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## In the Middle: An Interview With Professional Peacemakers

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# In The Middle

## An Interview With Professional Peacemakers

**S**hould you try to be a peacemaker when others are in conflict? How can you help them and avoid being caught in the middle?

Ken Sande, author of *The Peacemaker*, believes Christians have a responsibility to seek peace in people's lives. "Christian peacemaking is a lot like witnessing, in that everyone is called to be a witness to some degree, just as everyone is called to be a peacemaker to some degree." Dr. Chuck Dolph, professor of psychology at Cedarville College, agrees. He maintains that while the Lord has specially gifted some people in this area, everyone can be a peacemaker.

**When should you attempt to help someone in conflict? Consider these three factors:**

### 1. Your relationship to the person.

Sande notes that the closer your relationship is with another Christian, the more responsibility you have to help. Ask yourself whether this person would be more likely to accept help from someone else. If not, the Lord may be saying, "You're in a position to help—get on with it!"

### 2. The seriousness of the conflict.

Dolph has an active counseling practice and believes people should intervene in destructive conflicts. "It's often dangerous to get

involved in situations where you're not wanted. But where people are destroying each other, someone should intervene."

### 3. Your understanding of the area of conflict.

Sande, an attorney, points out that few of us would understand patent law well enough to mediate a dispute between rival inventors. But when a friend is having a conflict with a spouse or coworker, you probably know enough to help. If you are close to the person, the conflict is serious, and you understand the area of conflict, then you should talk to the person. You can give advice or offer to mediate the conflict. In rare cases, you may need to recommend the person get professional help. Dolph suggests people should look for competent, non-professional assistance first. He believes Christians should trust those in the church who have the gifts to help. Sande notes that in Matthew 18:15-20, "Jesus instructs us to make a sincere effort to resolve conflicts informally. Only if those efforts are obviously not succeeding and there's an indication that further damage will be done should we get help from professionals."

**If you are in the position to mediate a conflict, what can you do to help?**

### 1. Pray.

"The main way we help other people is through prayer," says Dolph. Sande reminds us that there is only one Reconciler, Jesus Christ, and while you do not have all the answers, He does.

### 2. Be objective.

Dolph notes, "If you are a closer friend to one of the antagonists, chances are the other one will think you are biased. Conflicts start with two persons having conflict, and before you know it two or three people, or whole departments, are pulled into the conflict—a just person won't get drawn into the conflict." Instead, you need to be committed to win-win situations.

### 3. Listen.

You need to be willing to listen to the cases of both sides. Sande reminds us, "When people are in

conflict, one of their most urgent concerns is for their opponent and anyone else to understand what is going on inside of them. The only way you can do that is to sit and listen, and listen..."

### 4. Base your advice on biblical principles.

Sande believes you should follow Christ's example and question people in a dispute before giving advice. But if they do not have biblically consistent answers, it is your responsibility to turn to God's Word and show them that God has very clear and specific guidelines on moral issues. Sande adds, "Of course, we have to be careful not to step beyond what Scripture says and impose our own legalistic ideas on people."

### 5. Train to be a mediator.

Dolph says mediation basically means challenging people to be more Christ-like. "The measure of that is not how much you get, it is how much you give up—to live at peace with other persons is a matter of self-sacrifice. People come to a mediator because they want something. The mediator often has the paradoxical job of asking them to give something up." This is not an easy task, but it is important. Dolph calls peacemaking "a noble calling, a much-needed service."

As with any gift, you must practice and train to develop the gift of peacemaking. The National Association of Christian Conciliation Services is committed to locating and training peacemakers within the local church. The basic program involves 50 hours of audio tape instruction. For more information write Ken Sande at:

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Dr. Charles Dolph is a 1974 Cedarville graduate and a professor of psychology at the College. He also maintains a private counseling practice. Dr. Dolph has a special interest in older people and consults with nursing homes on issues of aging.

