a popular concept these days, a variety of excuses are offered to justify overthrowing God’s authority structure. But those who rebel against Biblically established authority are rebelling against God Himself...God calls us to respect the *positions* of those in authority even when their *personalities* leave much to be desired.”

“When a person in authority instructs you to do something that you believe is unwise, unfair, or sinful, it is appropriate to make an appeal and respectfully try to persuade that person to do what is right and wise...If this does not lead the person in authority to change course, you should obey any instructions that do not violate scripture and trust God to take care of the rest.” (pgs. 123-124)

Remember, Ken is talking about areas where we often sin when we are at odds with others. In our culture, the authority issue is a major point of contention and in a deeply divided nation it is only getting worse. As a Wyoming native who grew up with a worldview that valued “rugged individualism on steroids,” this has been an area where I have often struggled. I have observed that apart from Christ, people in authority WILL become a challenge. A phrase I have used to explain this reality is “that little people with a little power can cause big problems.” And because that is true, we need to realize that “little people with a lot of power WILL cause even bigger problems.”

There are many implications to these realities for Christians, but let me very quickly hit two of them. First, it means the Body of Christ needs to be doing a better job in both the evangelism and discipleship areas, because our nation slides daily into a deeper death spiral of decadence and decay. Second, it means the Church needs to do a better job of identifying leaders who have the godly character and competencies described in the Bible.

Q: When you have encountered conflict caused by a respect for authority, how have you handled it?

Q: Describe a time when you were in a position of authority and someone challenged your actions or decisions. How did you handle it?

E. Forgetting the Golden Rule. Ken states, “Perhaps the most common cause of conflict is our failure to follow the Golden Rule.” He then lists the following questions you need to ask yourself.

Q: Would I want someone else to treat me the way I have been treating him?

Q: How would I feel if I found out people were saying about me what I’ve said about her?

Q: If our positions were reversed, how would I feel if he did what I have done?

Q: If someone broke a contract for the same reasons I am using would I feel that was right?

Q: If I was an employee, how would I feel if I was treated the way I have treated her?

Q: If I owned this business, would I want my employees to behave the way I am behaving?  
(pgs. 124-125)

F. Serving Sinful Desires. “As we saw in chapter 5, destructive conflict is usually caused by unmet desires that have gained control over our hearts. These consuming desires, which may also be referred to as idols of the heart, may include the following:

1) *Improper desires for physical pleasure.*

2) *Pride and the desire to always be right.*

3) *Love of money or other material possessions.*

4) *Fear of man* “may involve an actual fear of what others can do to us or an excessive concern about what others think about us which can lead to a preoccupation with acceptance, approval, popularity, personal comparisons, or pleasing others.”

5) *Good things that we want too much.* “Some of the most difficult idols to deal with are good desires that we elevate to demands... These things, while beneficial in themselves, can become the source of terrible conflict if we let them take control of our hearts.” (pgs. 125-126)

- Q: To which of these “idols of the heart” can you honestly say they have never been a temptation to you?
- Q: Which of the five items Ken mentioned has crept into your heart as your biggest idol?

**III. The Seven A’s of Confession.** “As God opens your eyes to see how you have sinned against others, He simultaneously offers you a way to find freedom from your past wrongs. It is called confession. Many people have never experienced this freedom because they have never learned how to confess their wrongs honestly and unconditionally...If you really want to make peace, ask God to help you breathe grace by humbly and thoroughly admitting your wrongs. One way to do this is to use the Seven A’s.”

A. Address Everyone Involved: “As a general rule, you should confess your sins to every person who has been directly affected by your wrong doing. Since all sins offend God...[they] should be first, confessed to Him.” Ken then distinguishes between a “heart sin” and a “social sin.” He states, “A heart sin takes place only in your thoughts and does not directly affect other. Therefore, it needs to be confessed only to God.” He then notes that “Social sins should be confessed to those who have been affected by them, whether it is a single individual or a group of people.” (pgs. 126-127)

Q: Which is easier for you, asking God to forgive you of your “heart sins” or asking others to forgive you of your “social sins and why?”

B. Avoid If, But, and Maybe: “The best way to ruin a confession is to use words that shift the blame to others or that appear to minimize or excuse your guilt...The word *but* is especially harmful, because it has the strange ability to cancel all the words that precede it...people sense that the speaker believes the words following *but* more than those that precede it...the same is true when you use *however*, *if*, *maybe*, or any other word indicating reluctance to accept full responsibility for what you have done.” (pgs. 127-128)

Q: Think back to a recent time when you attempted to confess to another person. Did you use words like *but*, *however*, *if*, *maybe* or any other word like it? If so, you might need to revisit that conversation using all seven of the A’s of Confession.

C. Admit Specifically: “The more *detailed* and specific you are when making a confession, the more likely you are to receive a positive response...In addition, being specific will help you identify the behavior you need to change...Make it a point to deal with your attitudes as well as actions...If you explicitly identify your sinful desires and attitudes, as well as your words and actions, others are far more likely to believe that you are genuinely repentant...One of the most convincing ways to show that you realize you have been morally wrong is to identify the Biblical principles you violated.” (pgs. 128-129)

Q: How often do you acknowledge that the way you personally deal with conflict can violate Biblical principles?

D. Acknowledge the Hurt: “Make it a point to acknowledge and express sorrow for how you have hurt or affected them...Although you should not dwell excessively on feelings, it is

important to show that you understand how other people feel and to express genuine sorrow for hurting them.” (pg. 130)

Q: Depending upon your personality, you can easily dismiss the feelings of others or you can be overwhelmed by your own feelings. Which of the two is a greater problem for you? How can you let God’s Spirit help you overcome that tendency?

E. Accept the Consequences: “The prodigal son demonstrated this principle. After acknowledging that he had sinned against God and his father, he decided to say, ‘I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men...The harder you work to make restitution and repair any damage you have caused, the easier it will be for others to believe your confession and be reconciled to you.’” Ken then notes that Appendix C has specific guidance on when and how to make restitution. (pg. 131)

Q: Have you ever been forced to make restitution to repair the damage you caused? What did that look like and how has it helped you avoid similar mistakes?

F. Alter Your Behavior: “Explain to the person you offended how you plan to alter your behavior in the future...acknowledge that you cannot change on your own and are depending on God, it is often helpful to begin describing your plan with the words, ‘With God’s help, I plan to...’” Ken then talks about the benefits of making a written plan for what and how to change. (pgs. 131-132)

Activity: Think about someone with whom you have had repeated issues. Then think about what and how that individual could change to alleviate the repetitive pattern of behavior. Then when the behavior happens again, ask them what and how YOU could change to alleviate the problem and be prepared to GRACIOUSLY share your thoughts.

G. Ask for Forgiveness—and Allow Time: “If you follow the six steps described above, many people will readily say they forgive you. If the person to whom you have confessed does not express forgiveness, however, you may ask, ‘Will you please forgive me?’ Be careful, however, not to use this question as a means to pressure someone into forgiving you.”

“It may be helpful to say something like this: ‘I know I have deeply hurt you and I can understand why you would have a hard time forgiving me. I hope you will soon be able to forgive me, because I want very much to be reconciled.’...Time alone will not always bring forgiveness. Sometimes forgiveness is inhibited because a confession was inadequate...for example, you may not have explained adequately how you intended to repair the damage you have done. Or you may have failed to understand and express regret for the way you hurt the other person.”

“Not every confession will require all seven steps. Minor offenses can often be handled with a fairly simple statement. The more serious the offense, however, the wiser it is to make a thorough confession using all of the Seven A’s.” He closes the section by saying, “When you go to confess a wrong, remember that you are there to serve the other person and not to gain

comfort for yourself. Focus on showing God’s loving work in your life and on ministering to the person you have harmed.” (pgs. 132-134)

Q: Think about a time when you confessed to someone and experienced a genuine “You are forgiven” response. How many of the Seven A’s of Confession did you use?

**IV. You Can Change.** “The final step in finding freedom from a particular sin is to work with God to change your attitudes and behavior in the future...*God is eager to help us grow and change.* There is no sin or habit in your life that cannot be overcome by His grace... There are four ways that you can cooperate with God in this process.

- A. Pray. “Thank God for the saving work He has already done in your life and ask Him to give you faith to believe that you really can change.”
- B. Delight yourself in the Lord. “As you focus on the Lord, you will discover that He can provide what idols promise but can never deliver. He alone can give lasting joy, peace, happiness, and security.”
- C. Study. “The Bible frequently emphasizes the close connection between transformed thinking and growth in character. Wisdom, knowledge, and understanding—all involving our minds—are important prerequisites to spiritual fruitfulness.”
- D. Practice. “As Paul warned the Philippians, we cannot change unless we put what we are learning into practice... When an argument develops, give close attention to controlling your tongue. When your desires clash with another’s, recall Jesus’ example and willingly submit. Or, if you have been offended, ask God to help you resist resentment and forgive as He has forgiven you.” (pgs. 134-135)

Activity: This next week, every time you are confronted with a “difficult” conversation practice the four steps, but in the moment replace “study the Bible” with reflect upon scriptures that you already know.

**V. Summary and Application.** “To be a peacemaker, you need to deal honestly with your contribution to a conflict... The more faithfully you draw on His grace and pursue these steps, the more useful you will be to Him in making peace.” The chapter closes with another set of excellent questions. (pgs. 135-137)

### Part III: Gently Restore

This section opens with another insightful illustration. Then Ken states, “Talking to other people about a conflict is usually an unpleasant experience. We often let tensions build to the exploding point and then confront people with a list of their wrongs... The gospel opens the door for an entirely different approach to talking to others about their role in a conflict... instead of using guilt and shame to force others to change themselves, we can breathe grace by holding out to them the wonderful news that God wants to free them from sin and help them grow to be like His Son... There are many helpful communication skills we can learn as well; these enable us to listen more carefully and speak more clearly and graciously.”

## **Chapter 7: Just between the Two of You**

“Conflict presents unique opportunities to serve other people. When others are weighed down with problems and stress, God will sometimes use us to encourage them and help carry their burdens. In other situations, we may be able to give helpful advice, provide a positive example, or suggest creative solutions to problems. Best of all, conflict can provide the opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ and give witness to the gospel, even to people who are attacking us...In this chapter we will explore some basic guidelines on when and how you should go and talk privately to another person about his or her contribution to a conflict.”

**I. Restoring Means More than Confronting.** Jesus said, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you.” (Matthew 18:15) Ken notes, “Just before this passage, we find Jesus’ wonderful metaphor of a loving shepherd who goes to look for a wandering sheep and then rejoices when it is found. Thus Matt. 18:15 is introduced with a theme of restoration, not condemnation. Jesus repeats this theme just after telling us to ‘go and show him his fault’ by adding, ‘If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.’ And then He hits the restoration theme a third time in verses 21-35, where He uses the parable of the unmerciful servant to remind us to be a merciful and forgiving to others as God is to us.”

