

Reconcile

Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians
(Lederach)

Summary

last update 5 Mar 2019

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John Paul Lederach describes himself as a believer, peacemaker, mediator, sociologist, teacher, and learner. His book uses a series of stories to unfold the complexities of reconciliation. If you want to explore why reconciliation is such a challenge, this book is for you.

This summary contains a few key points from each chapter. In some cases, I've created a graphic or table to convey the information at a glance.

1-The Threat to My Only Child

Having experienced a threat to his only child, Lederach, struggled to understand how a father could sacrifice a child for any reason.

Sacrifice for an Enemy

Before you accepted Christ as Savior, you were God's enemy. God sacrificed His Son for you. For Lederach, [John 3:16](#) is no longer a formula for salvation. Instead, it speaks to a willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of an enemy.

2-Turning Toward the Face of God

The story of Jacob and Esau raises significant questions about the nature of reconciliation.

Born into Conflict

Imagine the growing division within Isaac and Rebekah's family ([Gen 25-35](#)). Conflict is not just about the facts. It's about the meaning, feeling, and interpretation of our intertwined lives. We repeatedly ask: Who am I? Who are you? Who are we?

Regarding the drama of the blessing, Rebekah, Isaac, Esau, and Jacob likely asked: Why me? Why us? Why, God?

- Rebekah was likely experiencing guilt and fear.
- Isaac was probably confused and broken.
- Esau was likely frustrated and angry.
- Jacob was probably confused and guilty about his own behavior while being terrified of what Esau would do.

The Move Away

People tend to physically and emotionally move away from the source of pain and anxiety. Jacob ran. Time apart is often a necessary step in the reconciliation process.

Peace: Utopian Fantasy or Biblical Dream?

For reconciliation, we need to stay connected to the challenge of current realities while we live a new reality of relationships that are more just and peaceful.

The Turn Toward

Generally, it does not work well to force someone to turn toward the other. Jacob finally decides turn toward Esau. Jacob is uncertain and fearful. He begins by trying to find a way to appease Esau with gifts. Jacob's experience illustrates that this process is typically not smooth. Often, there are doubts, hesitation, and restarts. Jacob has encounters with himself, Esau, and God.

Reconciliation as a Journey, Encounters, and Places

Reconciliation is a journey toward and through conflict. The pathway through conflict is filled with God encounters at places along the way.



3-The Reconciliation Arts: Jesus

What does it mean to embody the reconciling love of God that we find in the Word-became-flesh, the person of Jesus? It means to bring the whole of yourself into the present moment in gratitude to the Source, the Creator of life ([Mat 22:37](#), [Luke 6:36](#)).

3 Core Reconciliation Arts

1-Love Your Neighbor: Notice Mutual Humanity

Compassion begins with the simple act of noticing another person. When Jacob looked at Esau's face, he noticed his mutual humanity ([Gen 33:10](#)).

2-Love Yourself: Nurture Self-reflection

Many of us fail to take time for renewal and self-care.

- Follow Jesus' example by taking time apart

to reflect and listen to God ([Luke 5:16](#), [Luke 6:12](#), [Mark 1:35](#), [Mat 14:23](#)).

- Walk with others as you talk over issues.
 - ▶ along the way ([Mark 9:33-34](#))
 - ▶ as they went ([Mark 16:12](#))
- As Jesus, did, ask reflective questions ([Mark 8:29](#)).

3-Love God: Accompany through Committed Friendship

God chose to come alongside us, share our suffering, and experience the vulnerability in the human condition ([John 1:14](#)). To reconcile, requires a commitment to see the face of God in others, to see the world from their perspective. Just like God, we can't promise that everything will go their way, but we can commit to being there with them ([Mat 28:20](#)). We can befriend them.

4-In the Beginning Was Conflict: Creation

God created us in his image ([Gen 1:27](#)).

Creation Commitments

1-God's image is present within each of us. God provides each of us with the capacity to think, reflect, care, and act.

2-God values diversity. Differences and distinctions permeate the creation account ([Gen 1](#)). Each element is distinct from the other yet each has identity and meaning only when connected to the other in relationship.

3-God gives us godlike freedom. Without opportunity, choice, and freedom, humankind loses its unique place in the creation.

Humankind: a Dynamic Mix

The very elements that make human experience rich and dynamic are the elements that make conflict inevitable. Conflict in itself is not sin. Sin may enter into the situation depending on how we approach conflict, how we deal with it, and how we treat each other.

5-When Conflict Burns and We Cry for Help

We must learn to develop a positive identity of self and group that doesn't depend on criticizing or feeling superior to another person or group.

