



## Practical Peacemaking

One of the hardest things to do is to stand in someone else's shoes and see the world as they see it. We see the world from our perspective based on our life experience. It is very difficult to see things any other way or understand that *there may be other ways to see things*. So much of how we look at the world is based on the assumptions we learn from our upbringing, culture, and religious traditions, the full influence of which we are often unaware of. Many of our core assumptions were set when we were young. People can change their views when they are introduced to new ideas and understandings, *if* they are open to both taking a critical look at their own assumptions *and* accepting the idea that assumptions new to them may be valid.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our sense of what normal is. At the same time, some ugly flaws in our society are being exposed and receiving public attention. The resulting uncertainty and public awareness present an opportunity for needed changes. We must be open about our assumptions and willing to make changes if we are going to be able to move forward into a better future rather than just trying to recreate the past with its blessings but also its many shortcomings. There are things in our nature that make this difficult. Among them, our instinctive assumption that the way we see things is the 'only' way and therefore the 'right' way, while anyone who sees things differently must be 'wrong'.

One of the hardest things to accept is that some of our own assumptions may in fact be wrong and even hurtful to others. Accepting this can change our world view and our understanding of our place in the world. This can be earth shaking, and also reveal new possibilities. Not accepting this idea can make us defensive (whether we are aware of it or not) because it can feel threatening. Defensiveness is a self-preservation instinct, but it makes thinking clearly and keeping an open mind harder. This puts us on shaky ground because once you become defensive, your reactions to a situation may trigger the same defensive reaction in others. You see them as a threat, and they see you as a threat. When this happens, trust is lost and communication is likely to shut down.

Defensive mode creates a cycle that is hard to escape. Everyone's perceptions can become powerful players and truth can get lost. Convincing another party that *their perception of you* as a threat is not true is just as hard as convincing yourself that *your perception of them* as a threat is not true. Both must happen to restore trust and end the cycle! A willingness to reevaluate our own assumptions is key. So is our willingness not to put other people in boxes. Especially in defensive mode we tend to *expect* people to react to things in the same way they have (*or we think they have*) in the past. Sometimes people do not react as we expect or are trying something new, but we miss it because we see only what we *expect* to see. *Our assumptions not their actions* get in the way. Result: we miss opportunities for dialogue and resolution; or someone who has tried a new path, may think their efforts do not help and so they return to old patterns. This makes the situation worse because the one who took the risk now resists change, or even open-mindedness because our actions make their efforts and openness appear useless.

Trying to see from another's perspective and bridge the gap between points of view may *feel like* risky business, but it is essential if differences are to be understood and resolved – notice that is 'understood' and 'resolved' not suddenly everyone agreeing with me! The situation may still look very different through someone else's eyes, and it is still possible they have a clearer view than we do. *We need to start by reevaluating our assumptions* and make changes if our assumptions are hurtful to others (remember what Jesus said about logs and specks! Matthew 7:1-5).

### ***This week, in your prayer time:***

Pray for the strength and openness to try to stand in another's shoes and see the world as they see it in the hope that it will help all of us do our part to make the world a better place for everyone.

- Especially remember those suffering under the load of injustice & racism.
- Remember those trying to end injustice including community leaders & police who are working to reevaluate their training, examine their attitudes, & review their mission to serve & protect the people.
- Remember those living with violence & those grieving for loved ones lost to violence.
- Remember those facing hunger & those facing homelessness.
- Remember those grieving COVID-19 losses & those put at risk of the virus by location, lack of protective measures, attitudes, or complacency.



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