“Scripture rarely uses words we would translate as ‘confront’ to describe the process of talking to others about their faults. Instead, it calls us to use a wide spectrum of activities to minister to others including confessing, teaching, instructing, reasoning with, showing, encouraging, correcting, warning, admonishing, or rebuking. God wants us to adjust the intensity of our communication to fit the other person’s position and the urgency of the situation...Therefore, if we want to be effective as peacemakers, we need to ask God to help us be discerning and flexible so that we can use whatever approach will be most effective in a given situation.”

After providing several Biblical examples of approaching others in such a manner, Ken closes the section by stating, “We should ask God to help us discern the most winsome and effective way to approach a particular person at a particular time and to open the way for genuine reconciliation.” (pgs. 143-145)

Q: Reflect upon the last several times when you have had to “confront” someone. How often was your approach done in the manner Ken described above?

**II. Sooner or Later, Face-to-Face.** My experience suggests that understanding and correctly applying the insights in this section will benefit you greatly. Ken states that “The Bible clearly commends face-to-face meetings as an important step in reconciling people, but it does not teach that this is the only way to begin a reconciliation process. In fact it is sometimes better to involve other people in resolving a conflict *before* trying to meet personally with someone who has wronged you.” Ken then provides several Biblical examples where an intermediary was used. He then points to several situations where involving other people is a better first step.

- When you are dealing with a person who comes from a culture or tradition in which it is customary to resolve problems through intermediaries such as family representatives or trusted leaders.
- When going to someone personally and privately is likely to make them lose face in the sight of others.
- When either of the parties might feel intimidated by the other person, perhaps because of a difference in verbal skills or differing positions of authority or influence.
- When one person was abused by the other and there is possibility that the abuser will use a private conversation to manipulate or silence the person who has been abused.
- When there is a party who has a much closer relationship than you do with the person who may be caught in sin, and that third party is willing to raise the issue with the offender. (pgs. 146-147)

Having worked with pastors and churches for over thirty years, I have developed a few topics that I seek to discuss with every pastor. One of them relates to the third bullet point above. I try to help pastors understand how unapproachable they are in the eyes of a typical church member. First, they are in a position of authority and this can be magnified even more based upon the church's polity. Second, their Biblical training means they will be able to "out Bible" most church members. Finally, their training and experience in preaching and teaching will mean that they will be able to "out talk" others.

Stop and think about the long-term impact if a pastor doesn't specifically create opportunities where he can receive honest feed-back. One negative impact can be that a pastor "assumes" because nobody said anything negative, everyone is on board for his new idea. I know churches, and change does not come easy to most of them. Another could be that when a pastor makes an honest mistake, no one is willing to correct him. Unfortunately there are also times when a pastor says or does something that is genuinely offensive. Notice I used the word "when" not "if" in the last two sentences. We are all human and we are all subject to making mistakes and susceptible to sin.

Q: What does the feed-back process look like in your church as it relates to your pastor?

Activity: If you don't have one, I would encourage you to prayerfully think through how one can be designed and implemented in your church.

Ken continues the section by saying, "However, whether we begin with a private meeting or work through intermediaries, we must not let personal preferences or cultural traditions divert us from seeking genuine reconciliation...the Bible teaches that a face-to-face meeting is usually essential to genuine reconciliation. This principle is presented in three ways in the Bible."

- Many passages clearly contemplate a direct conversation between the conflicting parties.
- Scripture provides many examples of marvelous reconciliations that came about after personal meetings between people who had wronged each other.
- The Bible gives examples of disastrous results when intermediaries delayed or let people avoid a personal meeting. [He provides several Biblical examples for each point.]

“God does not intend for people to relate to one another at a distance or through other people. Genuine relationship involves *personal* communication...Although other people can sometimes help get the restoration process started, its ultimate goal should usually be a personal, face-to-face meeting between those who have been estranged, so they can express and confirm repentance, confession, and forgiveness, and experience together the grace and reconciliation of God.” (pgs. 147-148)

Q: Describe a time when you used an intermediary to help you resolve a personal conflict. What were the results? Did it lead to a face-to-face meeting?

**III. If Someone Has Something against You.** “If you learn that someone has something against you, God wants you to take the initiative in seeking peace—even if you do not believe you have done anything wrong.” Jesus indicated in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:23-24) that “this command is not limited to situations where the other person has something *justifiable* against you...the obligation exists whether or not you believe his complaint is legitimate.” Ken states, “There are several reasons why you should initiate reconciliation even if you do not believe you are at fault.

A. Jesus Commands You to Go. “Seeking peace with an alienated brother enhances your Christian witness, *especially* if he is the one who has done the wrong.”

B. You Can Have Greater Peace of Mind. “Only by carefully listening to others can you discover sins of which you were not aware or help others realize that their complaints are unfounded.”

C. Out of Love for Your Brother and Concern for His Well-being. “Bitterness, anger, and unforgiveness are serious sins in God’s eyes. If your brother indulges in these feelings, they will separate him from God and expose him to judgment...Therefore, you should go to the person out of love and do everything within your power to resolve the matter.”

Ken closes the section with another one of his powerful real life illustrations. (pgs. 148-180)

Q: Have you ever “gone to someone who had something against you?” If so, what was the outcome? Knowing what you know now about being a peace maker, what would you have done differently?

Q: If you’ve never “gone to someone who had something against you,” open your heart, eyes, and ears and ask God, “Is there someone who has something against me?” If the answer is yes, are you willing to be obedient to scripture?

**IV. When Someone’s Sins Are Too Serious to Overlook.** “God also calls you to go and talk to someone about a conflict if that person’s sins are too serious to overlook...Jesus said, ‘If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him’ (Luke 17:3).” Ken then points to four situations that may warrant this kind of attention.

A. Is It Dishonoring God? “If someone who professes to be a Christian is behaving in such a way that others are likely to think less of God, of His church, or of His Word, it may be necessary to talk with that person and urge him to change his behavior.”

B. Is It Damaging Your Relationship? “If you are unable to forgive an offense—that is, if your feelings, thoughts, words, or actions toward another person have been altered for more than a short period of time—the offense is probably too serious to overlook.”

- C. Is It Hurting Others? This can happen in various ways. 1) The offender may be hurting or imperiling others in a direct way. 2) They may be setting an example that will encourage other Christians to behave in a similar manner. 3) If it was made public and other Christians take sides it could affect the peace and unity of the body.
- D. Is It Hurting the Offender? “When it is seriously harming the offender, either by direct damage (e.g. alcohol abuse) or by impairing his or her relationship with God or other people.” Ken notes that, “Unfortunately, because many Christians have adopted the world’s view that everyone should be allowed to ‘do his own thing,’ some believers will do nothing, even when they see a brother or sister ensnared in serious sin. This is not the kind of love Jesus demonstrated, nor is it consistent with the clear teaching of scripture.”

As always, Ken provides several Biblical examples. But also, as he has proven adept at doing, he challenges us to find the right balance. “The Bible repeatedly warns us not to be eagerly looking for opportunities to point out the faults of others. In fact, anyone who is *eager* to go and show a brother his sin is probably disqualified from doing so.” He then shares, “The best confronters are usually people who would prefer not to have to talk to others about their sin but will do so out of obedience to God and love for others.” (pgs. 150-153)

Q: Describe two or three times in the past when the sins of someone you knew fell into one of the four situations Ken mentions. Describe your response to each of those situations.

Q: Knowing what you know now about the Biblical importance of being a peace maker, what could you have done differently?

Ken then points out four reasons people use to avoid confronting someone about their sin as well as suggesting why each reason is invalid.

1. Matt. 7:1-5 where Jesus said, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.” Ken states, “In light of the verses quoted above, which specifically tell us to evaluate and talk to others about their behavior, Matt. 7:1-5 cannot be interpreted as forbidding personal correction. Instead, the passage explains when and how correction should occur.”
2. In Matt. 5:39, Jesus said, “Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Ken states, “This passage does not forbid personal correction. Rather, it forbids people to take the law into their own hands and to seek *vengeance* against those who wrong them...Christians have the responsibility to address serious sin, especially when it is found in a fellow believer.”
3. Some people say, “Who am I to tell someone else what to do?” To this argument Ken replies, “While it is true that we have no right to force our personal opinions on other people, we do have a responsibility to encourage fellow believers to be faithful to God’s truths, which are presented in Scripture.”
4. Others say, “Isn’t it God’s job to show people where they are wrong?” Ken states, “It is true that God is the only one who can convict people of sin and change their hearts, which He does through the power of the Holy Spirit. But God often uses another person to speak the words that a sinner needs to hear to see the need to repent.” (pgs. 153-154)

Q: How many of the reasons above have you used in the past to avoid confronting someone who has fallen into sin?

Q: What is your response to each of Ken's statements about why that interpretation of scripture is invalid?

This section is cram packed with "goodies" as he closes it by doing a deep dive into the Greek words behind Paul's exhortation in Gal. 6:1 to *restore* a brother who is "*caught* in a sin." "Caught" translates the Greek word *prolambano* which means "to be overtaken" or "surprised." It speaks of a brother who was been "ensnared when he was off guard...[and he needs] someone else to step in and sever the cords that entangle them." Ken points out that "Instead of ignoring him or throwing him out, the Galatians were instructed to "restore him gently. The word translated as "restore" is the Greek word *katartizo* which means to mend, repair, equip, complete, or prepare...Each of these activities has the goal of making something or someone useful for its intended purpose."

"Understanding these two words will help you decide whether an offense is too serious to be overlooked. First, keep the picture of being 'caught' in mind. If a sin does not appear to be doing serious harm to a brother or damaging his relationships, it may be best simply to pray that God will show him his need for change. On the other hand, if the sin appears to be dragging your friend under, do not delay in going to him. Second, remember the *katartizo* principle. Has that person's sin significantly hurt his spiritual health and reduced his usefulness to God...If so, there may be a need for "mending," which might be accomplished through a gracious conversation." (pgs. 154-155)

Activity: Reread and rephrase this section in your own words. Then find an appropriate time to discuss with a fellow Christian the topic of WHEN is someone's sin too serious to overlook.

**V. Special Considerations.** Ken then talks about some situations that will require special consideration.

- A. Going to Non-Christians. "The Bible teaches we should be concerned about the well-being of others regardless of whether they are Christians or non-Christians. We are also commanded to 'live at peace with everyone.' Therefore most of the principles given above apply to conflicts with non-Christians."
- B. Going to a Person in Authority. "Your responsibility to go to someone who is caught in sin does not vanish just because that person is in a position of authority over you. [You will want to] speak in a respectful manner, and do all you can to affirm your regard for that person's authority."
- C. Dealing with Abuse. "One of the most difficult offenses to address is one that involves the abuse of power or authority, such as physical or sexual abuse...Therefore, it is usually best to involve others in the confrontation process...If the abuser is a Christian, his church has a responsibility to confront his sin...This involvement can and should be carried out in cooperation with actions that civil authorities must take to deal with the abuse. At the same time the church should be ministering lovingly and diligently to the victim of abuse."
- D. Go Tentatively and Repeatedly. "It is wise to remember that many differences and offenses are the result of misunderstandings rather than actual wrongs." Let me pause to provide a personal AMEN to this point. In my experience of working with churches in conflict, I have encountered a number of issues, but the vast majority were not "in and of

themselves” a sin. The misunderstanding or inadvertent misstep; however, created sinful responses from both parties who were directly involved.

