



Zoom Bible Study ~ Improving Your Relationships

Session 9 ~ March 16, 2021

Introduction

I think if we took a survey of the things we don't like to do, confrontation would come out somewhere near the top. Yet, confrontation can be one of the most constructive things we can do to improve our relationships when it is done at the right time, for the right reason, in the right way.

In this study we are going to demonstrate the consequences of failure to confront when you need to, the potential benefits of constructive confrontation, and most importantly, the guidelines you need to follow when it is right for you to confront. This is one of the most important lessons to learn in developing your ability to improve your relationships.

The Consequences of Avoiding Confrontation

Consider this scenario:

You and I work together as peers, but I have been on the job longer than you. Your work habits have become a constant source of frustration to me because you don't do your work carefully and your many errors end up on my desk and cause me considerable extra work.

As a result, this has boiled up inside of me until I feel very “put upon,” and I share my frustration with another co-worker who is a good friend of mine. In other words, I go into gossip mode and tell this other co-worker what I don’t like about you, etc. Since this other person is a friend of mine, she is influenced by what I’ve told her about you, even though she personally has not had a relationship difficulty with you.

Shortly thereafter, my good friend is having a conversation with another co-worker in another part of the company, your name surfaces innocently, and my friend passes on to this other person the negative report about you which she heard from me. Before long this gossip has spread through the company, and your reputation is somewhat damaged.

You notice a change in the way some co-workers interact with you and you sense something has happened, but you have no idea what it is. You just know that it’s not much fun to work here any longer because of the poor working relationships that have developed.

Who is responsible for your relationship problems with your co-workers?

Consider other consequences of this scenario:

- Company morale suffers.
- You develop ulcers!
- Your attitude takes a turn downward.
- Productivity is down; wasted time is up.
- Inaccurate work continues, affecting customers adversely.
- The boss is not happy.
- I continue to be frustrated over your poor work habits, and that affects my attitude even more.

Now, here's the next important consideration. Which of these actions on my part could have averted all of these negative consequences?

- If I had gone to the boss and complained about you
- If I had kept my mouth closed and said and done nothing
- If I had chosen to confront you in a constructive way without talking to anyone else

When you and I avoid confrontation where it is needed, we do not spare nor help our relationships, but usually we damage them further. So, failure to confront when needed is a very destructive and harmful course of action.

Our Reluctance to Confront

How would you describe yourself when it comes to confrontation?

- I rarely confront anyone about anything because it is very uncomfortable and I try to avoid anything unpleasant.
- I fear the reaction from the person I need to confront and I don't want to hurt his or her feelings, so I'm very reluctant to confront.
- I feel so guilty about myself for so many reasons that I feel as though I don't have a right to confront anybody about anything.
- I only confront when I'm really angry, and then it comes out all wrong and causes greater problems.
- I confront all the time, but I don't stop to think about how I do it, so it often backfires on me.

Is there a person in your life at present that you know you need to confront about some situation or issue, but you have not yet done so? If yes, what is keeping you from confronting her/him?

- I'm afraid of her/his reaction.
- I don't know how to do it.
- I confronted her/him once before and it made things worse.
- I've confronted her/him many times and it doesn't do any good.
- I don't want to hurt her/his feelings.
- I don't know if it is my place to confront this person or not.
- I've never been good at confrontation and I'm fearful that I will make a fool out of myself.
- I'm waiting for the right time to do it (like maybe in 100 years!).

Analyze your answer and ask yourself if the root cause of your failure to confront is not indeed some kind of fear: fear of rejection, fear of disapproval, fear of failure, fear of unpleasantness, etc.

I think one of the most destructive consequences of our reluctance to confront is the gossip that often ensues. And oh, how easy it is for us to start gossiping when we need to confront! Next time you start to gossip, stop and ask yourself if you should be confronting instead of gossiping.

Constructive or Destructive?

Destructive confrontations usually occur quickly, on the spur of the moment, in the heat of some emotion, usually anger, and these quick “pop up” confrontations are almost always bad news.

Think of what is behind most of these types of confrontations.

- Anger
- Frustration
- Selfishness
- Watching out for “number one”
- Lack of patience

Which of the following confrontations would qualify as destructive or constructive and why?

1. Your boss calls the department together for a meeting, and after some initial announcements and discussion, he/she announces that the quality of work has been extremely poor in a certain area, and he/she proceeds to ventilate a great deal of anger toward certain people, with warnings and threats of what will happen if the quality of their work does not improve.

Constructive?

Destructive?

Why?

2. Your mother calls you in tears, very upset because she has just learned that you're not going to be home for Thanksgiving. She accuses you of not caring about her and always going to your husband's home instead of hers.

Constructive?

Destructive?

Why?

3. Your grown daughter is still living at home, but she doesn't do any work around the house. Since she pays a minimal amount of rent, she feels she is not obligated to do anything else. As a result her room, as well as the bathroom, is always a disaster area. You have decided to put in writing what will be required of her as a "tenant" in your home. You have a quiet conversation with her as you give her those written requirements, while you let her know that if she chooses to live somewhere else, you will understand and that will be okay with you. You set a time limit for her to make a decision about whether she will abide by the house rules or find another place to live.

