

Wisdom for Peacemaking

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Day One

Have you ever experienced conflict in the workplace? Clashing with another person is part of life and the truth is, we have all experienced conflict, in both our personal and professional relationships.

Sometimes you find yourself in a minor disagreement, other times conflict can turn into a full blown falling out with a co-worker or friend. Whether in the workplace, or at home, relational discord is part of life. It is not a matter of “if” you will have conflict but “how will you show” up in the face of it.

How do you react when there is a disagreement, disharmony or tension in a relationship? Do you hide or withdraw and harbor your hurt? Do you react by lashing out, pointing fingers and blaming? Maybe you move into a mode of avoidance just hoping the conflict will resolve itself. While we know that none of these responses is helpful, it can be easy to default to behaviors that are unbiblical. Fear, pride, or simply not knowing how to engage with conflict in a healthy way can hinder our relationships with others. So what is the God-honoring and relationship-building way to approach what most of us experience as uncomfortable conflict situations?

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus gives us counsel and words of wisdom when he says, *“Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God”* (Matthew 5:9).

Notice that Jesus says “peacemaker” not “peacekeeper.” This is a really important distinction. Being a peacemaker infers an active and intentional posture towards pursuing and creating peace. Taking the actions necessary to live in harmony with another person. Acknowledging there is a relational rift.

Peacekeeping on the other hand is often passive and an attempt to work hard at pretending that nothing is wrong or bothering you to keep tensions from rising. Peacekeepers try to avoid conflict at any cost. Peacemakers invite necessary conflict and know that it is a part of life. Now I am not saying that you should intentionally stir up conflict. I am saying that conflict is an unavoidable part of life and rather than ignore it, acknowledge it.

Re-frame conflict as a way that can enrich the relationship when approached in love and handled in a gospel grounded way. Practice the courage to engage conflict rather than living in a land of false peace.

And remember, in the words of Jesus, when you pursue peace, you will be blessed and called children of God.

Day Two

Are you a peacemaker or a peacekeeper? There’s a difference between being a peacemaker, actively pursuing peace in the midst of conflict, and being a peacekeeper, avoiding conflict in an attempt to keep the often “false peace”.

According to the Bible there is nothing inherently wrong with conflict. Disagreements happen. But the way we resolve our conflicts is extremely important. Conflict can become the catalyst to greater understanding, intimacy, and depth of relationship; or it can bring anger, bitterness, and broken relationships. How you deal with conflict will literally shape the direction of your life.

Whether it's addressing a conflict with your supervisor, an argument with your aunt, or not seeing eye to eye with a friend, most of us feel anxious, fearful or at least uncomfortable when conflict arises.

It's important to ask yourself, "What am I afraid of?" For me, I am often hesitant to lean into conflict because I am afraid I will in some way damage the relationship or cause the other person to not like me, to walk away from the friendship or cause a further wedge between us. Yet more often than not avoiding conflict only leads to a build up of hurt and resentment and then the very thing you fear the most ends up happening. Distance grows, avoidance settles in, and the relationship fades. So what do we do? The first step to take is to identify the conflict. Take time to reflect and write down, "who is the conflict with," and from your perspective, "what happened?"

This is also a critical time to get honest with yourself and acknowledge the role you played in the conflict. Now you might be saying, "it's all her fault. I did nothing wrong." But most often there is something that both parties need to address and own. It could be an attitude or reaction on your part that God brings to light. As the saying goes, "it takes two to tango." My favorite verses in displaying humility and inviting God to shed light on my contribution to a breakdown are found in Psalm 139:23-24. "*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*" Invite Jesus into your conflict!

This posture before God models a teachable heart and invites God to use the conflict situation to grow and sanctify you. Your heart will be primed to approach the other person with humility and in a way that will honor God.

Day Three

A few years ago I received a call from a friend. When I picked up the phone she asked if we could talk. She said she had been hurt by something I did and wanted to have a conversation about it because our relationship was important to her. I admired the courage it took for her to call me. It would have been much easier for her to stew or make up stories about what happened rather than take the initiative to share her hurt. She went on to describe what happened from her perspective and how she felt. I really admired the way she approached the conversation. She did not blame; she shared her experience and point of view. She sought to engage in dialogue rather than prove a point or put me in my place.

Ephesians 4:15 says, "*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.*" Christian maturity is marked by the ability to share difficult truths in a loving way. And my friend did this which led to a fruitful conversation. Her attitude was one of humility. As you prepare to approach a conflict situation, the actual words and delivery in the midst of the confrontation are key.