Ken states, “Be prepared for the fact that your first meeting may not be successful...The Greek verb use for ‘go’ in Matthew 18:15 implies a *continual* action...You should continually seek to resolve the matter privately until it becomes apparent that further personal conversations are truly pointless or are likely to do harm.” (pgs. 155-158)

Q: Have you ever had to deal with the circumstances listed in points A through C above? If so, how did you handle it?

Q: How well have you handled Ken’s fourth point during a time of conflict: “go tentatively and repeatedly?”

**VI. After the Log Is Out of Your Eye.** “As Jesus teaches in Matthew 7:3-5, you should not try to talk to others about their wrongs until you have dealt with your contribution to a problem. When you follow Jesus’ teaching, your confession will sometimes encourage the other person to admit sins...In some cases the other person will acknowledge little or no responsibility for the problem...If you proceed to bring up that person’s wrongs, he may become defensive and believe that your earlier confession was a sham...if you just walk away without discussing the other person’s wrongs, he may not come to grips with the need for change. So what do you do?” Ken provides four answers to this question.

A. You may simply overlook the offense. Confess your contribution to the problem, let go of what the other person did, and get on with your life.”

B, You may build on the other’s superficial confession. Ken provides three examples of what you might say:

- ”I appreciate your admitting that you lost your temper, Bob. May I explain how that made me feel?
- I appreciate your saying that. What do you think you did wrong?
- Why do you think I was frustrated?”

C. You may need to talk about the other person’s sin now. “This will be appropriate when the conflict is so serious or the other person’s attitude and behavior is so harmful that the situation must be dealt with immediately or further problems are likely to occur...plan your words carefully in advance to reduce the likelihood that he or she will question your motives.” Ken then provides two examples.

D. You may postpone confrontation until another time. “If you genuinely repent of your wrongs and sincerely work at changing your attitude and behavior, a variety of results may take place.

- First, you may eventually decide that the other person’s wrongs were actually insignificant.
- Second, the effort you make to change and to restore your relationship may convict the other person and eventually motivate him to come to you and admit past wrongs.
- Third, if the offense is repeated later, you will be in a better position to approach the offender if you have made an obvious effort to deal with your faults.” (pgs. 158-160)

Q: In past times of conflict, how easy has it been for you to get the log out of your own eye?  
You may want to ask your spouse or someone who knows you well how you do in this area.

**VII. Summary and Application.** “If you know that someone has something against you, go to that person and talk about it as soon as possible. Similarly, if someone’s sins are dishonoring God, damaging your relationship, hurting others, or hurting that person, one of the most loving and helpful things you can do is go and help him or her see the need for change.” As is true of every chapter, Ken closes with some additional processing questions. (pgs. 160-161)

## **Chapter 8: Speak the Truth in Love**

In this chapter we will look at some foundational communication principles and skills and explore practical ways to use them in the midst of conflict.

**I. Bring Hope through the Gospel.** “When someone has disappointed or offended me, my natural tendency is to come at them with ‘the law,’ lecturing them about what they have done wrong and what they should now do to make things right. This approach generally makes people defensive and reluctant to admit their wrongs... Instead of coming at them with the law, I am learning to bring them the gospel... [focusing] primarily on what God has done and is doing for them through Christ.”

Ken then provides several Biblical examples: Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well in John 4; Paul’s opening remarks to the church in Corinth which was filled with conflict (I Cor. 1:2-9); Passages in Paul’s letters to the church in Philippi and Colossi. He then states, “As these passages show, when we need to talk with others about their faults, we should ask for God’s help to resist our tendency to hammer people into submission by dwelling on their failures. Of course, we sometimes need to show them where they have sinned and fallen short of God’s ways. But that should not be the primary focus of our words, because judgment inevitably discourages.”

He closes the section with a personal application. “Whether I’m doing peacemaking at home, in my church, or in a formal conciliation case, I’ve seen this approach open the door for repentance and peace... The year before I began making the latest changes to this book, I realized that I could not consistently weave the gospel into my conversations with others until the gospel was woven deeply into my own heart. God showed me that I am a natural ‘law speaker;’ I bring judgment much more easily than I bring grace. When I saw this, I began praying for God to give me a major heart change, to make the gospel central to everything I think, say, and do.” (pgs. 162-165)

Q: Are you by nature more of a “law speaker” or a “grace giver?” How does that impact your relationship with others?

Q: Have you thought of the gospel as being primarily associated with salvation? What changes will you need to make in your understanding of the gospel to incorporate it into the relational components of your daily life?

**II. Be Quick to Listen.** Ken reminds us of what James wrote, “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19). He then writes, “With God’s help you can develop several listening skills.”

A. Waiting. “He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame” (Prov. 18:13). Ken makes four specific applications of this verse:

- Try not to jump to premature conclusions about what others are thinking.
- Discipline yourself not to interrupt others while they are speaking.
- Learn to be comfortable with silence.
- Do not offer immediate solutions to every problem others bring to you.

B. Attending. “The human mind can think at least four times faster than a person can talk. Therefore, when you are listening to someone, your mind may be searching for something more to do.” To avoid this problem, Ken suggests the following:

- Maintain regular eye contact.
- Avoid negative body language.
- Eliminate distractions as much as possible.
- Lean forward slightly to show interest.
- Nod your head occasionally to show that you understand what the other person is saying or feeling.

C. Clarifying. This is the process of making sure you understand what the other person is saying. He suggests responses like:

- Are you saying...?
- Tell me more about...
- Can you give me an example?
- I’m confused about...
- Let me see if I understand...

Ken then states, “Because these responses also show your interest in getting further information, they encourage the other person to share emotions and perceptions more fully. Let me share a personal observation on this point. Unless and until the person perceives that you are genuinely listening, you will never get to the core or the heart of their real issues.

D. Reflecting. This is the process of paraphrasing or summarizing the other person’s main points in your own words. Ken writes:

- “Reflecting does not require that you agree with what the other person says; it simply reveals whether you comprehend another person’s thoughts and feelings.
- Reflecting shows that you are paying attention and you are trying to understand the other person.
- Reflecting also helps to clarify what the other person is saying and allows you to focus the discussion on a specific topic rather than having to deal with several concerns simultaneously.
- Reflecting can slow down the pace of a conversation, which is especially beneficial when emotions are high and words may be spoken in haste.
- Reflecting what others are saying can make them more willing to listen to what you want to say.”

E. Agreeing. “This doesn’t mean you abandon your beliefs, but rather that you acknowledge what you know is true before addressing points of disagreement... Agreeing is

particularly important when you have been in the wrong.” Ken points to the importance of listening for the truth and then acknowledging what is true. “By agreeing with the other person whenever possible, you can resolve certain issues easily and then focus profitably on matters that deserve further discussion.”

“One reason we are sometimes reluctant to admit being wrong on one issue is that we fear it will seem like we are accepting responsibility for the entire problem. The best way to overcome this hurdle is to agree with others in *specific* terms...These kinds of responses require genuine humility and also call for keeping a tight rein on your emotions. But they are worth the effort.” (pgs. 166-169)

Q: Which of the five attributes above do you do fairly well? [Waiting, Attending, Clarifying, Reflecting, or Agreeing.] Give an example.

Q: Which of the five needs the most work? Start there, and begin to change how you listen.

**III. The Tongue of the Wise Brings Healing.** “The third element of effective communication is the ability to speak to others in a clear, constructive, and persuasive manner.” Ken then provides sixteen common sense principles that can help you communicate more wisely.

- A. Breathe Grace. “Since we cannot breathe out what we have not breathed in, this process hinges on our moment-to-moment relationship with God...As we are filled with His grace, we can then breathe it out to others by confessing our wrongs, bringing them hope through the gospel, lovingly showing others their faults, forgiving them as God has forgiven us, and manifesting in our words and actions the fruit of the Holy Spirit...When even one person in a conflict is faithfully breathing out this kind of grace, others will often receive God’s grace through us. As they do they are less likely to be defensive and more inclined to listen to other concerns.”
- B. Make Charitable Judgments. “If people sense that you have jumped to conclusions about them and enjoy finding fault in them, they are likely to resist correction. If on the other hand they sense that you are trying to believe the best about them, they will be more inclined to listen to your concerns. Therefore, ask God to help you make *charitable judgments* about others. [Which means] that out of love for God you strive to believe the best about others until you have facts to prove otherwise.”

“Communication will usually improve if you give someone the benefit of the doubt, put things in the best possible light, avoid backing the person into a corner, and indicate that you really are open to hearing his or her side of the story.”

- C. Speak the Truth in Love. “God commands us not only to speak the truth to each other, but to ‘[speak] the truth *in love*’ (Eph. 4:15)...This process starts when you ask God to put love into your heart that is not naturally there (I Cor. 13:1-7). Next, ask Him to give you the ability to communicate this love by speaking to others with gentleness and patience and by showing genuine concern for their well-being and interests (Phil. 2:3-4). Of course, there are times when you must speak to others in a firm or even blunt manner, especially if they have refused to pay attention to a gentile approach and are persisting in sinful behavior.”

- D. Talk from Beside, Not from Above. “Do not talk down to them as though you are faultless and they are inferior to you. Instead, talk with them as though you are standing side by side at the foot of the cross.”
- E. Help Others Examine the Desires of Their Hearts. “It is hard enough to talk to others about their sinful words and behavior; it is far more difficult to know and talk about what is going on in their hearts... The best starting point is to humbly describe the idols you have found in your own heart and confess how they have caused you to sin in this conflict or other similar situations.”

“If the other person seems generally receptive to this concept, graciously suggest that perhaps he too is being influenced by good desires that have taken too strong of a grip on his heart.” Ken then recommends that you share the “X-ray Questions” with them. We discussed them on page 26 of this discussion summary.

- F. Choose the Right Time and Place. “Timing is an essential ingredient of effective communication. If possible, do not discuss sensitive matters with someone who is tired, worried about other things, or in a bad mood. Nor should you approach someone about an important concern unless you will have enough time to discuss the matter thoroughly... Give careful thought to where you will talk. Unless it is necessary, do not talk about sensitive matters in front of others. Try to find a place that is free of such distractions as television, other people, and loud noises... it may be wise to select a place where he or she will feel relatively secure, perhaps at home.”
- G. Talk in Person Whenever Possible. “Communication is most effective when it is done as personally as possible. Therefore, face-to-face conversation is usually better than talking by telephone, because both people can see facial expressions and communicate with body language as well as with words.” Let me pause to emphasize this point. STOP trying to have difficult conversations via social media. First, when we are face-to-face, we do a better job of filtering our words. Also, words alone constitute a small percentage of the communication process: eye contact, facial expressions, body language, and voice inflection carry more weight.

