

When Conflict Arises

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Day One

Sometimes the headlines are too much. These days the news is full of conflict, and it seems like this conflict has made its way into work in many ways. Whether it is continued conflict about gender or racial bias, income inequality, views on sustainability or environment or politics, we can count on people at work having differing opinions. And these opinions can bubble over into conflict when we least expect it.

In John 16:33 we are reminded by Jesus in this world we will have tribulation. Tribulation is defined as great trouble or suffering. You can see how each of these issues we just mentioned can cause great trouble and suffering. Beyond these macro level issues that we are all aware of, what about the day-to-day conflicts at work? It could be something as simple as a colleague not completing their work in a timely fashion which causes your work to be late, or a boss that requires you to be in the office every day but only comes in once a week.

While Jesus promises us all this conflict, he also tells us to take heart because he has overcome the world. Earlier in John 16:33, Jesus also tells us that in him, we will have peace.

How can you find the peace of Jesus in these conflict moments? This week we will look at ways we can find the peace that Jesus offers. Perhaps some of your conflicts are self-inflicted. Are you listening to wise counsel? Are you listening and staying silent enough? Maybe you are saying too much, when it is God you should be reliant on.

How closely you abide to your peace, Jesus, will be indicative of your greatest success or failure during times of conflict. Remember, Jesus promises us this conflict, but he also offers us the greatest solution in himself!

If you are feeling overwhelmed by a macro level conflict in our world today, Jesus isn't calling you to avoid it, he is calling you to rely on him! If you are going through a micro level conflict at work or at home, he isn't calling you to avoid it either, he is calling you to rely on him!

Day Two

Sometimes when we are in the midst of a conflict, we talk about it with others to seek counsel. Seeking counsel from others is not a bad thing. In fact, Proverbs 15:22 tells us that *without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed*, and in Proverbs 24:6 we learn *surely you need guidance to wage war, and victory is won through many advisers*.

Sometimes during a conflict, we seek counsel from people who may tell us what we want to hear instead of what we need to hear. You know that group of friends or colleagues that always seems to share your point of view, the ones that cheer you on and will tell you the other party is just plain wrong. In industrial psychology, we call this group think. Irving Janus, a Yale psychologist defines group think as a mode of thinking that people in a group engage in where striving for unanimity overrides the motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action.

Finding people that will agree with us can certainly feel good in the moment, but it can have monumental consequences when it comes to resolving a conflict.

In 1 Kings 22 Jehoshaphat sought counsel to discern whether he should go to battle. The prophets that he would typically take counsel from told him to go ... *for the Lord will give it into the king's hand* (1 Kings 22:6). When he asked if there was another prophet that he could inquire of, Micaiah was suggested. Jehoshaphat states, *I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad* (1 Kings 22:8). In the remaining verses of 1 Kings 22 we learn Jehosaphat goes to battle after not listening to Micaiah, and he lost his life.

When you are seeking advice during a conflict, are you listening to wise counsel or are you listening to the voices that always agree with you? And more importantly are you seeking counsel from other believers?

Good counsel asks questions; it challenges you and will seek to help you maintain and discern how you can come to a good resolution to a conflict. Good counsel will turn you toward God's Word and to your relationship with Jesus as you look for solutions in whatever situation you are in.

Day Three

Staying quiet when you are in conflict is hard! I know I have been guilty of saying too much during a conflict—especially if it is something I am passionate about!

Getting wound-up during a conflict is easy. You have a point of view, and you think it is the right point of view. Maybe you have stated your point of view, but it seems like no one is listening. Perhaps you are experiencing a conflict and don't know what to say, or you feel plain defeated in trying to continually do the right things and it doesn't seem to get you anywhere.

Are your words empty? The Bible cautions of the words that we use.

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words (Matthew 6:7).

Are you talking a lot but without a lot of substance?

Proverbs 21:35 in the message translation also warns,

Watch your words and hold your tongue; you'll save a lot of grief (Proverbs 21:35).

In the heat of a conflict, you can often say things you don't want to say.

