

# The Beauty of Mediation as a Ministry Tool

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For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5, ESV)

...In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself. (2 Corinthians 5:19, ESV)

I want to be a Christ-like counselor, don't you? Well, a chief characteristic of our Lord's ministry was that he was a reconciler of others to his Father. He served as an intermediary who was willing to sacrifice so that our chief relationship could be made right. Wouldn't it make sense that if we serve as intermediaries to help others get right with one another that we are being like our Savior?

Some of the greatest blessings of my ministry years have come through leading mediations—for families, marriages, and churches. I LOVE watching precious people take ownership of sin, ask for forgiveness, and then see others grant forgiveness so they all can be reconciled. I also deeply enjoy the process of working through issues that have divided couples, families, and churches and seeing the parties involved accept brainstormed solutions to the issues.

This is a different process than longer term, traditional marriage counseling. As you seek to serve the hurting, it has advantages for you to consider and it is an amazing tool to add to your counseling toolbox!

Here are the advantages: this short-term model can be used to stabilize crisis relationships and deal with the big issues that have caused division. Doing mediation not only gives hope but also causes long-term counseling issues to bubble to the surface. Let me hit some key words or phrases from those two sentences.

**Short-term**—During 4 or 5 pre-mediation meetings the individuals do homework separately; they understand how their own heart desires have been fueling and shaping their response to the situation, and they begin to take responsibility. This pre-mediation time brings to light the big issues that are causing division as you do data-gathering. You can also give them homework, like reading *Peacemaking for Families* and doing questions from the end of the chapters. The advantage to that assignment is that it helps everyone to understand “peacemaker principles” so that during this process all are using the same tools to try to resolve the conflict.

After the pre-mediation work, and after the parties are spiritually ready (with softer hearts, ready to forgive and ready to confess), you schedule a 1 ½- or 2-day mediation where you work through the main issues/complaints through a structured process. This structured process has rules to follow that help everyone involved feel safe and has a set agenda using the acronym G-O-S-P-E-L, which keeps the process moving, organized, and gospel-focused.

## ***Stabilizes crisis relationships...gives hope.***

By addressing the biggest frustrations that are causing the relationship to gasp for air, you breathe in some hope and buy some time to address deeper heart themes in the long-term. You do address the heart at this time, just not at the depth that you can in a longer counseling relationship.

## ***Long-term counseling issues bubble to the surface***

As the big roadblocks in the relationship are addressed, and as the participants begin to deal with their hearts, it becomes obvious that there are issues that this short-term approach doesn't handle. But that's not the job of this short-term intervention. I have experienced over and over that the longer term counseling issues become obvious. Allow me to illustrate by telling you about Karen.

She and her husband were only married for 1 ½ years when they asked me to do a mediation. This was a third marriage for both, and they were afraid this one would fail as well. She was extremely angry that she had not been told the whole truth about his financial situation, and he was utterly frustrated at the harshness of her speech. Their marriage was on the brink of disaster.

They both responded well to the pre-mediation work; they did their homework and realized they each had much to confess. When the actual days of mediation came, a story began to unfold that previously had not been clear. As she was revealing her part of the story, and we were digging into why she talked to him the way she did, a horrible story of abuse during childhood came to light. She had been sexually molested repeatedly and out of that had developed an extremely controlling nature as a way to cope with life and to keep others from hurting her again—especially men. This was not an issue we could deal with during mediation. Was it impacting their marriage? Absolutely! But it was not what the big complaints in their marriage were about—at least on the surface.

By dealing with the big complaints, confessing sins, granting forgiveness and brainstorming solutions to those big complaints, the marriage was stabilized. But it was obvious she needed some intensive discipleship to really deal with the sexual abuse and the ways she was worshiping control. I am happy to report that both were a success—the mediation and her long-term discipleship counseling. Karen is a radically different woman, and the marriage is stable.

I enjoy the process of working through issues and being a witness to, at times, dramatic reconciliations. It is Christ-like to serve as a mediator, so I hope you'll consider this tool to imitate him.

This is the briefest of introductions to the topic. If it sounds interesting, please see [icpeace.com](http://icpeace.com) for more information. I also wrote a small booklet titled *Help! I'm in a Conflict* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2015) that may be of help as you seek to see others become reconciled.

## **Join the Conversation**

What questions does this methodology raise? How could you get the process going to train others to conduct mediations and not just traditional discipleship counseling?

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