



SHAPING PEACEMAKERS

PRACTICAL HOW-TO'S FOR TEACHERS



**BY
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Zaid Jilani was an 8th grader in Georgia the day terrorists struck the World Trade Center. He remembers the “bomb them back” mentality that spread thereafter as American might struck the Taliban supporters of al-Qaeda. Today Zaid, the son of Pakistani immigrants, promotes peace and challenges violence as a solution to human problems. A 12th-grade finalist in the 2006 *Nation* Student Writing Contest, his essay “A Generation of Peace” decries the breeding of hatred between peoples, the blood-letting of war, and the disproportionate expenditure on the military versus that on poverty, health, and education in America and elsewhere:

“The peace movement has changed my consciousness. . . . I dream one day our children . . . will turn the pages [of history books] and look to my generation, who ended the horror and chose non-

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violence over nonexistence. They will be awed by my generation, the Generation of Peace. It is up to us to create such a future.”¹

Jesus and Peace

Christian teachers and youth can applaud Zaid’s views and add a unique dimension of their own—faith in the Person and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, the quintessential Peacemaker. At His birth, angels heralded *peace*, God and humankind reconciled (Luke 2:14; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19). “Blessed are the peacemakers,” Jesus taught (Matthew 5:9. NIV),² and throughout His ministry, He provided an antidote to the unrest, anxiety, fear, the unpeace that characterizes humanity in its fallen state. He came, not with condemnation or judgment, but with a heart of peace, intent upon treating all with love, dignity, and respect.

Jesus said, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). He knew, as the context shows, that His presence would divide people. Some would accept Him, others would not. Believers know peace, an interior calm born of contentment and freedom from fear, care, and worry (cf. Matthew 6:30-34; 11:29). Those whose hearts are hardened against Him know the opposite—

the conflict and strife symbolized by the sword. The Pharisees whom Jesus denounced in Matthew 23 exemplified the latter. In the Visual Bible production of *Matthew*, actor Bruce Marchiano enables us to see and hear this Jesus with tears in His eyes and a terrible sorrow in His voice as He anguished over their choice.³

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you,” said Jesus (John 14:27). Though professed Christians and Christian nations often portray it weakly if at all, peace in human hearts and in human relationships is a core value of authentic Christianity: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace” (Colossians 3:15); “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (Romans 14:19).

Shaping Peacemakers

Someone has said that there is no such thing as an individual, only “pieces of families.” Children are parts of a whole bigger than themselves. Behavior is shaped not only by internal forces, but also by influences in the many contexts of a child—family, neighborhood, church, school, ethnic group, socioeconomic tier, society, etc. Social systems function in ways that, if understood, can greatly increase the effectiveness of those who would nurture peace in children.