How to create an enemy:

1. Separate yourself from the person.
2. See yourself as superior.
3. Dehumanize the other person.

The challenge of reconciliation requires us to be present, to respect, and to acknowledge the suffering, fear, and bitterness.

6-Truth, Mercy, Justice, and Peace: Psa 85

Reconciliation is restoring and healing the torn-apart web of relationships. It takes Truth + Mercy + Justice + Peace.

Truth	brings forward what really happened and puts it in the open; can only happen when all respect the others' voices
Mercy	strives for acceptance, compassion, and support for everyone
Justice	wants to make things right; insists on acknowledgement of what broke the relationship, accountability, and changed behavior
Peace	encourages security, respect, and well-being

Psalm 85 reinforces the understanding that reconciliation is a journey we must take, a place we are trying to reach, and encounters along the way.



Reconciliation requires us to take up the primary practical task of creating the dynamic social space where Truth, Mercy, Justice, and Peace meet to wrestle things out, much like Jacob in the long night (**Gen 32:22-31**).

7-Where Two or Three Meet: Mat 18

Matthew 18 is a chapter about conflict. It teaches a method of working toward reconciliation, to restore and heal people and their relationships (**Mat 18:15-18**).

Step 1: Go Directly:

- Prayerful vulnerability: Face your fears and anxieties. Be open to God and others.
- Responsible discernment: Move toward the conflict and the other person. Face your accountability and interdependence.
- Interactive engagement: Be a non-anxious presence (**1John 4:18**). Be constructive when differences emerge.

Step 2: Take Along Witnesses

- Forum: Witnesses should create a forum where you and the other can reflect, listen, and begin to understand.

- Accountability: Witnesses should create a space for you and the other to be transparent, to interact, and to move toward agreement and resolution.

Step 3: Tell it to the Church

- Mission: Reconciliation is the mission of the church (**2Cor 5:18-19**, **Col 1:20**).
- Challenge: Leaders must discern the nature of the conflict and devise appropriate procedures for responding to it.

Step 4: Relate as with a Tax Collector

In the conflict resolution process, when we get to the point of treating a person as a tax collector, Lederach asks us to consider how Jesus treated tax collectors (**Mat 9:10**).

8-Keep Silent and Listen: Acts 15

Acts 15 is a chapter of conflict.

Handling Conflict

1. Recognize and define the problem. Acknowledge the disagreement. Look below the surface to define the specific concerns you need to address.
2. Create an appropriate forum for processing the issues. How you handle conflict is as important as the eventual decision. Place a high value on involving people in defining the process. This increases ownership of the process and the result.
3. Allow diverse viewpoints. Include all people that the decision will affect.
4. Give everyone an opportunity to speak. Listen carefully to what they say.
5. Use the gifts in the community to support the process (**1Cor 12-14**).
6. Decide upon and implement decisions.

Listening: the Spiritual Dimension of Conflict

When others don't think you hear them, they feel disconnected and rejected.

- Listening is a spiritual discipline.
- Listening is like prayer. Effective prayer is attentive awareness and discipline based on relationship and love.
- Listening is seeking God. When you listen to a person and genuinely try to understand, you help create an opportunity for the person and yourself to get in touch with what God may be saying. Lederach calls this "prophetic listening" (**1Cor 14:29**, **1The 5:20-21**).

Implications for Churches

Our capacity to listen to God is only as great as our capacity to listen to each other when we are in conflict.

9-Reconciliation is the Gospels: Paul's Letters

Reconciliation lies at the heart of God's intention for humanity and with humanity. Many Christians view reconciliation as a product of proper belief. Lederach insists that reconciliation is the defining model of who and how God is in the world.

Our mission is to align ourselves with God's mission: to reconcile all of creation, particularly a broken, estranged humanity ([Acts 3:20-26](#), [Col 1:20](#)).

- All Things Come Together: Through Christ, God was pleased to reconcile all things to Himself. Christ holds all things together ([Col 1:17-20](#)).
- A New Humanity: Through the cross, Christ has created a new humanity reconciled with each other and God ([Eph 2:11-22](#)).

- In This World: By God's example through Jesus, we are to move toward human troubles so people can become aware of the alternative of God's reconciling love ([John 17:11](#)).
- God's Mission is Our Mission: Our mission is to walk the path by which all things come together ([2Cor 5:18-20](#)).

We must keep our feet on the ground and our heads in the clouds.

May God grant us the innocence to dream and the wisdom, courage, and sustenance to take up the journey to reconciliation.