Ken provides the following clarifications. “It may be wise to telephone to arrange for a personal conversation... If the other person has refused to respond positively to telephone calls or personal conversations, a brief letter [text or e-mail] may be the only way to invite further communication... If time allows, set aside the first draft of a letter for a day or two. When you reread it, you may catch words that will do more harm than good. It may also be wise to ask a close friend to read the letter as well, because an objective reader may be able to identify needed changes.”

- H. Engage Rather than Declare. “One of the fastest ways to make people defensive is to abruptly announce what they have done wrong... If you are talking to a friend who trusts you and is not likely to react strongly to the issue you want to raise, you may be able to speak fairly candidly... If strong trust has not been built... or if the issue is likely to trigger defensiveness, you would be wise to broach your concern in an indirect way that engages the other person’s heart and mind without putting him instantly on guard.”

Ken inserts a personal example of how he uses different analogies and metaphors when he has a “difficult” conversation with his son than he does for his daughter based upon

the interests and personality of each child. He then closes the section by stating, “Whatever approach you use, your goal should be to describe your concern in a way that captures other’s attention, appeals to their values, and gives hope that the issue can be resolved constructively.”

- I. Communicate So Clearly that You Cannot Be Misunderstood. “It is not good enough to communicate so that you can be understood. You should communicate so clearly that you cannot be misunderstood...Whenever you need to communicate important information, think carefully about your words and look for ways that they might be vague, imprecise, or potentially misleading. As you tighten up what you say, you can prevent many of the misunderstandings that fuel conflict.”
- J. Plan Your Words. Ken reminds us “that *asking* for a meeting is less threatening than telling someone there will be a meeting.” He also states, “I cannot overemphasize the importance of planning your words when you need to talk with others about their faults... ‘Those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness’ (Prov. 14:22b).” Ken then suggests several areas where it would be helpful to write out your thoughts.
- Define the problem as narrowly as possible.
  - Identify words and topics to avoid because they are likely to offend.
  - Think about analogies or metaphors that the other person will understand and value.
  - Identify words that describe your feelings.
  - Describe the effect the problem is having on you and others.
  - Your suggestions and preferences for a solution.
  - The benefits that will be produced by cooperating to find a solution.

“In addition to planning your opening remarks, it is often wise to think of two or three ways the other person may respond to your words and then plan how you will handle each scenario...In responding to an angry reaction remember that ‘a gently answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger’ (Prov. 15:1)...Don’t depend on the other person to follow your script. You will need to be flexible in responding to new developments.”

- K. Use “I” Statements. These are statements that give information about yourself rather than attack the other person. Sande states that they can accomplish three things:
1. They tell the other person how his or her conduct is affecting you.
  2. They identify the things the other person has done that concern you.
  3. They explain why this issue is important to you and why you would like to discuss it.
- L. Be Objective. “When you are trying to show someone his fault, keep your remarks as objective as possible...use objective facts whenever you can.” Avoid phrases like “you always,” “you never,” and “every time.”
- M. Use the Bible Carefully. Ken suggests the following four basic principles to keep in mind when you use scripture:
1. Don’t quote the Bible to tear others down, but only to build them up in the Lord (Ephesians 4:29).
  2. Make sure you are using a passage for its intended purpose—check your context.
  3. If possible, have others read the passage from their own Bibles and then ask, “What do you think that means?”

4. “Know when to stop. If the other person appears to be getting irritated by your references to Scripture, it may be wise to back off and give him or her time to think about it.”
- N. Ask for Feedback. “Match impact with intent. In other words, you want to make sure that what you meant to say has actually gotten across to the other person completely and accurately...Asking questions will promote dialogue and give you an opportunity to measure how well you are communicating as well as how the other person is responding to you.”
- O. Offer Solutions and Preferences. “When you speak to others about issues in their lives, be prepared to offer solutions to the specific problems you have identified...At the same time, try not to give the impression that you have all the answers...The more you promote dialogue and reasonable thinking, the less likely people will be to remain entrenched in one position. If you give them creative ways to deal with a situation and set an example of openly weighing various options, the discussion can result in real progress.
- P. Recognize Your Limits. “There are limits to what you can accomplish. You can raise concerns, suggest solutions, and encourage reasonable thinking, but you cannot force change...If you prayerfully prepare, speak the truth in love, and do all you can to effectively communicate your concerns to the other person, you will have succeeded in God’s eyes regardless of how other respond (see Acts 20:26-27)” (pgs. 170-182)

Activity: That’s a lot of wise counsel to process at one time. Let me encourage you to focus on two of his “common sense principles” per day for the next eight days. Reflect on times when you used the principle and times when you didn’t. What difference did it make? Think about a difficult conversation you need to have and how you could apply these principles in that context.

**IV. Summary and Application.** “Ron Kraybill, a respected Christian mediator, has noted that ‘effective confrontation is like a graceful dance from supportiveness to assertiveness and back again.’” Before closing the chapter with another set of excellent questions, Ken states, “In developing the skills of loving confrontation, you can see for yourself that ‘the tongue of the wise brings healing.’” (pgs. 183-184)

## **Chapter 9: Take One or Two Others Along**

If we draw on God’s grace and follow the principles He has given to us in Scripture, we can resolve most conflicts on our own...if we are unable to resolve our differences in private, we may need to ask one or more respected friends, church leaders, or other godly and unbiased individuals to help us to be reconciled. Jesus Himself sets forth the framework for seeking help from others to resolve a conflict in Matthew 18:15-20...In this Chapter we will walk through the process step-by-step and seek how you can apply it as you seek to restore someone to a right relationship with God and other people.”

- I. **The Matthew 18 Process.** A general principle taught in Matt. 18 is that we should try to keep the circle of people involved in a conflict *as small as possible for a long as possible*. Ken then lays out a five step process.

- A. Step One: Overlook Minor Offenses. “To begin with, evaluate how you can use the situation as an opportunity to glorify God, serve others, and grow to be like Christ (see Chapters 1-3). Then seriously consider resolving the dispute unilaterally by overlooking minor offenses and giving up certain personal rights (see Chapter 4).”
- B. Step Two: Talk in Private. “If you have wronged someone else, God calls you to go to the other person to seek forgiveness (see Chapter 5 & 6) If another person has committed a wrong that is too serious to overlook, it is your responsibility to go to the other person and show him his fault, making every effort to resolve personal issues and promote genuine reconciliation (see Chapters 7 & 8).” (pgs. 185-187)

Q: In a time of conflict, how often have you strictly adhered to these first two steps? That means you didn’t talk to anyone else until you had talked to the person you offended or who offended you.

Q: Is there anyone you need to prayerfully and graciously approach today to ask for or extend forgiveness?

- C. Step Three: Take One or Two Others Along. This is a very well done and detailed section. “If a dispute cannot be resolved in private, Jesus tells us to ask other people to get involved...In some cases, the others may serve as intermediaries, shuttling between both sides to promote understanding (see Chapter 7). In most cases, they will act initially as mediators, meeting with both parties simultaneously to improve communication and offer Biblical counsel. If necessary, they may eventually serve as arbitrators and provide a binding decision about how to resolve the matter.”

1. There are two ways that outside people can become involved in a dispute.

- a. *By mutual agreement.* “If you and your opponent cannot resolve a dispute in private, you can suggest that the two of you ask one or more unbiased individuals to meet with you in an effort to facilitate more productive dialogue...They should be wise and spiritually mature Christians who are worthy of your respect and trust. If your dispute involves technical issues, it is helpful if one or more of the reconcilers has experience in that area...Some of the best reconcilers are people who are personally acquainted with you or your opponent, or better yet, who know both of you quite well.”

“If you opponent balks at your suggestion to involve others, carefully explain why doing so would be beneficial...Appendix B describes some of these benefits in detail.”

- b. *On your initiative.* “While mutual agreement is always preferable, it is not actually required if your opponent professes to be a Christian. Matt. 18:16 indicates that you may seek help from reconcilers even if your opponent doesn’t want it. Before you take this step, however, it is wise and often beneficial to warn your opponent what you are about to do.” Ken gives the following example of what you could say:

“Bob, I would prefer to resolve this matter just between the two of us. Since that has not happened and because this involves issues that are too important

to walk away from, my only other option is to obey what the Bible commands, which means asking some people from our churches to help us out. I would prefer that we go together to get that help, but if you will not cooperate, I'll ask for it by myself."

If your Christian opponent does not agree to cooperate, you may enlist the help of reconcilers in several ways.

- (1) You can get the help of someone your opponent is likely to respect and trust, and go together.
- (2) You could ask a reconciler your opponent would trust to talk to them in an effort to set up a meeting with you and the reconciler.
- (3) You could contact your opponent's church and ask for help from one of its leaders.

"Regardless of how you enlist the help of reconcilers in achieving your opponent's participation, make every effort not to give them unnecessary details about the conflict. Simply explain that you and the other person are at odds and need their help." (pgs. 188-190)

If at this point you are thinking, "It's not worth the effort!" Ask yourself two questions:

Q: What is different today, since you previously determined that it wasn't a minor offense that you could overlook (Step One above)?

Q: If you dropped it at this point, how would it impact your relationship with the other person? Remember, it is worth fighting for healthy relationships.

2. What do reconcilers do?
  - a. Their primary role is to help you and your opponent make the decisions needed to restore peace by facilitating communication and clarifying facts.
  - b. They may also provide advice on how to deal with the problem: personal confession, Biblical principles, or additional solutions.
  - c. At the request of you and your opponent, they may help resolve a deadlock.
  - d. If you or the other person refuses to resolve material issues, they may serve as witnesses to report to your respective churches what they have observed.

Step three may be followed even when your opponent claims to be a Christian but is not acting like one.

Q: Have you ever served as a reconciler (objective third party) in a dispute? What happened in that situation?

3. What if my opponent is not a Christian? "The basic principles of step three can also be applied when the other person does not profess to be a Christian...your opponent must voluntarily consent to mediation or arbitration and may need to be persuaded that the reconcilers can offer objective and helpful advice." (pgs. 191-192)

Q: What reasons would you give for not using the above steps with someone who was not a professing Christian?

D. Step Four: Tell It to the Church (Church Accountability). From my experience, few churches practice this step and when they do it is not done well. “This does not mean standing up in a worship service and broadcasting the conflict to church members and visitors alike...Instead you should inform the leadership of the other person’s church (and probably yours as well) of the problem and request their assistance in promoting justice and peace by holding both of you accountable to God’s word...the church speaks with the authority of Christ Himself when it acts pursuant to its Biblical mandate to deal with sin...The only time a Christian may properly disobey his church is when its instructions are clearly contrary to what the Scriptures teach.” (pgs. 192-193)

Q: Has your church or have you seen a church ever take this step with a member? What was the process and results?

E. Step Five: Treat Him as a Nonbeliever. Ken notes that “Jesus’ use of the word *as* is significant. Since only God can know a person’s heart, the church has no power to decide whether a person *is* a believer. Instead, the church is called only to make a functional decision: If a person behaves like a nonbeliever by disregarding the authority of Scripture and of Christ’s church, he should be treated as if he were a nonbeliever.”