Constructive?

Destructive?

Why?

4. Your husband has a bad habit of saying negative things about you in front of other people, in a joking way, but it often hurts your feelings. He did it again last night when you were out with friends, and you didn't speak to him after you got home. This morning, however, he keeps asking you what's wrong, and finally you blurt out that you're tired of him running you down in front of other people, and you end up in tears.

Constructive?

Destructive?

Why?

5. Your friend at church calls at the last minute to tell you something's come up and she can't help you with the church dinner tonight. You tell her how thoughtless that is of her, how much work this puts on you, and how her action is going to adversely affect the whole church dinner tonight.

Constructive?

Destructive?

Why?

6. Your parents are aging and need a great deal of assistance in taking care of their home and their affairs. You have two siblings, but they seem to be happy to leave all the responsibility for your parents in your hands. You have dropped some hints at times to try to solicit their involvement, but they haven't seemed to notice. So, you arrange for both of them to come to your home, and after dinner you broach the topic. Ahead of time you prepare a list of the things that have to be done for your parents, with any necessary details. You inform your siblings that these responsibilities will have to be shared between the three of you, and you ask them to choose the ones they will volunteer to do.

Constructive?

Destructive?

Why?

What qualifies a confrontation as "constructive"? Here are some benchmarks:

- *If the confrontation were successfully completed, would the person you are confronting benefit from it?*
- *Does this situation/person really require confrontation, or do you need an attitude change or more patience?*
- *Is your desire to confront imbedded in a desire to get even, or is it wrapped up in anger and vengeance?*

[James 4:1-2:](#)

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.

If you confront for the wrong reasons, even if a confrontation would be helpful, your motive will spoil the whole thing and it won't produce a good result.

Ephesians 4:11-16:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Some very important principles regarding relationships can be gleaned from this passage:

1. Relationships need to be nurtured and built up.
2. Relationships and maturity are closely connected.
3. Being open in our relationships is very important.
4. Confronting in love is a necessary part of maturing as a Christian.

This really gets to the heart of our motivation in confrontation. It has to be rooted in love for the other person.

Sometimes we are called to endure patiently, even when there is a need to confront someone.

Tips for Confronting

Remember that confronting is by nature sensitive and delicate, and therefore needs to be thoughtfully approached. A reckless, speedy, unplanned confrontation can lead to disaster.

Proverbs 14:15:

The simple believe anything, but the prudent give thought to their steps.

Proverbs 14:29:

Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly.

How would you describe a “prudent” person?

Choose the Right Time

Check the following times that would be good times for a confrontation:

- You are upset and at the point of tears.
- You spent a sleepless night worrying about it.
- The “confrontee” is extremely busy this week.
- The “confrontee” just lost his/her job.
- You are angry.
- The “confrontee” has had a recent health problem.

It should also be noted that some confrontations can't wait. For example, the following situations would probably require an immediate confrontation:

- A situation where there would be no further opportunity for confrontation; it is now or never.
- A situation of such volatility and potential harm that to wait could endanger the reputation or welfare of others.
- A situation where the name of Jesus Christ would be dishonored by waiting.
- A situation where your ethics or morality could be misunderstood or defamed by waiting.

Choose the Right Place

Not only is the right time important, but the right place is as well. Which of these locations would seem conducive to a constructive confrontation?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The cafeteria at work | <input type="checkbox"/> Your cubicle in the office |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A conference room | <input type="checkbox"/> A restaurant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In a meeting | <input type="checkbox"/> A private office |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Over the phone | <input type="checkbox"/> The lobby at work or church |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In a home setting | |

Here are the basic things to consider in choosing the right place:

- Choose a private place where you can have a one-on-one discussion without being overheard by others. In a work situation, you may want to consider the implication of calling someone into your office and shutting your door for a confrontation. That could be a signal to others that a confrontation is occurring, so even though it is in a private place, it may still need to be more discreet.

- On the job, consider an off-site location. That is a good idea, especially in what you would consider “high profile” situations.
- Consider confronting over a meal. It seems to break down some barriers when we share a meal with someone.

Avoid Finger-Pointing

Which of the following phrases would be considered ‘finger-pointing’ phrases?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> You never are on time... | <input type="checkbox"/> You’ve made the same mistake three times... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> You don’t know how to do this... | <input type="checkbox"/> You have difficulty getting along with your sister... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Your attitude is causing problems... | <input type="checkbox"/> You never listen to me... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> You have had your way for too long... | |

Think of some words/phrases that don’t tend to have that “finger-pointing” flavor.

An example is:

“Perhaps there has been a misunderstanding...”

What are some others?

Plan Your Words

Proverbs 21:23 reminds us that:

Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity.

Proverbs 16:21 is very helpful in this matter of confrontation:

The wise in heart are called discerning, and gracious words promote instruction.

You certainly don't have to be gushy or phony as you approach a confrontation. It just means you are wise enough to choose words that can be swallowed as easily as possible.

Speaking kind words is definitely a high priority when we are confronting. Referring once again to:

Ephesians 4:29:

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

This verse should be our guiding principle in choosing our words.



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