

Mending the Divides: Creative Love in a Conflicted World
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“Conflict, hatred, and injustice are becoming the norm. Both close to home and around the globe, broken systems break people. In our communities, neighborhoods are disintegrating based on race, orientation, documentation, and association. On an interpersonal level, we are unable to engage in constructive discourse, exchanging it for debate and posturing.

“Peacemaking isn’t a reaction to conflict; it’s a way of life. That said, conflict is an everyday reality that requires everyday peace. Our discipleship invitation is to be everyday peacemakers who are formed and mobilized to love creatively in our conflicted world.”

Be a Peacemaker in a World of Conflict

The enormity of conflict, hatred, and injustice in our world can make peace seem a hopeless impossibility. But the reality of refugees fleeing war-torn homelands, the violence taking place on neighborhood streets, and the daily injustices in our personal lives can’t be ignored.

For everyday Christians wondering what they can do in the face of endless interpersonal, local, and international conflicts, Jon Huckins and Jer Swigart lead Christians into the hope-filled and intentional work of peacemaking.

Huckins and Swigart are cofounders of The Global Immersion Project, a peacemaking training organization that forms, equips, and mobilizes individuals and communities to enter into conflict to heal rather than to win. Both are deeply committed to peacemaking in the Middle East and in their local communities. *Mending the Divides* collects their wisdom and experience in a book that offers a very tangible set of peacemaking practices rooted in the life and teaching of Jesus. The book is filled with inspiring stories from their friends, mentors, and faith leaders who are living out these peacemaking practices and making a difference in the world.

Huckins and Swigart regularly write and speak on peacemaking and reconciliation, conflict transformation, Muslim-Christian relations, and living locally as global citizens. In *Mending the Divides* they address questions such as:

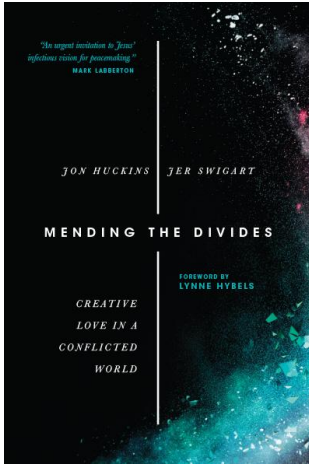
- How do you define peace? What does peace look like in a world of endless conflict?
- How can everyday Christians be peacemakers in large international conflicts? In local conflicts?
- You say that the work of peacemaking is a set of everyday practices that require intentionality, sacrifice, and creativity. What are those practices?
- What kind of situations have you used these peacemaking practices in? What happened as a result?
- How can Christians uncover biases and prejudices ingrained through our upbringing, brand of church, and preferred media sources in order to see the humanity, dignity, and image of God in everyone?
- What would be different in the world if North American Christians understood peacemaking as central to following Jesus?
- What’s your story with peacemaking? Why did you decide to start a peacemaking organization and to write a book teaching others what you have learned?
- What can faith leaders who want to engage local and global conflicts as a church or organization learn from this book? How can we train people in the way of peace?
- If in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus God waged a decisive peace, why do we still live in a world plagued by conflict?

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 Krista Clayton, broadcast and online publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kclayton@ivpress.com
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Peacemaking in Action

Whenever we begin a conversation about restoration at an international level, we're met with pessimism. Questions surface like: "How does someone like me living in Des Moines, Iowa, join God in the work of international peacemaking?" In questions like these we discover just how disconnected many of us are from how globalization, international conflict, and the immigration phenomenon have brought global communities into our own neighborhoods.

While it's likely that most of us will never find ourselves in international peace negotiations, almost all of us are relationally connected to the divides in our world through our neighbors, our businesses, our churches, and even our social media channels. But how do we leverage those relationships? And in so doing, how do we join God in his work of restoration on a global scale?

Andy, Jamie, and their kids are your typical white evangelical family. They're natives of Seattle, Washington, and local practitioners of international peacemaking. Refugees from Iraq and Syria inhabit their neighborhood, creating an opportunity for their family to become an instrument of peace in our war-torn world.

The reality of ISIS paired with the chaos of the Syrian conflict has created a refugee crisis the likes of which hasn't been experienced since World War II. At the time we are writing this, 4.6 million Iraqis have been displaced due to ISIS campaigns. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 6.1 million Syrians have been internally displaced while an additional 4.8 million Syrians are on a perilous refugee journey toward safety.

The state of Washington is considered one of the top ten most receptive states to refugees in the country with the Seattle area leading the way. To date, more than fifteen thousand Iraqi refugees have been resettled in the greater Seattle area and between thirty and fifty thousand Syrians. Andy, Jamie, and their kids are at the center of an international peacemaking effort in their own neighborhood.