“But treating others as unbelievers also means that we look for every opportunity to evangelize them...If they are behaving in a way that disrupts the peace of the church, it may be appropriate to exclude them from church property...Treating someone as a nonbeliever serves three important purposes:

1. Revoking the person’s membership in the church prevents the Lord from being dishonored if that person continues to act in blatantly sinful ways.
2. Other believers are protected from being led astray by a bad example of divisive behavior.
3. Treating someone as a nonbeliever may help the rebellious person to realize the seriousness of his or her sin, turn from it, and be restored to God.”

By ignoring this teaching, a church is not only disobeying Jesus’ specific commands, but also failing to face up to the seriousness of sin and its consequences.”

This section concludes with powerful analogy and a real life illustration of the positive impact this step can have. The analogy is that of a doctor who has diagnosed cancer in a patient. Ken stated, “Any doctor who diagnoses cancer but fails to report it to a patient would be guilty of malpractice.” (pgs. 193-196)

Activity: Take time to list areas where we are called upon by scripture to treat a fellow believer and a non-believer differently.

**II. Is It Time to Go to Court?** When you have exhausted the above steps, Ken notes that you have only a few options left.

- A. One choice would be to drop the matter and give up any claims you have against the other person.
- B. Another choice would be to try to persuade your opponent to accept some other form of alternative dispute resolution (see Appendix B).
- C. A third choice would be to file a lawsuit. Since the Bible generally prohibits Christians from suing one another, you should not file suit unless you have exhausted all other possible remedies. Ken refers back to what he wrote in Chapter 4 and also points to Appendix D on this option. (pg. 197)

Q: Have you ever had to file a lawsuit against a fellow believer? If so, what were the results?

Q: Has your church ever had to file a lawsuit? If so, what were the results?

**III. The World Needs Reconcilers!** “Perhaps God is calling you to learn how to be a reconciler. If so, reconciler training can help you develop communication, counseling, and mediation skills that you could use to guide other people through conflict.” Ken then points to the many areas of your personal life that would benefit from such training. He also points to the booklet *Guiding People through Conflict* published by Peacemaker Ministries as well as Appendix E in the book. (pgs. 197-198)

Activity: List some of the personal benefits of using the Biblical principles you have read about in this book.

Q: Once you have learned to practice those principles in your daily life, what are some of the areas in your church where you could make a positive impact?

**IV. Developing a Culture of Peace in Your Church.** Ken points to Appendix F where he provides information on how to develop a culture of peace in your church. He also lists eight characteristics of a church that has a culture of peace.

- A. Vision: Demonstrates the reconciling love and forgiveness of Christ.
- B. Training: Deliberately trains both its leaders and members.
- C. Assistance: Has in-house trained reconcilers who are available to assist members.
- D. Perseverance: Works long and hard to restore broken relationships—especially when a marriage is at stake.
- E. Accountability: Church leaders get directly involved in holding members accountable to the Word of God.
- F. Restoration: The church gladly forgives and fully restores members who have genuinely repented of serious and embarrassing sins.
- G. Stability: Relationships are valued, leaders clearly model that value, and members see the church as their home.
- H. Witness: Members are active peacemakers in their daily lives to the point that others ask why and how do you do it. (pgs. 198-199)

Activity: Review the eight characteristics and rate your church on a scale of one to ten on how well you are currently doing in each area.

Q: What can you do to help your church develop a culture of peace?

**V. Summary and Application.** “By God’s grace, most conflicts between Christians can be resolved by talking personally and privately with someone who has offended you. When personal efforts do not succeed, Jesus has given us a simple yet effective process for involving other people who can promote understanding and agreement.”

The chapter closes with some excellent processing questions. (pgs. 199-200)

## **Part IV: Go and Be Reconciled**

The real life story Ken shares at the opening of part four is about a husband who can’t forgive his wife for an affair she had, even though she has expressed deep regret and begged for forgiveness. Ken told the husband their marriage couldn’t be restored “with the empty forgiveness he had offered his wife.” Ken continued, “Imagine that you had just confessed a serious sin to God, and for the first time in your life He spoke to you audibly: ‘I forgive you, but I can’t ever be close to you again.’ How would you feel?”

The husband countered, “I know I *should* forgive her...but I can’t imagine forgetting what she did! And I just don’t feel like I could ever be close to her again.” Ken’s response was, “Hold on, where in the Bible does it say that forgiveness is forgetting? Or that it depends on feelings? Forgiveness is a choice, a decision you make by God’s grace in spite of your feelings.” Ken summarized the situation by stating, “Although they would spend many hours of pastoral counseling to address the root causes of their marital problems, forgiveness had cleared a path through the rubble of the past. By God’s grace, they could now deal with those problems in a way that could result in a completely restored marriage and a powerful testimony to the reconciling power of Jesus Christ.” (pgs. 201-203)

Q: Think about a recent conflict you had with someone. Is your forgiveness of that individual “empty” or does it reflect the forgiveness that God has given you?

Q: How would you describe the issues of “forgetting” and “your feelings” in the forgiveness process?

## **Chapter 10: Forgive as God Forgave You**

Christians are the most forgiven people in the world. Therefore, we should be the most forgiving people in the world...however, we often find ourselves practicing a form of forgiveness that is neither Biblical nor healing...As Christians, we cannot overlook the direct relationship between God’s forgiveness [of us] and our forgiveness [of others].”

**I. You Cannot Do It Alone.** “It is impossible to truly forgive others in your own strength, especially when they have hurt you deeply or betrayed your trust...there is only one way to

overcome [this], and that is to admit that you cannot forgive in your own strength and that you desperately need God to come in and change your heart.” God’s word warns us that unforgiveness will eat away at our soul and build a wall between us and God. “As we receive and depend on His grace to [forgive] us, we can breathe out the grace of forgiveness to others.” (pgs. 204-206)

Q: In what ways are you currently trying to fight through forgiveness on your own?

**II. Neither a Feeling, nor Forgetting, nor Excusing.** Ken writes that forgiveness is an act of the will which involves a series of decisions...

- A. Calling on God to Change Your Heart. We must choose to call on God to change our hearts regardless of our feelings
- B. Choosing to not remind yourself and others. “Forgetting is a *passive* process in which a matter fades from memory merely with the passing of time. Forgiving is an *active* process; it involves a conscious choice and a deliberate course of action...when God says that He ‘remembers your sins no more,’ He is not saying that He *cannot* remember our sins. Rather, He is promising that He *will not* remember them.”
- C. Forgiving is not choosing to excuse a wrong. “Forgiving is the opposite of excusing. The very fact that forgiveness is needed and granted indicates that what someone did was wrong and inexcusable.” (pgs. 206-207)

Q: How do you respond to Ken’s description of forgiveness as a series of decisions?

Q: Can you describe a time when you chose to forgive using Ken’s three pronged decision process? What did that look like?

**III. Forgiveness Is a Decision.** Ken opens this section with a joke—I’ve often said it is easier to communicate hard things if we say things in a way that makes people laugh. “A woman went to her pastor for advice on improving her marriage. When the pastor asked what her greatest complaint was, she replied, ‘Every time we get in a fight, my husband gets *historical.*’ When her pastor said, ‘You must mean *hysterical,*’ she responded, ‘I mean exactly what I said; he keeps a mental record of everything I’ve done wrong, and whenever he’s mad, I get a history lesson!’”

Ken then does a deep dive into scripture by noting that, “*Aphiemi*, a Greek word that is often translated as “forgive,” means to let go, release, or remit. It often refers to debts that have been paid or cancelled in full. *Charizomai*, another word for “forgive” means to bestow favor freely or unconditionally. This word shows that forgiveness is undeserved and cannot be earned...When someone sins, they create a debt, and someone must pay it. Most of this debt is owed to God...But if someone sinned against you, part of their debt is also owed to you.” Ken points out that we have two options for clearing that debt.

- A. We can continually seek payment from others. But Ken points out the reality that unforgiveness and retribution exacts a high price: “Unforgiveness is the poison we drink hoping others will die.”
- B. We can choose to release the debt owed to us. That debt is not always released in a single decision. Over time we will have to...

1. Fight against painful memories.
2. Speak gracious words when it isn't easy.
3. Work to tear down walls and be vulnerable when there are still trust issues.
4. Endure the consequences of a material or physical injury that the other person is unable or unwilling to repair.

“Forgiveness can be costly, but if you believe in Jesus, you have more than enough to make these payments...As you draw on that grace through faith day by day, you will find that you have all that you need to make the payments of forgiveness for those who have wronged you...Therefore, forgiveness may be described as a decision to make four promises:

- 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.

Ken points out that his wife, Corlette, summarized these four points in a little poem she includes in her children's curriculum entitled *The Young Peacemaker*.

Good thoughts,  
Hurt you not.  
Gossip never,  
Friends forever.

Having worked with churches in a consultant role for over thirty years, a pattern I have observed is that many church members who are wounded by conflict leave the church. Instead of running to a source of comfort they run from it. As you read how Ken uses his wife's poem imagine a loving God and church emphasizing peacemaking react in the same manner.

“Whenever I need to forgive my children for something they have done, I pull them onto my lap, put my arms around them, and remind them of the forgiveness we all have in Christ, which enables me to forgive them. Then I recite Corlette's poem to them. As I say the final words, I pull them close, give them a tight hug, and whisper ‘Friends forever’ softly in their ears. I want them to know that no matter what they have done wrong, Jesus has opened the way for a complete restoration of our relationship. I want them to run quickly to me when they have done something wrong, instead of running away from me out of fear of punishment.”

“Many people have never understood or experienced this kind of forgiveness. As a result, even when they hear the words ‘I forgive you,’ they continue to struggle with feelings of guilt and estrangement.” (pgs. 207-210)

Activity: There is a lot to unpack into this section. Take time to discuss Ken's points with your spouse, a close friend, or your small group. Then answer the following questions.

Q: Have you ever thought about God's forgiveness of you as a decision He made? How does it make you feel to know that God chose to forgive YOU?

Q: Reflect upon Ken’s graphic statement, “Unforgiveness is the poison we drink hoping others will die.” How much poison are you ingesting every day?

Q: Have you ever felt forgiven by someone in the way Ken describes forgiveness in this section? Describe how that felt.

Q: Have you ever forgiven someone in the way Ken describes forgiveness in this section? Describe how that felt.

**IV. When Should You Forgive?** “Ideally, repentance should precede forgiveness...When an offense is too serious to overlook and the offender has not yet repented, you may need to approach forgiveness as a two stage process.

A. Stage One: Develop an attitude of forgiveness. “Having an attitude of forgiveness is unconditional and is a commitment you make to God. By His grace, you seek to maintain a loving and merciful attitude toward someone who has offended you. This requires making and living out the first promise of forgiveness:” to not dwell on the incident (see top of page 55).

B. Stage Two: Grant forgiveness. This is conditional and based on the repentance of the offender and takes place between you and that person. “When there has been a serious offense, it would not be appropriate to make the other three promises of forgiveness (see top of page 55) until the offender has repented (see Chapter 6).