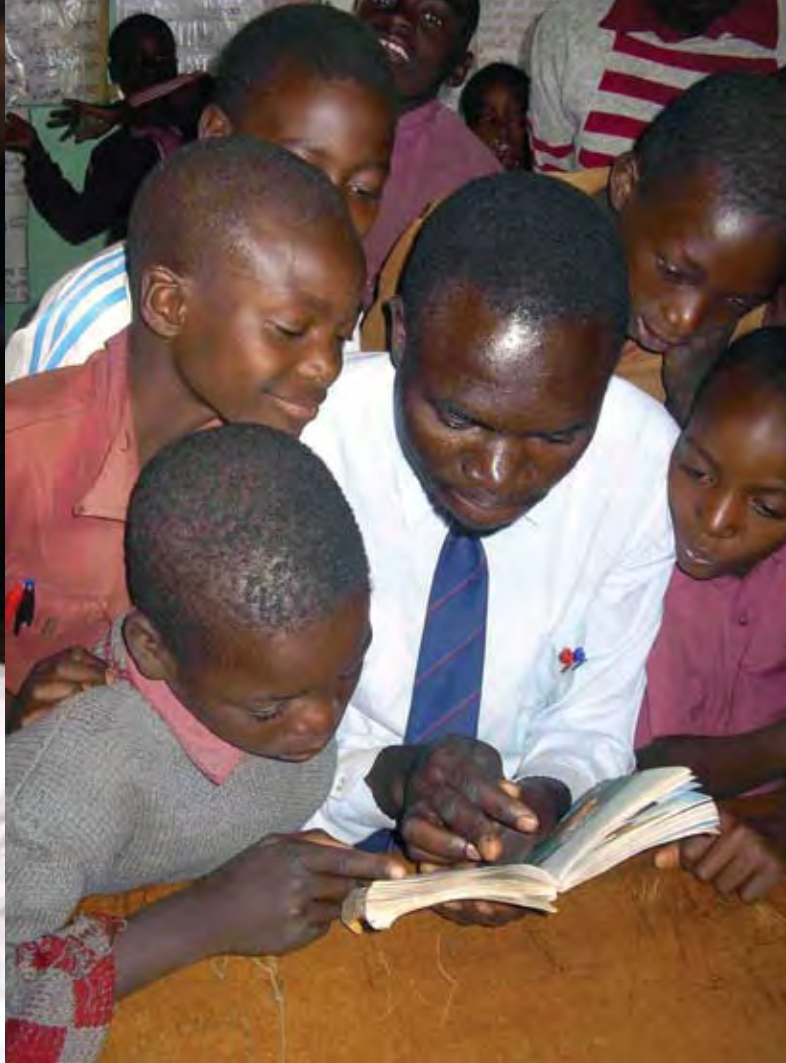
Christian educators play a significant role in shaping young peacemakers whose spirit and influence will be felt, not only in their home life, but also in

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all their relationships. Values to be inculcated in children, however, must first be found in the adults who mentor them. “These commandments that I give you today *are to be upon your hearts*. Impress them on your children” (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7).

Adults provide a model for peace—in the family, church, school, society, and global village. Children are sensitive barometers for *unpeace*; their inappropriate behavior is often a misguided bid to stabilize something gone awry in their caregivers. The good news is that God’s peace is a renewable, unlimited resource. As we allow Him through His Spirit to percolate to our innermost being and work His restorative solace, we will have peace to share with the students who look up to us.

All the systems or contexts in which a person functions are interrelated. Change one, and you will impact the others. The classroom system is the one place mostly under the control of the teacher. Whatever happens there will also profoundly affect relationships in the families, neigh-



borhoods, and ever-widening contexts in which children live. What then can teachers do to “pass the peace” to children, so that their work can be like the proverbial pebble that spawns ripples across a pond? Here are a few ideas for starters:

Celebrate diversity and the dignity of all human beings. There is nothing more comforting to children than knowing that they are valued, not for favors they have earned, but because they are beloved children of God. A no-tolerance rule regarding put-downs, disrespect, and bullying will promote diversity and protect vulnerable children.

A lesson that cannot be learned too early in life is that people are different. While differentness should never be used to excuse inappropriate behavior, many differences that create tension in relationships are neither right nor wrong. They

and William Bumberry⁴ concluded that success in relationships will largely be determined by one’s capacity to deal with differentness. Learning to live with differentness is a process that begins with acknowledgement and moves on to acceptance, respect, even enjoyment and treasuring others who are not like us. Teachers help children develop their capacity to celebrate diversity when they affirm the variegated rainbow of personalities, ethnicity, giftedness, and interest found throughout society. Classrooms where every child’s talents are engaged to benefit the whole group teach children valuable lessons in respect for people cut from a mold different from their own.

Manage by the kindness-firmness principle. Our sister-in-law Margaret is a gifted teacher whose gentle spirit for some 30 years has pervaded her classroom like the “non-anxious presence” counselors

are variations. Family therapists Carl Whitaker

market to the world. One generation who learned to read, write, share and explore with her now sends its children for more of the same. There is order; there is discipline. But there is little occasion for raised voice or harsh control. Her manner establishes an atmosphere of peace where learning can flourish.