As it always does, it began with healed sight. Neither Andy nor Jamie had been to Iraq or Syria nor had they spent much time with Muslims. They simply saw in the local newspapers that a group of Middle Eastern refugees were moving to town and were in desperate need of support and accompaniment. Reality hit Andy and Jamie. Their new international neighbors needed help adjusting to life in a new country after unthinkable trauma in their own.

Their immersion began with a cultural competency training offered by a local refugee resettlement organization. Within days, an Iraqi family was living with them in their small apartment. Hospitality was the tool of their contending. While Andy and Jamie didn't have much, they did have a spare bedroom, some extra folding chairs, and the resources to ensure

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Jon Huckins is cofounder of peacemaking organization The Global Immersion Project. He also is on staff with Thresholds as a missional church leadership coach and is the pastor of a neighborhood faith community. He is the author of Teaching Through the Art of Storytelling and Thin Places.

Jon has a master's degree from Fuller Theological Seminary and writes for numerous publications, including TheOOZE, Red Letter Christians, Sojourners, RELEVANT, and Burnside Writer's Collective.

Jon lives in the neighborhood of Golden Hill (San Diego) with his wife, Jan, and four children and finds much joy in participating in the economic, social, and relational fabric of Golden Hill with his family and community.

that their dinner table had enough food for everyone. They also had a network of friends and family that pitched in additional resources to ensure that all who called their humble apartment “home” had what they needed.

Andy and Jamie worked hard to help their new roommates get acquainted with an American kitchen, local grocery stores, the school system, and public transportation. English lessons were organic as, around the shared table, they worked with their foreign friends to establish a baseline understanding of English. Over time, a trusting relationship developed that created the space for healing to occur for the Iraqi family. But theirs wasn't the only restoration that occurred.

As I (Jer) have reflected with Andy on the experience of welcoming refugees, he's been quick to declare that the restoration that's occurring is his own. His understanding of who God is and who God is for is expanding. He's been forced to acknowledge how he's allowed his upbringing, theological development, and media influences to blind him from people who are not like him. As their home has become a place of immersion, he's learned how God inhabits the spaces Andy formerly protected and how God brings about holistic restoration when we release our grip on “our” resources. He and his family are working hard to confront their constructions of “enemy” and are finding that as they practice creative love, God is restoring them, those they host, and those who are on the journey with them.

Since hosting that original family, Andy and his family have hosted eight additional Iraqi and Syrian families in their home. We have shared their story with faith, civic, and political leaders throughout the country as an example of how to engage in international peacemaking with our refugee neighbors. Andy, Jamie, and their kids are joining God in his work of international restoration from their living room and dinner table and, as a result, others are learning to do the same.

As we learn to see, immerse, and contend, we actively join God in bringing restoration to life in our interpersonal relationships, issues of local injustice, and international conflicts. Often, the restoration that springs to life in us and those around us surprises us. Restoration realized takes shape in hundreds of different ways.

The restored world that God is making – that we get to join him in ushering in – looks like a world where brothers no longer kill their brothers and where women and children are no longer exploited for the pleasure of men. This restored world is one in which no human beings are owned by other, more powerful human beings.

The restored world God is making is one in which senseless gun violence no longer produces dead kids in our streets and where immigrants and refugees no longer hide in fear in the shadows of overcrowded apartments. It's a world where human beings are no longer trapped in cages, where addiction no longer has power, and where hunger and thirst no

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Jer Swigart is cofounder of peacemaking organization *The Global Immersion Project*. He teaches theology, justice, and innovative leadership at *Kilns College* in Bend, Oregon, and serves on Bend's Justice Commission.

Jer is a thought leader and international speaker who has been working in the field of peacemaking and conflict transformation since 2005. He is a contributing author to several books and has written for *Huffington Post* and *Sojourners*.

Jer completed his undergrad at the University of Northwestern-Saint Paul and has an MDiv from Fuller Theological Seminary where he received the prestigious David Allen Hubbard Award. He currently resides with his family in Bend, Oregon.

longer plague humanity. It's world where children are no longer trapped in systems without families.

Restoration happens when capitalism no longer trumps compassion, where consumption no longer trumps generosity, and where my flourishing no longer trumps yours. It happens when you and I assume the posture of the cross in myriad ways for the benefit of others. Restoration springs to life when we leverage and lay down our power and privilege so that others flourish.

This restored world that we speak of is made possible because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's the new world that God is making, and everyday peacemakers get to be a part of bringing it about.

– Adapted from chapter eight, “Restore”