

PART V: Living in Community and Conflict

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READ THIS OVERVIEW

Most people are poor at resolving conflict, especially Christians.

Some of us are poor at resolving conflict because of wrong beliefs about peacemaking. Because Jesus proclaimed, “blessed are the peacemakers,” we wrongly assume that Jesus calls us to be pacifiers and people-pleasers who ensure that no one gets upset. Rather than expressing the ways that someone has hurt us or upset us, we avoid conflict by saying nothing, dismissing our wants, and pretending nothing is wrong. Yet, true peace will never come by pretending that what is wrong is right.

Others of us are poor at conflict not because we’re trying to keep the peace, but because we fight dirty. Whether because of our family of origin or because of our personality, all of us have adopted habits for dealing with conflict that are unhealthy. Our unkind words, defensive postures, and aggressive (or passive-aggressive) behaviours can all contribute to dirty fighting tactics. Yet, true peace will never come until we learn to fight cleanly.

When we look at the life of Jesus, we see a model for true peacemaking. Jesus was willing to bring disruption in order to bring true peace. Jesus didn’t avoid conflict or appease people. He didn’t ignore tensions or differences. Jesus fought; but he fought cleanly and with integrity.

If we’re going to follow Jesus, we must learn to engage conflict. By the power of the Holy Spirit and in Community, we can be transformed into the kind of people who fight cleanly and with integrity.

WORK THROUGH THESE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When faced with conflict, most of us respond with one of the following postures: fight, flight, or freeze. Which of those do you tend towards? Which was most prevalent in your family of origin?
 - a. Fight: Running towards conflict, sometimes engaging the conflict without slowing down enough to fight cleanly and cautiously.
 - b. Flight: Avoiding the conflict, perhaps by distancing yourself physically or emotionally from the person or situation.
 - c. Freeze: Staying present in the conflict, but doing nothing about it.
2. Take 5 minutes to have read the Dirty Fighting Tactics checklist below. Then share: Which 2 or 3 tactics do you see most often in your own life?
 - Silent Treatment
 - Lecturing
 - Blaming / Attacking
 - Condescension
 - Threatening Gestures
 - Name-Calling
 - Criticizing
 - Sarcasm
 - Complaining
 - Denying
 - Justifying
 - Walking Away
 - Avoiding
 - Shouting
 - Using “Always” and “Never”
 - Anger / Rage
 - Passive-Aggressive Behavior

- Lying
- Hitting / Violence
- Showing Contempt

DO THIS PRACTICE AS A COMMUNITY RIGHT NOW

Doing conflict well is one of the most difficult parts of any relationship, and yet it is also an incredible source of growing intimacy. Since doing anything well takes practice, we want to spend some time now to practice fighting cleanly. Pete & Geri Scazzero, in *Emotionally Healthy Relationships*, list out 7 Steps to a Clean Fight. You'll notice that effective conflict resolution involves the participation of both the speaker and the listener. Start the Practice tonight by reading the following 7 steps aloud together. (Note: 7 steps is a lot to remember, so it could be helpful to send out the link to this Practice to your Community, so they can follow along.)

Step 1: Ask for permission & state the problem (Speaker)

Begin the process by asking for permission to engage the listener in a clean fight and state what you would like to talk about. It's really helpful to use "I notice..." language. It's also important to be specific when you state the problem, and to address a behavior, not just the emotion.

For example: "Do you have a minute to chat? I notice that you get up and leave when you're getting frustrated with me during an argument."

Step 2: State why it is important to you (Speaker)

Next, express the value that compelled you to bring this problem up. Try using the phrase, "I value..."

For example: "I value having healthy communication with you..."

Step 3: Fill in the following sentence: "When you... I feel..." (Speaker)

Next, refer to the way the behavior you are addressing makes you feel. The goal here is not to accuse the person, but to explain how the behavior impacts you, so try starting with the behavior and ending with the emotion you feel.

For example: "When you get up and leave while we fight, I feel disrespected and..."

Step 4: State your request clearly, respectfully, and specifically (Speaker)

In light of their behavior and your feelings, make a specific request for how you'd like them to behave. Consider using the phrase, "I'd like to ask that you..."

For example: "I'd like to ask that you do not leave the room during our conflicts..."

Step 5: Consider the request & state your level of agreement (Listener)

As the listener, spend a minute reflecting out loud about the request the speaker has made. This is a great time to briefly share your perspective and feelings with this person. As you consider the request, you have an opportunity to agree to all, some, or none of what the speaker has requested.

For example: "Thank you for sharing this with me. I had no idea it impacted you so much. I can try my best to not leave the room during a conflict, but sometimes I may need to leave because I know that, if I were to stay, I would say something I regret."

Step 6: Agree to the request or offer an alternative (Speaker)

Now that the listener has heard the request and stated their agreement, you can agree to the request or offer an alternative.

For Example: "I understand that. I can agree to give you some space before we talk." Or, "I understand that. If you do need some space, let me know by saying "I need a minute" and we can take some time before we come together to talk about it."

Step 7: Review the agreement now and then again in 2 to 4 weeks (Speaker & Listener)

In order to make sure you're on the same page, take a minute for each of you to express your understanding of the agreement using the phrase: "My understanding of the agreement is.." So put a date on the calendar to come back together, review your agreement and check-in about how it's going and see if you need to make any adjustments.

DISCUSS THE COMING WEEK'S PRACTICE

When we get into conflict, it's easy to get caught up in the spur of the moment and lose our integrity. We may not recognize our part of the problem, be unclear about our values, avoid the truth, or not think about the future. This week's practice is an exercise in maintaining our integrity in conflict, using what Pete and Geri Scazzero call Climbing the Ladder of Integrity. The ladder of integrity is

Step 1: Identify a minor problem that is bothering you (eg, someone being late, cell phone use, clutter, lack of communication, lack of meetings).

Step 2: Using the practice we did today, write your problem in a journal, or on a piece of paper. (So that you practice how you could solve the problem and that you have clarity about what the problem is that you are experiencing)

Step 3: If after doing these steps on your own, you feel like you've gained clarity about the problem or conflict you're having with another person, respectfully share what's going on inside of you with that person (i.e. put in practice what we did today)