Ken does a beautiful job of pointing out how God in Christ demonstrated the first promise when He said from the cross, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” Then at Pentecost God’s Spirit convicted three thousand people who repented of their sin and received God’s forgiveness. Thus God fulfilled the four promises of forgiveness. Ken concludes by stating, “This is exactly the pattern you should follow, ‘forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (Eph. 4:32).” (pgs. 210-211)

Q: How often have you declared “I forgive you,” which granted forgiveness, without hearing an apology?

Q: What are the consequences to declaring forgiveness when there has been no repentance?

Q: How does the idea of God’s willingness to forgive people of their sin clash with someone’s unwillingness to acknowledge their sin and repent?

**V. Can You Ever Mention the Sin Again?** “The four promises are a human attempt to summarize the key elements of God’s marvelous forgiveness for us. As a human device, they are limited and imperfect and should not be used in a rigid or mechanical fashion. In particular, the commitment not to bring up the offense again and use it against the offender should not be used to prevent you from dealing honestly and realistically with a recurring pattern of sin. For example, you may know someone who has a problem with repeatedly losing his temper...For his sake, you may need to help him see that he is caught in an ongoing pattern of sin, which calls for counseling...Be careful, however, not to let this

thinking become an excuse to brush the second promise aside and automatically bring up other's past wrongs to bolster your case against them." (Pgs. 211-212)

As in many areas of life, we need to seek a balance between being rigid in principle and willing to be flexible in application. With the clarity God can provide us through the passing of time, spiritual maturity, and honest, humble reflection...

Q: Describe a situation when you were too rigid in principle.

Q: Describe a time when you were too flexible in application.

Q: Describe a situation when you were able to find the right balance.

**VI. What about the Consequences.** "Forgiveness does not automatically release a wrongdoer from all the consequences of sin...When God does allow certain consequences to remain, it is always to teach us and others not to sin again...Following God's example, you should remove any walls that stand between you and a repentant wrongdoer. It may also be appropriate to relieve that person from at least some of the consequences of his or her sin...On the other hand, there may be times when you forgive someone but cannot afford to absorb the consequences of such wrongdoing. Or, even if you could bear the cost, doing so may not be the wisest and most loving thing for an offender, especially one caught in a pattern of irresponsibility or misconduct. As Proverbs 19:19 warns, 'A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again.'" (pgs. 212.-213)

Q: Describe a time when you had to face the consequences of your sin. How has that situation kept you from making similar mistakes?

**VII. Overcoming Unforgiveness.** "For those times when we need extra help, He provides counsel and encouragement through pastors and fellow believers. As you draw on these resources, there are several steps you can take to overcome unforgiveness."

- A. Confirm Repentance. "It can be difficult to forgive a person who has failed to repair and confess clearly and specifically. When you find yourself in this situation, it may be wise to explain to the person who wronged you why you are having a difficult time forgiving." As Ken has done so often, he provides a fitting personal illustration.
- B. Renounce Sinful Attitudes and Expectations. "Either consciously or unconsciously, many of us withhold forgiveness because we believe the offender must earn or deserve our forgiveness or because we want to punish others or make them suffer. We may also withhold forgiveness because we want a guarantee that such an offense will never occur again." Having pointed out our human reactions, Ken then points to how God treats us:
- There is no way we can earn or deserve God's forgiveness.
  - God does not withhold forgiveness in order to further punish people who have repented.
  - God demands no guarantee from us regarding our future conduct.

If someone has expressed repentance but continues to behave in a hurtful manner, it may be appropriate to talk with the offender about *present* conduct. A pattern of sinful behavior may need to be addressed repeatedly before it is successfully overcome.

- C. Assess Your Contributions to the Problem. A statement I have often used in this area is “Own your part, even if it’s only 1%.” Ken says it this way: “Even if you did not start the dispute, your lack of understanding, careless words, impatience, or failure to respond in a loving manner may have aggravated the situation...Remembering your faults usually makes it easier to forgive others for theirs.”
- D. Recognize That God Is Working for Good. “When you are having a hard time forgiving that person, take time to note how God may be using the offense for good...How can you serve other and help them grow in their faith?...When you perceive that the person who has wronged you is being used as an instrument in God’s hand to help you mature, serve others, and glorify Him, it may be easier for you to move ahead with forgiveness.
- E. Remember God’s Forgiveness. “The parable of the unmerciful servant vividly illustrates this principle (Matt. 18:21-35)...This parable illustrates an attitude that is all too common among Christians. We take God’s forgiveness for granted, while we stubbornly withhold our forgiveness from others.”

Activity: Ken then suggests the following activity.

- Make a list of some of the sins for which God has forgiven you. In particular, ask yourself whether you have ever treated God or others the same way you have been treated by the person you are trying to forgive.
- Take a long look at this list and remind yourself what you deserve from God because of your sins.
- Then rejoice in the wonderful promise of Psalm 103:8-11: “The Lord is compassionate and gracious slow to anger, abounding in love...He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him.”

- F. Draw on God’s Strength. “True forgiveness depends on God’s grace. If you try to forgive others on your own, you are in for a long and frustrating battle. But if you ask God to change your heart and you continually rely on His grace, you can forgive even the most painful offenses.” Ken closes this segment with the powerful illustration of Corrie ten Boom’s encounter with a former concentration camp guard.
- G. Reconciliation and the Replacement Principle. “Forgiveness is both an event and a process. Making the four promises of forgiveness (see top of page 55) is an event that knocks down a wall that stands between you and a person who has wronged you. Then a process begins. After you demolish an obstruction, you usually have to clear away debris and do repair work. The Bible calls this “reconciliation,” a process involving a change of attitude that leads to a change in the relationship. More specifically, to be reconciled means to replace hostility and separation with peace and friendship.”

“Reconciliation requires that you give a repentant person an opportunity to demonstrate repentance and regain your trust...Although reconciliation can sometimes take place with little or no special effort, in most cases you will need to remember the saying, ‘If you are coasting, you must be going downhill.’ In other words, unless a deliberate effort is made to restore and strengthen a relationship, it will generally deteriorate.” Ken suggests that we pursue reconciliation at three different levels:

1. *In Thought.* Ken again uses a powerful personal example to share how he learned what he calls the *replacement principle*. “It is very difficult simply to stop thinking about an unpleasant experience. Instead, we must replace negative thoughts and memories with positive ones.”
2. *In Word.* Luke 6:27-28 records Jesus’ teaching in this area. “But I tell you who hear Me; Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” Ken then states that this verse “implies that the replacement principle applies to our words as well as our thoughts...As you verbally reaffirm your friendship and sincerely build up the other person, both of you should experience improved attitudes and feelings.”
3. *In Deed.* “If you really want to be reconciled to someone, apply the replacement principle to your actions as well (I John 3:18). As C. S. Lewis noted, ‘Don’t waste time bothering whether you *love* you neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love them.’” Ken ends the section with another personal illustration and a great historical example. (pgs. 213-223)

Q: Think of a situation you have today where you are struggling to forgive someone. Which of the Ken’s seven steps do you think you’re doing well?

Q: In that same situation, which of the Ken’s seven steps do you need to apply and what will that look like for you?

**VIII. Summary and Application.** “By thought, word, and deed, you can demonstrate forgiveness and rebuild relationships with people who have offended you...By the grace of God you can forgive as the Lord forgave you.” The chapter ends with another set of questions (pgs. 223-224).

## **Chapter 11: Look Also to the Interests of Others**

“So far we have focused primarily on how to resolve the personal issues that can arise during a conflict. As we all know, however conflict may also involve material issues.” In this chapter Ken defines and then describes five principles of a cooperative negotiation process.

- I. **Cooperation versus Competitive Negotiation.** “Many people automatically resort to a competitive style when negotiating material issues...Although this approach may be appropriate when prompt results are needed or when someone is defending important moral principles, it has three inherent weaknesses.”
  - A. A competitive approach often fails to produce the best possible solution to a problem. “When people work against each other, they tend to focus on surface issues and neglect underlying desires and needs...this attitude discourages the openness and flexibility needed to develop creative and comprehensive solutions.”
  - B. Competitive negotiation can also be quite ineffective. The give and take in this process can consume a great deal of time and generate significant frustration.

- C. Competitive negotiating can significantly damage personal relationships. When you focus on material issues rather than personal concerns, perceptions, feelings, and reestablishing relational health takes a back seat.

Ken states that “cooperative negotiation is highly commended by Scripture, which repeatedly commands us to have an active concern for the needs and well-being of others.” Then he backs up his statement up with several scriptures ending with Jesus’ statement in Matt. 10:16 that we are to be “as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” His counsel is that “after gathering all the relevant information and exploring creative options, a wise person works toward solutions that honor God and provide lasting benefits to as many people as possible.” (pgs. 226-227)

Q: Would you describe your normal style of resolving conflict as being cooperative or competitive, and why?

**II. The Cooperative Negotiation Process.** “When you need to negotiate, PAUSE. This acronym stands for the following five step process: Prepare, Affirm Relationships, Understand Interests, Search for Creative Solutions, and Evaluate Options Objectively and Reasonably.

A. Prepare. Ken lists several activities that can get you prepared.

1. *Pray.*
2. *Get the Facts.*
3. *Identify Issues and Interests.*
4. *Study the Bible.*
5. *Develop Options.*
6. *Anticipate Reactions.*
7. *Plan an Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement.*
8. *Select an Appropriate Time and Place to Talk.*
9. *Plan Your Opening Remarks.*
10. *Seek Counsel.*

Then Ken describes in detail a real life conflict which he uses throughout the chapter to describe in detail how a couple used the PAUSE process to resolve an issue they were having with one of their neighbors.

Q: Abraham Lincoln stated, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.” In general, how much time do you prepare for significant tasks?

Q: If you truly value relationships, how much time are you willing to spend in preparing for a major encounter that will impact the future of a relationship?

Activity: Think of a major issue you are currently having with someone, or if all is peaceful, praise God and then think of a recent conflict you had. Then as Ken describes the following steps write out how you can use Ken’s advice in your current situation or how you should have used Ken’s advice in the past.

B. Affirm Relationships. “A conflict generally involves two basic ingredients: people and a problem. All too often, we ignore the feelings and concerns of the people and focus all our attention on the problems that separate us. This approach often causes further offense and alienation, which only makes conflicts more difficult to resolve. One way to avoid these unnecessary complications is to affirm your respect and concern for your opponent throughout the negotiation process...[but] affirming words must be backed up with comparable actions.” Ken then lists several ways to demonstrate concern and respect during the negotiation process.

1. *Communicate in a Courteous Manner.*
2. *Spend Time on Personal Issues.*
3. *Submit to Authorities.*
4. *Earnestly Seek to Understand.*
5. *Look out for the Interests of Others.*
6. *Address Sin in a Gracious Manner.*
7. *Allow Face-Saving.*
8. *Give Praise and Thanks.*

Ken returns to his illustration and describes how the couple affirmed their desire to sustain a good relationship with their neighbor.

Q: How can you affirm your relationship in your current situation or how could your previous conflict situation have been resolved if you would have affirmed your relationship?