No matter the level of hurt or offense, approach the conversation with humility. Share your perspective. Avoid blaming. Seek to understand the other person's perspective. Listen.

If you are the one who was hurt, give grace and extend forgiveness. If you caused the hurt, own it, sincerely apologize, and ask for forgiveness. Give your ego a backseat and seek the fruit of the Spirit of peace.

Whether you are the injured or offending party, seeking an end to conflict by pursuing harmony and being a peacemaker is biblical. As children of God we are called to share Jesus's passion for peace and reconciliation. Where can you actively engage in conflict with the goal of breaking down the walls

that seek to divide your relationships? Who will you call this week to address a conflict as you seek peace and reconciliation?

Day Four

Do you want to live a long, good life and enjoy the beauty that fills each day? I'm guessing the answer is "yes."

There is so much advice coming at us at a rapid pace these days and there is no shortage of knowledge and information clamoring for our attention. We are inundated with commercials, podcasts, Instagram, and social media posts that tell us the ways to achieve the "good life." Buy this car, have this job, make this salary, acquire this house, wear these clothes, marry this person..... The list towards the pursuit of happiness is infinite and the chase is endless. And whatever we look to to guide our "happiness," whatever "wisdom" we consume on a daily basis, will ultimately consume us and have a profound effect on our hearts, minds, attitudes and actions.

That's why it is important to look to God's Word as we seek discernment and wisdom for our everyday life. I want to look to the Psalms as we pursue godly instruction to guide our paths.

Psalm 34:12-14 says, *"Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it."*

The keys to a good life:

- Watch your words.
- Turn your back on sin.
- Practice being at peace.

Can you imagine what the world would be like if these were the standards? Surely we would all be living our days filled with more beauty and goodness. While these are not the principles of the world, as a follower of Jesus these are instructions from God's Word and we are called to live by these truths.

If you were to examine your words, do you speak with integrity? Do your words show moral character and honesty? Are they in alignment with Ephesians 4:29 which says, *"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."*

When you are tempted to sin do you take the way out as 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, *"And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."*

Do you practice peace as Romans 12:18 says, *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."*

As a child of God you have the profound privilege of living in a manner that shows the world a better way of living a good life, and enjoying the beauty that fills each day.

Day Five

It's easy to try to get our identity from all the wrong places rather than from the very of truth of God. Have you ever been in a season of waiting? Maybe you are in a time of waiting right now. Are you waiting to hear back on a job interview, a promotion, a letter of acceptance to school. Maybe you are waiting on a phone call from a long-lost friend or estranged family member, a call from the doctor for a diagnosis. Waiting is hard.

I was having dinner with a friend the other night and she was lamenting about prayers that are seeming to go unanswered. We talked about how difficult and often uncomfortable it can be when we experience what feels like long delays as we seek God for help, or answers to a problem we are facing. We confided to one another the pain and frustration we can feel in the waiting. Can you relate? Have your prayers ever sounded like a broken record as you wonder why God was waiting so long to answer?

Proverbs 3:5-6 reminds us what wisdom looks like in the waiting. *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”*

Trust God not your own understanding. If we're honest, disheartenment can take up residence in us when we rely on our limited knowledge and vision of a situation. We can be tempted to trust in what we know and forget that we serve an all-knowing, trustworthy God. We can be enticed to give into impatience rather than fully surrendering to the faithfulness of Jesus.

In Psalm 27, David expresses authentic faith and courageous trust in God as he cries out and waits in confident expectation that the Lord will rescue and save him in his time of trouble. In Verse 14 he declares he will, *“Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”*

David is training his heart to trust and remember that the Lord hears him and he is faithful. In his perfect timing God will answer David and come to his rescue. In his perfect timing God will answer you and come to your rescue. Waiting for God to come through is a way that God builds your faith and character and grows your spiritual maturity.

Waiting can feel like wasted time but it isn't. The waiting sanctifies you. The waiting humbles you. The waiting prunes you. The waiting strengthens your dependence on God.

What are you waiting for from God? Will you trust him? It really comes down to choice. Will you choose patience and faith, or will you give into fear, doubt, worry, and anxiety? Listen, God is for you. He is making a way for you. Cooperate with him so the time spent waiting will prove productive and fruitful. There is wisdom in the waiting.