Long before social science research touted the merits of the “authoritative” parenting style—a combination of warmth and appropriate restraint,⁵ Ellen White used the terms *kindness* and *firmness* to describe the best methods for shaping children into responsible adults. “In order to maintain . . . authority,” she wrote, “it is not necessary to resort to harsh measures; a *firm*, steady hand and a *kindness* which convinces the child of your love will accomplish the purpose.”⁶

Under authoritative leadership, children experience both high support and appropriate limits. Love and affection are in abundant supply. Communication is clear and open. Expectations are realistic

and appropriate to the maturity of the child. Rules are few, the consequences of not abiding by them are clear, and follow-through is predictable. In this style of home and classroom management, responsibilities are assigned to children as they are able to assume them, and affirmation flows freely. Such guidance increases the likelihood that children will become socially responsible and caring in their relationships with others.

Facilitate communication, and go for win-win. Parents and teachers may despair that peace can never prevail, given the recurring conflicts and clashes of will that stem from temperament differences, sibling rivalries, age gaps, developmental needs, strong-willed attitudes, and rebellion. Peace advocates James and Kathleen McGinnis offer a hopeful note:

“Peace is not the absence of conflict. Conflict is an inevitable fact of daily life—internal, interpersonal, intergroup, and international conflict. Peace consists in creatively dealing with conflict. Peace is the process of working to resolve conflicts in such a way that both sides win, with increased harmony as the outcome of the conflict and its resolution.”⁷

Research on conflict resolution points to the collaborative style as offering maximum satisfaction for all participants.⁸ This combines balanced concern for self, others, and the relationship. Collaborative conflict resolution—in which participants’ needs are taken into consideration and solutions sought that meet the needs of everyone involved—begins with defining the problem in terms of the broad spectrum of needs that drive a human response to a problem situation.

Children are indeed blessed who learn from childhood to articulate their needs and appreciate the needs of others. We set the stage for effective conflict resolution when we help children develop a wide vocabulary of feeling words and encourage them to express both their ideas and feelings. We set them up for success in relationships when we foster their ability to share openly and to listen to the needs of others with care and concern.

Peacemaking requires a kind of thinking that goes beyond I win-you lose, or you win-I lose. We must help children get a vision for working together col-



laboratively to find a solution in which *everyone wins*—a solution that leaves everyone feeling understood and valued because their thoughts and feelings have been heard and their needs taken into consideration.

Foster competition within. In shaping peacemakers, fostering competition “within” achieves greater success than competition “between.” When children set personal goals and compete with themselves to improve their abilities, achievement awards can be enjoyed by all rather than a select few. Games in which teams work together for the good of all build a spirit of goodwill that does not occur in a climate where winning is everything. To find appropriate balance

in this arena is not easy in our competitive world, but educators who nurture in children an internal motivation to grow themselves—apart from a need to measure themselves against others—give them an extravagant gift that works for peace in all arenas of life.

Reframe anger as a healthy emotion. Christians often view anger as a negative, undesirable emotion. However, Scripture includes anger in the list of attributes of the new person in Christ. This emotion—with the potential to do much harm as well as good—must be brought under the discipline of grace (cf. Ephesians 4:26). Anger is a healthy, God-given emotion that serves its intended purpose when it fuels an appropriate protective



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response to the abuse or oppression of any human being (cf. Mark 3:1-6). It also does its intended work when it helps individuals draw the line on abuse perpetrated against them (cf. 2 Samuel 13). Anger provides an early warning signal that relationships need attention.

We help children become peacemakers when we affirm the good purposes of anger and help them learn how to express anger in appropriate, constructive ways rather than condemning as bad their attempts to cope with what they are feeling.

Conclusion

In coaching children to become peacemakers, the schoolyard seesaw may just be our best teaching aid. Everyone knows what unpeace on a seesaw is like. The toy becomes a painful place when the rules of balance are flouted. But when we go in search of a pleasant ride, we adjust, we distribute our weight fairly, and we accommodate our partner. Relationships are like that. In giving as well as receiving there is smooth rhythm and harmony—and peace. ✍



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