C. Understand Interests. Remember, Ken is a lawyer, so definition of terms and specific use of those terms is important. “In order to identify interests, it is important to understand how they differ from issues and positions. An *issue* is an identifiable and concrete question that must be addressed in order to reach an agreement...A *position* is a desired outcome or a definable perspective on an issue...A *position* is what motivates people. It is a concern, desire, need, limitation, or something of personal values...positions are frequently incompatible...While interests may sometimes clash, in many situations the parties’ primary interests are surprisingly compatible...Therefore, when people focus on interests rather than positions, it is usually easier to develop acceptable solutions.”

Ken then provides an excellent Biblical example: the story of David, Nabal, and Abigail found in I Samuel 25. He then states, “Before you attempt to understand the interests of other people, it is wise to make a written list of your own interests. Remembering the three opportunities provided by conflict, you might begin by listing interests related to glorifying God, serving others, and growing to be like Christ (see pages 8-9 of this summary).

The section closes as Ken returns to the example he has used throughout the chapter. It provides a very thorough list of personal interests in four specific areas that the couple developed for how to approach their neighbors:

- Personal interests that are confidential for now.
  - Personal interests we should reveal.
  - Interests our neighbors may have that may be mentioned when it seems appropriate.
  - Interest our neighbors may have that we should be sensitive to but should not mention.
- (pgs. 234-240)

Q: How can you differentiate interests, from issues and positions in your current situation or how could your previous conflict situation have been better resolved if you would have had greater clarity in these three areas?

D. Search for Creative Solutions. “This process should begin with spontaneous inventing. Everyone should be encouraged to mention *any* idea that comes to mind. Imagination and creativity should be encouraged, while evaluating and deciding should be postponed...The best solution may involve a combination of several options, so feel free to use parts of several ideas to form a variety of choices.” I have personally used this process in several settings and it is an effective tool for thinking outside the box. I call it “popcorning” as you blurt out whatever option pops into your head—as Ken suggested, don’t spend time evaluating each thought, just write them down. Ken returns to his example revealing some unique solutions that they developed. (pgs. 240-242)

Q: How can you use the idea of seeking creative solutions in your current situation or how could your previous conflict situation have been better resolved if you would have taken time to discuss creative solutions to your primary issues?

E. Evaluate Options Objectively and Reasonably. “Even if the previous steps have gone well, you may encounter significant differences of opinion when you get to this stage. If you allow negotiations to degenerate into a battle of wills, your previous work will have been wasted...insist on using objective criteria to evaluate the options before you.”

Ken provides another great Biblical example: The cooperative negotiations that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah had with their chief about their diet (Daniel 1). He then reminds us to use objective criteria and to make every effort to negotiate in a reasonable manner. “If your evaluations result in an agreement, it is often wise to put it in writing. This will help to prevent misunderstandings and subsequent disputes on the details. At the very least, your agreement should cover these items:

- What issues were resolved?
- What actions will be taken?
- Who is responsible for each action?
- Dates by which each action should be completed.
- When and how the results of the agreement will be reviewed?

Ken closes the section by returning to his real life example. (pgs. 242-245)

Q: How would you describe the benefits of taking time to PAUSE?

Q: Which part of the PAUSE process will come most naturally to you and why?

Q: Which part of the PAUSE process will be the most difficult and who could help you to do a better job in that area?

**III. Summary and Application.** “If approached properly, many people will respond favorably to cooperative negotiation, which can allow you to find mutually beneficial solutions to common problems.” Ken closes with some more processing questions. (pgs. 245-246)

## **Chapter 12: Overcome Evil with Good**

“Peacemaking does not always go as easily as we would like it to. Although some people will readily make peace, others will be stubborn and defensive and resist our efforts to be reconciled. Sometimes they will become even more antagonistic and find new ways to frustrate or mistreat us. Our natural reaction is to strike back at such people, or at least to stop doing anything good to them...Jesus calls us to take a remarkably different course of action...‘love your enemies, do good to those who hate you...be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.’ (Luke 6:27-28 & 35-36)...From a worldly perspective, this approach seems naïve and appears to concede defeat.”

“Paul realized that a true peacemaker is guided, motivated, and empowered by his or her identity in Christ...Paul also understood that God has given us divine weapons...[which] include Scripture, prayer, truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Ken includes I Cor. 10:3-5 which describes how Paul responded when he was subjected to intense and repeated personal attacks. He also includes Romans 12:14-21 which Ken refers to several times in the chapter. Regarding the Romans passage, Ken notes, “This passage shows that Paul understood the classic military principle that the best defense is an effective offense...[it also] indicates there are five basic principles that contribute to a victorious offensive campaign.

### **I. A Victorious Offensive Strategy.**

- A. Control Your Tongue. “The more intense a dispute becomes, the more important it is to control your tongue...you may be sorely tempted to indulge in gossip, slander, and reckless words, especially if your opponent is saying critical things about you...make every effort to breathe grace by saying only what is both true and helpful.”
- B. Seek Godly Advisors. “As Paul says, it is difficult to battle evil alone (Rom. 12:15-16)...It is important to develop relationships with people who will encourage you and give you Biblically sound advice. These friends should also be willing to correct and admonish you when they see that you are in the wrong...One of the best ways to avoid straying from the Lord is to surround yourself with wise and spiritually mature people who will encourage you to stay on a Biblical course even when the going is tough.”
- C. Keep Doing What is Right. Ken paraphrases Rom. 12:17 by stating, Paul tells us to “plan and act so carefully and so properly that any reasonable person who is watching you will eventually acknowledge that what you did was right.” He then points to Peter’s similar statement: “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us” (I Pet. 2:12). Ken then reminds us of one of two situations where David had an opportunity to do harm to Saul, but he chose to respond in love (I Sam. 2). He then closes the section with another powerful real-life example of a husband who continued to demonstrate love towards his wife even after she divorced him and moved in with her high school sweetheart.
- D. Recognize Your Limits. “Even when you continue to do what is right, some people may adamantly refuse to admit you are right or to live at peace with you...remember that you cannot force others to do what is right. If you have done everything within your power to resolve a conflict, you have fulfilled your responsibility to God and may stop actively trying

to solve the problem...it is not necessary or wise to waste time, energy, and resources fretting about someone who stubbornly refuses to be reconciled.”

“God defines success in terms of faithful obedience to His will...‘Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man’ (Ecc. 12:13b)...Instead of taking justice into your own hand, respect and cooperate with God’s methods for dealing with people who persist in doing wrong...In some cases, all you are to do is wait for God to deal with people in His own way...Although His results may come more slowly than you desire, they will always be better than anything you could bring about on your own.”

- E. Use the Ultimate Weapon. Returning to Rom. 12:20-21, Ken states that “the ultimate weapon [is] *deliberate, focused love*...actively loving an enemy will protect you from being spiritually defeated by anger, bitterness, and thirst for revenge.” Ken provides the powerful historical example of Ernest Gordon who was a Japanese prisoner of war during WWII. He then notes that, “Most of us will never be subjected to this kind of abuse or have to reach across so great a chasm to love those who have wronged us. Therefore we need to keep stories like Ernest Gordon’s and Corrie ten Boom’s in mind when we are challenged with loving an enemy.”

Before he closes the section, Ken provides another personal example that helps illustrate his point. For preachers, I would suggest that this chapter would make an excellent sermon. And in sermonic fashion Ken’s closing words are “There is such wisdom and power in these simple words: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty, give him something to drink...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.’” (pgs. 247-256)

On a personal note, I recently had to “recognize my limits” in a very difficult situation. I had read this book, was seeking to apply Ken’s wisdom, and was about half way through writing this discussion summary when I acknowledged that it was time to cease striving and know that He is God (Ps 46:10). I stepped back and disengaged from the reconciliation process which was spiraling in the wrong direction. I continue to pray for the situation, but it doesn’t consume me. The experience has helped me to more consistently respond to difficult situations by simply “letting go and letting God be God.” This final chapter speaks to just such situations.

Q: Describe a time when you had to “let go and let God” take total control. How did it feel after you made that difficult decision?

Q: Is there a situation you are facing today where you need to respond to a conflict by stepping back and responding in love to someone who is acting unkindly towards you? What will that require of you?

**II. Summary and Application.** “The principles described in Romans 12:14-21 are applicable at every stage of a conflict, and they are echoed throughout the Bible—‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ‘Do to other what you would have them do to you.’ ‘Overlook an offense.’ ‘If someone is caught in a sin, restore him gently.’ ‘Speak the truth in love.’ ‘Look out for the interests of others.’ ‘Forgive as the Lord forgave you.’ ‘Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.’” The chapter concludes with more excellent questions. (pgs. 256-257)

## **Conclusion**

“Peacemaking can involve a wide variety of activities, all of which may be summarized in four basic principles drawn directly from Scripture. Taken together, these principles could be called “The Peacemaker’s Pledge.”

- A. Glorify God.
- B. Get the Log Out of Your Own Eye.
- C. Gently Restore.
- D. Go and Be Reconciled.

“This pledge is available in a brochure that also contains the Slippery Slope diagram [pg. 5 in this summary], the Seven A’s of Confession [pgs. 34-35 in this summary], the Four Promises of Forgiveness [pg. 55 in this summary], and the PAUSE Principle of Negotiation [pgs. 60-62 in this summary].” Ken suggests that the pledge can be used in three ways:

- A. Use It as a Personal Commitment and Guide.
- B. Use It as a Teaching Tool to Help Others.
- C. Use It as a Standard for Conflict Resolution in Your Church, Ministry, or Business. (pgs. 259-261)

If you’ve made it this far, you have been deeply challenged. I pray that you are learning to use the Biblical principles and teachings that Ken has highlighted for us. He has provided a lot of practical application tools and a host of real life examples.

Activity: Take a few minutes and review the Slippery Slope, Seven A’s of Confession, Four Promises of Forgiveness, and the PAUSE Principle of Negotiation. Then with the broader perspective you have gained by reading and processing this book, take time to pray through the Peacemaker Pledge and note specific ways you can apply these principles in the three areas Ken mentions:

- A. How Will I Use It as a Personal Commitment and Guide?
- B. How Will I Use It as a Teaching Tool to Help Others?
- C. How Will I Use It as a Standard for Conflict Resolution in My Church, Ministry, or Business?

## **Appendix A: A Peacemaker’s Checklist.**

If you struggled with the Activity in the previous section, this Appendix is crammed full of great ideas. (pgs. 263-269)

## **Appendix B: Alternative Ways to Resolve Disputes.**

“Since the early ‘80s, a great deal of attention has been devoted to developing alternative ways to settle conflicts. In this appendix, I will describe and compare several of the more common dispute resolution processes.” Remember, Ken is an attorney and these are formal definitions of

the five processes he mentions. In this summary, I will simply provide the basic definition. We have talked about each of these at some point in this summary.

