



## Practical Peacemaking Tips

### Standing In Someone Else's Shoes

One of the hardest things to do is to stand in someone else's shoes! We see the world from a specific perspective based on our own life experience. It is very difficult to see things any other way. It is even difficult to comprehend that *there may be any other way to see things*. So much of how we look at the world is based on our assumptions some of which we may not even be aware of. When we stand in our own shoes, we are within our comfort zone and the world looks the way we *expect* it to. Trying to stand in someone else's shoes can turn the world upside-down for us. It pushes us outside our comfort zone; and complicates things by challenges our since of our place in the world.

- One of our instinctive assumptions is that the way we see things is the only way. That makes it the 'right' way and therefore, anyone who does not see things the same way we do must be 'wrong'.
- When one of our assumptions is challenged, we tend to become defensive – even when we are not fully aware that is what is happening, and even if there is really no threat to us at all.
- Becoming defensive is part of our instinct for self-preservation. However, it takes extra effort to think clearly and keep an open mind once our survival instincts kick in. That can be a big problem!

Anyone who has lived with other people – be it a spouse, siblings, friends, etc. has experienced what happens when a situation arises that brings these instincts into play, though you probably do not realize that is what happened the last time you had a disagreement!

One tricky part is that once your defensive instincts kick in, your reactions to the situation may help trigger the same defensive reaction in the other person.

- When you are in 'defensive mode' anyone disagreeing with you is likely to appear to be threatening – 'out to get you' in some way.
- If you assume the other person is a threat, you are likely not to trust them. Then communication is likely to shut down.

When both parties are in this defensive mode, you are in a cycle that is very hard to escape. Convincing the other 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 things must be accomplished to end the cycle!

It is complicated by the fact that we tend to *expect* people to react to things the same way they have in the past, especially when we are in defensive mode. Sometimes people do change, but we miss it because we see only what we *expect* to see. That can cause the other person to think changing does not help, and so push them back into old patterns; only now, they may resist change, or even open-mindedness because it appears useless.

To truly try to stand in someone else's shoes may *feel like* a very risky business. However, it is essential if differences are to be understood and resolved – and *the first step is realizing that 'under stood' and 'resolved' does not mean everyone will suddenly agree with me!* To stand in someone else's shoes:

- is a tool for seeking understanding
- it is not a tool for *us to change others* to our way of thinking
- we must be open to the possibility that the world may look very different through someone else's eyes.
- We must accept that 'Different' does not necessarily mean bad
- Acknowledging these things is the first step to understanding why people see things differently.
- We must also let go of the temptation to pass judgment. That role belongs to God (Luke 6:37).
- We must accept that some of our assumptions may be a problem – even short-sited or incorrect.
- We must also accept that some of our assumptions may be self-serving but not God serving. If our assumptions are hurtful to the people we share the house, the community, or the world with, *we need to reevaluate our assumptions first* (remember what Jesus said about logs and specks! Matthew 7:1-5).
- We must accept that standing in someone else's shoes is not a tool for proving who is right. Who is right or wrong may not be a factor at all. Someone's perspective can be different from our own without being wrong.

Standing in someone else's shoes is one way of truly *hearing* another person and trying to understand them. Think back on your own experience. Sometimes knowing you have been heard, even when you are not agreed with, can make all the difference. When you take the time and effort to really hear and try to understand another person it shows you value them and care about them as a person worthy of respect like you want to be yourself. Isn't that what it means to love your neighbor as yourself? (Matthew 22:37-40)