My greatest encouragement is to tell you to remember it is ultimately God that fights your battles. He even calls us to be silent.

The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still (Exodus 14:14).

Have you ever tried deploying silence and waiting for the Lord to work on your behalf in a conflict? In the world this is counter intuitive. We are told to speak up and to fight for our point of view.

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 (Proverbs 3:5-6).

In this silence and waiting, turn to the Lord in prayer. Those empty words that you may say during a conflict are better used in a silent prayer to God to step in for you. Prayer is powerful. It draws you near to the Lord and helps you increase your trust that he knows the plans he has for you.

Day Four

Is a past conflict weighing on you? Perhaps it is something someone did to you or is it the other way around? As Christians in the workplace, we must hold ourselves to the higher standards of a calling to live our life in a way that reflects Jesus to others. More specifically, we are called to the greatest command to love one another as Jesus Christ loved us. The problem can be sometimes that our past conflicts may impact how others view our actions now or how we view others.

Perhaps you weren't following Jesus when you started working. You lead a very different life now, but people that knew you "before" remember conflict you caused. Old behaviors where maybe you caused conflict can linger. Maybe you were prone to carry the office gossip, or perhaps you took credit for a project that you worked on with other colleagues! But now you walk away and try not to say anything, and you try to ensure that you give words of encouragement to others for the work they do. Your choice not to engage in these old behaviors any more may even isolate you from colleagues or even a boss. Those that knew you as the office gossip or credit grabber may not initially trust your good intentions.

Paul is a terrific example of a follower who started off his vocation creating a lot of conflict. From the book of Acts, we know Saul was a persecutor of the followers of Jesus. They were truly frightened of Saul! After his miraculous conversion, Saul, now Paul, is brought back to Jerusalem to meet with the disciples. And, you guessed it, they were initially afraid to meet with him!

What conflict with someone from the past has impacted you? Perhaps you have been on the receiving end of conflict. Maybe a colleague or boss placed the blame on you for a key project not being completed on time. Have you been on the receiving end of that gossip? Maybe you were called out for your faith or for holding a point of view that is contrary to others in your workplace.

None of this builds trust or confidence. However, as followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to forgive others.

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins (Mark 11:25).

I am not suggesting you should forget the actions of others, in fact, being aware of past occurrences can help you navigate them better in the future if they happen again. Forgiveness will allow you to continue to shine the light of Jesus at work and draw closer to God.

Day Five

What is clear is that as followers of Jesus Christ we are called to handle conflict differently.

In verse 1 of John 16, Jesus says to his disciples, *all this I have told you so that you will not fall away*. Why is this significant? This singular verse follows John 15, and Jesus teaching about abiding. Just as we discussed earlier this week, Jesus knew we would face conflict. In fact, he is even more specific about this conflict in John 15:18. Jesus reminds us that if the world hates us know that it hated him before it hated you or me. Now let's put this together. Jesus wants us to abide, because he knows we will need him. He knows we need his love, his friendship, his counsel and his joy.

The conflicts in our day to day are heavy, but sometimes our Father is using these conflicts to help us to bear more fruit for his Kingdom. Yes, I said it. God uses these conflicts to grow us! John 15:2 states, *every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it will bear more fruit*. Pruning is a verb meant to trim by

cutting away dead or overgrown branches or stems, especially to increase fruitfulness and growth. Sometimes conflict happens to remove things from our lives that don't belong. That could be at work too. God can use these moments to shine a light of our need for a greater reliance or abiding with him. Another word used in these verses in place of abide is remain. Remain or stay. How often are we not remaining with Jesus? Are we wandering too far from the perfect, life-giving vine of Jesus Christ?

This is the vine of perfect love—a vine that says we can ask whatever we wish in Jesus' name! A vine that doesn't consider us servants but friends. A vine that apart from, we can do nothing. Don't ever forget this. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing. This means conflict. We should not engage in conflict without seeking Jesus.

Now, conflict isn't the only pruning God uses in our lives, but surely when we are in the midst of conflict, God's number one goal for us is how we seek him in the trial!