

WHAT IS PEACE?

SEASON 1 - EPISODE 2

INTRODUCTION

And hello, everyone. This is David Lowry from A Peaceful Life. Don, are you doing all right today?

Great, David. I'm looking forward to today's discussion.

At the beginning of this podcast, we need to define what it means to live a peaceful life and be a peacemaker, all these terms that get thrown around. We think everybody listening to our program wants to know more about what it means to have peace in your life and how you can get it. And the purpose of this program is to teach you those things.

So, David, I'm really excited about this discussion. I've been thinking about mental models for a long time. Mental models are the ways we can have peace, the way we think about peace, what we think about it, and how it shapes both our thinking and our actions.

I totally get that. What you think is possible for you has a lot to do with whether you'll have a peaceful life. If you think *there's no way I can have a peaceful life, it is what it is, and you go forward*, you'll probably have lots of trouble in your life. But if you think *there's got to be a better way*, then we might have an opportunity to work with you and teach you a few things.

We encourage you to go to our website, Peacemaking101.com and you'll learn all kinds of helpful ideas, tools, and information there. You'll have transcripts of our programs today, and anytime we ever mention a book or say anything we want you to know about, you'll find it on Peacemaking 101.

Don, let's define peace and what it isn't.

Okay, David, I started off by just looking up what Merriam-Webster had to say about peace and what constitutes peace. And here's a couple of definitions right out of the internet. First, Webster defines it as a state of tranquility or quiet, such as freedom from civil disturbance or war. Another definition they give is freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions. And the last is harmony in personal relations. But note that in all three of these cases, peace is generally defined as what it is not and not what it is.

It's like, we can't tell you exactly what it is, but we can tell you what it's not. And we need to get more specific on that.

It's right. And I think there's an interesting quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who defined peace in a way different from this. This was at a peace conference in 1967. Of course, he was talking about the state of war at that time. But it's relevant to what we're talking about in personal and interpersonal peace.

This is a quote: It is not enough to say *we must not wage war. It is necessary to love peace and to sacrifice for it.* And this is the most important part for our purposes. *We must not concentrate on merely the negative expulsion of war but the more positive affirmation of peace.* So, peace is more than the absence of war, conflict, negative relationships, or work stress. Peace must be cultivated as a positive attribute of an individual's life.

I agree with that. That's why we talk about a peaceful lifestyle here. We believe that peace is an end state that you can enjoy, but you must do things to enjoy that peaceful state, whether it's harmony or tranquility, a great relationship, the absence of fighting, or getting the drama out of your life. There are things you can do to make your life important and better.

We've got a different definition of peace around here, and it's a more holistic view. I see peace like you, Don, not as the absence of conflict

necessarily but as an interrelationship of interpersonal relationships. Let me say what I mean by that.

You and I have relationships with everybody, everything-- my car, my friends, even a relationship with myself. It's when you can flourish in your relationships with people, places, things, situations, events, that sort of thing. Peace is a happy relationship that allows you to flourish. and all your relationships.

INTERNAL PEACE

I break them down into three areas. One is internal peace where you're happy being in your own skin. You like who you are, or you've come to peace with who you are. That means your shadow side, the things you're displeased with, and you say, *Man, I wish I could live that over again. I didn't do such a great job.* But you've come to peace with it.

INTERPERSONAL PEACE

Or, it's interpersonal peace, where you're getting along with your wife, husband, and people at work—just people you know. You somehow make those relationships the best they can be.

ENVIRONMENTAL PEACE

The last one is what I call environmental. All of us live in a situation. We live in our culture. It may be peace in the organizational sense like I have a job, and I've got to get along with all those people. And maybe I don't agree with everything that happens at work, but I found a way to make peace with my environment and so forth. It's learning how to live a peaceful lifestyle so that it cultivates an environment that feels peaceful and makes you more conducive to having these relationships.

David, I've heard you refer to this as a lifestyle. Environmental peace is a total picture, but sometimes, it's also places that we go. I'm a hiker, for instance. And anytime I spend hiking in the woods, or wherever I'm at, I generally feel very peaceful during those times.

I love the mountains. I love going to the New Mexico and Colorado mountains. A hike up a hill is going to work for me. But I also love the oceans and seeing great expanses of water. Those things feed my soul and create a sense of something bigger and greater than myself. At the same time, I feel a sense of peacefulness that I'm a part of something bigger than myself.

PEACE AND FLOURISHING

The main thing is that when you're at peace, you're flourishing. You have a sense of well-being. You have a sense of relatedness between you and others. This will help people as they think about being a more peaceful person. You're important, and they're important, but your relationship is probably the part you must work on to have peace. Our relationships are the crucible by which we experience peace.

Intellectually, we understand that we must be there for other people. But if we start thinking about our relationship with others, whatever it is, can we make it the best relationship possible? Can it be deeper? Can we make an even better relationship? Or if it's one where we're bonded with a person, can we keep and maintain that bond we have with people? Our relationships are the crucible by which we experience peace.