- A. Negotiation. A personal bargaining process in which parties seek to reach a mutually agreeable settlement of their substantive differences.
- B. Mediation. This is similar to negotiation, except that it involves the assistance of one or more neutral mediators who work to facilitate communication and understanding between the parties.
- C. Arbitration. The parties agree to present each side of their dispute before one or more neutral arbitrators, and in most cases, to be legally bound by their decision.
- D. Litigation. This process involves lawyers, judges, juries, and procedural rules of the civil court system to settle disputed issues.
- E. Christian Conciliation. This process uses a Biblically faithful method and principles to settle disputed issues. This is the process described and recommended throughout the book. (pgs. 270-275)

### **Appendix C: Principles of Restitution**

“Restitution is an important Biblical concept. When a person has injured someone else, God says that he ‘must confess the sin he has committed...[and] make full restitution for his wrong’ (Num. 5:7).” In this appendix, Ken lays out the Biblical command and process for restitution. (pgs. 276-277)

### **Appendix D: When Is It Right to Go to Court?**

“First Corinthians 6:1-8 specifically limits a Christian’s freedom to sue another Christian in civil court. There is significant confusion regarding the intent of this passage and the extent of its limitation.” I ran into some of that confusion a few years ago when I was in the room when the head of a major Christian entity rationalized that it was okay for his organization to sue a fellow Christian because they were not an individual but a corporation. Was he right or was he rationalizing their action? In this appendix, Ken deals in depth with the central issues in this passage and how they should be applied in real life. In this summary, I will only do a simple overview. If you, your church, or a friend is considering taking an issue to court, let me suggest you prayerfully and carefully read this appendix.

- A. Does I Corinthians 6 Apply Only to Scandalous Lawsuits? “Some people argue that I Cor. 6 applies only to lawsuits that deal with such scandalous issues that the publicity would necessarily hurt the reputation and witness of the church.” Ken quickly points to James 4:1-3 where the source of conflict is clearly identified as sin. Then he notes, “Civil courts can make rulings on legal and property issues, but they have no jurisdiction or ability to address sin or other matter of the heart.”
- B. To Whom Does I Corinthians 6 Apply? There are three common views:
  - 1. *It prohibits lawsuits against both Christians and non-Christians.*

2. *It forbids any and all lawsuits between people who profess to be Christians.*
  3. *It forbids Christians to sue persons who are members in good standing of a Christian church that is faithful to Scripture.*
- C. Exhausting Church Remedies. In this and the following section, Ken lays out three conditions that he believes must be met before someone considers a civil suit. This section speaks to the responsibility of the individual, his church, and the church of his opponent.
- D. Two Additional Conditions.
1. *Are the rights you are seeking to enforce Biblically legitimate?*
  2. *Would a civil suit have a righteous purpose?*
    - a. Would it advance God’s kingdom? For example promote justice or provide a positive Christian witness.
    - b. Benefit your opponent? For example force them to bear the consequences of wrong behavior.
    - c. Enhance your ability to know and serve Christ? For example preserve rights and resources needed to minister to others.
- E. Who Has Jurisdiction? “Jurisdiction means the right or authority to interpret and apply the law...the church has jurisdiction over sinful acts and attitudes...God has given civil government jurisdiction over the way people interact with one another in society. Government has jurisdiction over criminal acts.”
- F. Unusual Situations. “Since the church does not have jurisdiction over civil government or corporate organizations, it is appropriate to resolve disputes with these types of bodies in court, assuming you cannot arrive at a solution through personal and informal means. The same would be true of disputes involving insurance coverage.”
- G. What if Someone Sues You? “The three conditions for filing a lawsuit (sections C and D above) apply equally well to defending yourself in a lawsuit.”
- H. Summary. “Jesus warned it is important not to get caught up in a multitude of detailed and legalistic rules. Instead, you should pay attention to the basic principles set forth in Scripture and focus on what our Lord called ‘the more important matters of law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness’ (Matt. 23:23, Micah 6:8).” (pgs. 279-286)

## **Appendix E: From Peacemaking to Relational Wisdom**

After spending thirty years focusing on *resolving* conflict, Ken states that in 2012 he shifted his focus to *preventing* conflict. The set of skills necessary to prevent conflict he calls “Relational Wisdom.” He defines it as “your ability to *discern* emotions, interests, and abilities in yourself and others, to *interpret* them in the light of God’s Word, and to use this insight to *manage* your responses and relationships successfully.” Ken states that, “The Bible’s teaching on relational wisdom can be organized in terms of six core skills or disciplines that are grouped into three pairs. One pair focuses on how we relate to *God*, another on how we relate to *ourselves*, and the third on how we relate to *others*.” He provides the graphic on the next page and then states, “Each pair has an *awareness* component (what we understand) and an *engaging* component (what we do and say).”

“The better we know and follow God, the more we will know and discipline ourselves, which opens the way for us to better understand, relate to, and serve our neighbors... Thus, relational wisdom is a set of interrelated skills that continually fuel one another.” (pgs. 287-288)



One of the greatest limiting factors I have observed in Christian leaders is a lack of self-awareness. Ken’s *Relational Wisdom 360* places that problem at the lack of awareness and understanding of what it means to stand at the foot of the Cross where God demonstrated His love, power, and grace to all creation. We are nothing without Him, but with Him and through Him we can become all things to all men that by all means we might see some come to a saving knowledge of God through the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

## **Appendix F: Cultivating a Culture of Peace in Your Church**

- A. A Culture of Peace. Ken points to the promise in James 3:18—“Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.” Then he states that the “harvest James referred to involves a wide variety of relational fruit.” After listing many of the benefits, he acknowledges two realities: the benefits don’t suddenly appear nor are they present all the time. “Our sin continually works against a culture of peace. Even Paul and Barnabas had a falling out.” He then mentions that “One of the greatest benefits of resolving conflicts biblically is that outreach and evangelism are enhanced.” (pgs. 289-290)
- B. Leading a Cultural Transformation. Ken points to his experience of seeing churches change and observes that the pastors played a key role through preaching and personal example. At the same time, they widely delegated most of the day-to-day educational and reconciliation work to gifted people in their congregation. He then describes five levels of peacemaking productivity.
- Level 1—*A Culture of Disbelief:* People lack practical training in resolving conflict and doubt that the church can do much to help them resolve their differences.
- Level 2—*A Culture of Faith:* People begin to understand God’s peacemaking commands and promises and to believe that His ways will work in today’s culture.
- Level 3—*A Culture of Transformation:* People want to put off worldly ways of resolving conflict and are taking steps to learn how to respond to conflict Biblically.
- Level 4—*A Culture of Peace:* People are eager and able to resolve conflict and reconcile relationships in a way that clearly reflects the love and power of Jesus Christ.
- Level 5—*A Culture of Multiplication:* People delight in expanding God’s kingdom by showing other people and churches how they too can be peacemakers. (pgs. 290-291)

Having been involved in church revitalization for forty years, I can give his description of churches at various levels of spiritual health a hearty “AMEN!”

- C. The Characteristics of a Cultural Peace. “A church that has a culture of peace usually has eight essential characteristics:
1. *Vision:* It is eager to bring glory to God by demonstrating the reconciling love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

2. *Training*: It knows that peacemaking does not come naturally, so it deliberately trains both its leaders and its members.
  3. *Assistance*: It is prepared to assist members through trained reconcilers.
  4. *Perseverance*: It works long and hard to restore broken relationships.
  5. *Accountability*: It is prepared to hold people accountable if they are unwilling to listen to private correction.
  6. *Restoration*: It is willing to imitate God's amazing mercy and grace when members have demonstrated genuine repentance.
  7. *Stability*: It values relationships and affirms long-term service of leaders and members.
  8. *Witness*: It has members who practice peacemaking in their day-to-day lives. (pgs. 291-292)
- D. How to Transform a Church Culture. "Peacemaking is an attitude expressed through action. The heart of his attitude is the joy and thankfulness that come from fully understanding the gospel (Phil. 4:4)" I would remind you that this verse was written specifically for a church who had two members who were at odds with each other. "In order to build a culture of peace, a church must do both pruning and cultivating. It must help its people put off worldly ways of resolving conflict and put on peacemaking attitudes and actions that mirror our reconciliation with God." To cultivate the characteristics mentioned in section C, Ken says it involves five essential activities:
1. *Gain support from church leadership*. The pastor(s) must see peacemaking as vital to the church's well being and not just one of many ministries.
  2. *Form a core support group*. Enlist a team that will be responsible for guiding educational and reconciliation activities.
  3. *Educate the entire congregation in peacemaking*. A good way to do that is to have a sermon series and then use the church's small groups to dive more deeply in the Biblical principles of peacemaking.
  4. *Train gifted people within your congregation to become reconcilers*. Identify those God has uniquely gifted to serve as reconcilers and provide ongoing training for them.
  5. *Upgrade your church's organizational documents to support peacemaking and reduce legal liability*. Upgrade the church's documents to adopt policies for counseling, confidentiality, conflict resolution, and church accountability.
- "Some churches can make substantial progress in all five of these areas in two years. Others will take four or five years to overcome deeply ingrained attitudes and traditions...Relational Wisdom 360 has developed comprehensive resources and guidelines that will help your church implement each of these five steps." (pgs. 292 -295)
- E. The "Level 5 Church"—A Culture of Multiplication. "With many blessings comes great responsibility. God has given the church a unique and precious talent: the power and ability to bring peace, unity, and reconciliation to a broken and conflicted world. Sadly, many churches have been afraid to use this talent...How can your church produce the maximum harvest with the peacemaking talents God has given you?...The following are ways that many churches are already doing this:"
1. *Equip and encourage members to carry peacemaking into everyday life*.
  2. *Teach peacemaking to children*.
  3. *Send peacemakers with mission teams*.
  4. *Develop a church-based reconciliation ministry*.
  5. *Share your experience with other churches in your community or denomination*.
  6. *Plant new churches that have peacemaking as part of their original 'DNA'*. (pgs.295-296)
- F. It Can Start Today with You. "All it takes is one person who hears the call of God and responds, 'Here am I. Send me!' (Isa. 6:8). Perhaps for your church, that person is you. Please pray about it and reflect on the Scriptures given above. Ask God to give you a longing to see a culture of peace in your church that reflects the love and power of His son. If He gives you that longing, hard work awaits you, but great blessing is also in store, for Jesus' promise in Matt. 5 is absolutely dependable: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God' (vs. 9)." (pg. 297)

\*Mark R. Elliott served as a Director of Missions (Associational Mission Strategist) in western Iowa and eastern Nebraska for thirty years, and he continues to be an active consultant for pastors and churches. He is a strong advocate for obedience and Biblically based disciple making. As such, he knows that making healthy disciples requires Christian leaders to be constantly pursuing spiritual maturity—be lifelong learners. Because of the time constraints of ministry, most pastors focus their reading list on resources that assist them in teaching and preaching the Word of God. As such, books focusing on church health, leadership development, spiritual development, and church health tend to find their way to the bottom of a pastor’s reading stack. With that reality in mind, Mark has written discussion summaries on several books that have helped him to personally grow in Christ. Many pastors, as well as other leaders, have found the discussion summaries helpful as they are able to more quickly process great insights from other pastors and authors.