Okay, let's recap a couple of things we've said here. Number one, peace is more than just the absence of conflict. But peace is more than what we experience internally. Our website is called Peacemaking 101, so we need also to define what it means to be a peacemaker.

Exactly. Peacemaking is the things you do that help promote peace. As we've mentioned earlier, if it weren't for relationships, you'd probably live at peace all the time. When I'm by myself, I get along just fine. I take myself to Starbucks and buy myself the coffee I like, or I sleep as late as I want, or I watch whatever show I want. It's what I get with other people that peacemaking comes in, right?

WHAT IS A PEACEMAKER?

Peacemakers are those individuals who are dedicated to fostering and nurturing their relationships. All these areas that we've just talked about are driven by a deep understanding of the factors that contribute to all of that. They study them, and they want to improve in them-- like learning how to listen better or how to have empathy and compassion. And, of course, conflict resolution skills. That's a big part of getting the drama out of your life and teaching others how to live that way.

Of course, you've got to acquire some skills, and as you acquire those skills, you develop wisdom on how and when to use those skills, and the more you use them, the better you get. And soon you find that you get along well with other people. And when you don't, you find a way of coexisting in a respectful way that takes care of you and the relationship and the other person.

When we're doing what's best for the relationship regardless of whether the other person is putting anything into it or not. When we're doing our part, we are making headway toward having that peaceful life we're talking about and being peacemakers. When I give myself the grace I need, when I've done things I wish I could do over, that's me making peace with myself. When I'm doing what's right for my family, someone at work, or someone who I really hate to take them off the hook because they've done things to me in the past, but I do what's in their best interest and what I perceive to be the best for them in whatever situation I find myself in, I'm making peace.

Don, are there other things you would like to add to this list I've just mentioned?

THE IMPORTANCE OF CRITICAL THINKING

Yeah, David, I can think of a couple. One involves critical thinking or developing our ability to analyze complex situations and relationships, interface with others, identify the causes of conflict, and explore creative solutions.

Another area concerns resilience or perseverance—remaining committed to peacekeeping efforts despite challenges and setbacks. Our efforts to be peaceful, both in ourselves and in our relationships, will be constantly challenged. As you mentioned, it's important that we exercise our ability to respond, just like any muscle, and exercise does this because you get stronger over time. As you practice your awareness, your ability to respond effectively will increase.

Exactly. I used to think of life as a cause-and-effect sort of thing. So, let's say I meet you, and we're talking, and you do one thing, and I respond to it, or you do something, and I respond back to you. But it never occurred to me that if you were not having your best day ever, and suddenly things took a turn for the worse between us, I would meet whatever you said with just as much force or as much vigor as you were giving it to me.

But in peacemaking, I've learned I don't have to do that. I can manage my part of it. So, if somebody is being a little bit insulting to me or makes me the butt of the joke, or does something I don't like or appreciate, I don't have to respond in kind. I can do what I think is in the best interest of our relationship-- to say, hold on a minute there, I'm feeling uncomfortable about what you just said. Would you like to tell me more? Or I may need to remove myself from it. As a peacemaker, we're always using resilience and perseverance, holding the door open for a better relationship if the other person is willing to work with us.

If they're not willing to work with us, then we may go our separate ways, but it won't be because we didn't try. It's going to be because the other person didn't want to try. The more I have worked on trying to be a better person towards other people and work on the relationship, the more things work out than ever before.

A lot of the things that I wrote off for other people being the problem really weren't the problem. It was me not willing to put the effort into bridging the gap. But when things don't work, and I can't make things better because

the other person isn't interested, at least at the end of the day, when I go home, I can say I tried, and I'm going to leave the door open for peace.

Right. Just yesterday I received a call of the blue. I wasn't expecting it. I didn't anticipate the phone call. And the individual on the other side of the line was calling me about an issue that he was deeply embarrassed about. But he started off the conversation very aggressively, asking me a lot of questions, and my immediate response was a defense response, right? It was like when you're caught in a corner, and you feel the need to respond. Yeah. So, I did, but I quickly recovered from that and started asking some questions. I found one of the best ways to deal with situations like that is to start asking questions and not necessarily make assumptions about where the other person is. And oh gosh, it was less than a five-minute conversation, but we had done a 180. And I realized what his needs were. I understood that he was embarrassed by the situation, that he wanted to make it right, and that I had an opening to work with him and fix that problem. We could not end up fixing it the way we originally intended. The circumstances had changed. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, it worked out great. Today, I followed through on that. He's been very cooperative, and we're moving forward. It turned out to be a good, useful situation, and I was using peacemaking skills to redirect that conversation.

Absolutely, you were. And peacemakers start asking those questions like you did. Good for you and good for this because what you have now is a restored relationship, and maybe there's still work to be done, but it has a chance, right? Peacemaking is about restoration, reconciliation, forgiveness, grace for us, and grace for others so that we've become this harmless individual. Believe it or not, as we become harmless, it becomes harder for people to harm us because we're not going to take their offense. We're not going to allow what they say to matter to us.

Peacemakers can function in various capacities. For instance, I've had mediation training for small claims courts. Sometimes, you get in a spot, and somebody must help work it out between you and somebody else

because there's money at stake or something has happened, and we can't agree on who should be doing what.

It could become even larger with global disputes and international conflicts. So, we should pray the universe's blessing on everybody who's trying to make peace in the Middle East or peace with our nation's enemies. It's a vital role, and we need more people who are interested in making peace with others and for themselves.

Now, my circle of influence is nowhere near as big as some people's. I'm an ordinary person, but I do have some influence. I have my own family. I have students that I've been teaching for years and years. I have people at the church I attend. It's my own little community, right? I can make a difference there. I can work in the best interest of all those relationships.

And Don, believe it or not, when you take care of your stuff, whether it's your car, your house, your lawn, or your garden, you're doing peacemaking. Because you are recognizing that you have entered a relationship with the things and possessions you have. Believe it or not, if you take care of your car and keep it safe, you're impacting other people. If you keep your lawn green and nice looking, it makes the homes in your neighborhood look nicer and maybe sell for a better price. All those things are important, and that's peacemaking.

Hey, you're making me feel guilty, David. I'm going to leave here and go wash my car.

Let's look at another definition of peace.

Okay, you and I had bonded several years ago over a reading of Father Richard Rohrer's book *Falling Upward*. Oh, that's a good one. yeah. isn't it?

I recommend that to everybody if you haven't read it.

Absolutely. In this book, he discusses the problem of either or, or what he calls dualistic thinking. If we follow either-or thinking, either we have a

completely peaceful life, or we don't have a peaceful life. Rohr shares a better way of thinking, which he calls nondualist or both-and thinking. In this way, we come to see peace as being defined by what it is and not by what it is not. It's possible to have peace or to be at peace and live in a world with its negative challenges.

That is a whole new mind shift. So, if you wake up this morning and you have food to eat, count that as a blessing, right? Or you're not fighting. Life is good. Start counting all the good things you have. If you have something to eat, if you can drive to work, if you have a job at all, if you have all these positive things in your life, learn to look at those as the tools you have available to make your life even more peaceful. We can learn to turn our thinking to what we have and see that those are the tools we must use to make things better.

So, I started this conversation talking about mental models. The mental model that many of us have or possess is one in which we either have peace or we don't have peace. What Rohr is trying to tell us is that we can have both. We can have peace and be peacemakers, even though oftentimes there are challenges and stresses in our lives.

That's the only way it can be. We live on a peace continuum. Some have very little peace in their life. And it's no fault of their own. Maybe if you live in certain parts of the world where your life is not very safe, and you don't know what some surface-to-air missile will take out your home, it's very hard to feel like you're having a very peaceful life. Despite that, we can learn that *I'm going to have the best life I can have given those circumstances*.

Others of us have wonderful lives. We live in relative safety. We don't worry about being harmed in any way, really. We know the potential could be there. There's nothing that's without risk, but we have a relatively safe life. So, it's a continuum, isn't it? It's both and. You can have a great marriage but have a crummy job, or you could have a great job and be struggling in your marriage. Relationships are not always in balance, are they? But the

goal of a peacemaker is to tend to all these relationships, whether it's your stuff, yourself, or the friends you have, and put a little energy and effort into all of those so that peace begins to have a chance in your life. And as you do it, you might be surprised it hits a tipping point where there's more peace in your life than not.

There used to be this bumper sticker, Don, called, that said, Teach Peace. Do you remember seeing those bumper stickers?

I don't.

For a while, I saw those everywhere. Teach peace. And this is what our program is about. It's learning that you can teach it. We all can learn things that improve our relationships, our lives, and our flourishing. If we give ourselves a chance, we can see that happen.

Sometimes, it takes a little bit of time, but if you're in it for the long haul, and I hope you are, and if you're not impatient, and you're willing to say okay, I'm going to do all I can do. I'm going to hold the door open. I can't make people do anything they don't want to do, but I'm going to be there as best I can. I'll have the best relationship I can have, given the circumstances I'm in now. Things can get better.

I'll close with an illustration of my own life, and this really happened. Our parents passed, and there was a state to settle, and there was friction among the kids. Things got tense, and I didn't want it to be that way, but I couldn't seem to get out of it either. Sometimes, we get in these twisted situations where we're trying to do all the right things, but it comes out wrong, or somebody doesn't like it; these things can happen. But I decided I was going to have the best relationship I could have given the circumstances. For a couple of years there, there wasn't anything. But I held the door open. And then it got to be just a little better, and a little better, and a little better. And each time, I moved forward with the best relationship I could have under the circumstances. Things are totally healed now. Sometimes, we must be willing to let time heal some wounds, but we always hold the door open for a better thing.

Absolutely. And this is what we need to do to bring more peace into our lives. That's peace, and we hope that people who listen to our program will buy into this vision.