



Pursuing Peace Together

Applying the Gospel
through Relational Wisdom

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SESSION 1

Introduction

Factors to Remember

- Conflict is everywhere. It is naturally in every relationship – family, business, marriage and ministry. Conflict is even between God and the most committed Christian.
- This challenge is a fact for every person, Christian and non-Christian alike.
- We are all sinners and naturally tend to respond to conflict according to our self-interests and self-love.
- However, the Gospel provides hope and a path to respond to conflict in a decidedly different way than the world.
- Relational Wisdom provides a needed framework for applying biblical peacemaking principles.
- Biblical peacemaking addressing conflict with a biblically faithful approach) reflects our identity and provides a clear goal of attaining a culture of peace.
 - Matthew 5:9 *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."*
 - James 3:18 *"And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."*
- In a culture of peace, God uses the challenge of our everyday conflicts to bring glory to Himself, make us more like Christ, and reconcile relationships.
 - 1 Corinthians 10:31 *"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."*
- Christian families and churches have an amazing opportunity to create a new culture, one of peace and harmony, even in the face of the most challenging of conflicts.
 - 1 Corinthians 1:10 *"Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment."*
- To create this new culture requires intentional effort!
- Studies indicate that after 1 month you will remember only 13% of what you hear today.
- Actively practicing peacemaking will help you embed these principles in your life. Make notes highlighting the things you learn today that you will intentionally put into practice tomorrow.
 - Philippians 4:9 *"The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."*

SESSION 2

The Anatomy of Unresolved Conflict

What Is Conflict?

Conflict is a difference between two people or within a group of people.

It can be as simple as a difference of opinion between a parent and a child.

It can be as complex as a divided congregation.

Pause for Thought:

What types of conflicts are you presently aware of in your life?...family?...church?...school?...business?

Remember:

The problem isn't the *difference*, it is *what we have done* with the difference.

Triggers: The Beginning of Conflict

Principle: No matter what the trigger is, conflict starts in the heart.

Positive Triggers:

- God-given diversity - illustration: I Corinthians 12
- Natural differences of perspective and preferences
- Godly desires

Challenging Triggers:

- Unclear communication
Consider this: "You never know what you said until you know what they heard."
- Misunderstandings
- Disappointments

Harmful Triggers:

- Sinful actions – examples: Careless words; reckless words
- Selfish attitudes
- Idolatrous desires

Pause for Thought:

When you are in conflict, what do you most often want?
How can I learn to check my heart/ desires each time I am in conflict?

#1 Conflict begins with something I want.

James 4:1 *"What is the **source** of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source **your desires** that wage war in your members?" (emphasis ours)*

Key Ideas:

- We are different by design...God's design.
- We are in conflict by desire...our desires.
- We are impacted by many influences ...the world's culture.

Key Question:

What are you doing to combat the world's culture?

#2 – Conflict is fueled by how badly I want something.

James 4:1-3 *"...Is not the source **your desires** that wage war in your members? **You desire** and do not have; **so you** commit murder. **You are** envious and cannot obtain; **so you** fight and quarrel. You do not have **because you do not ask**. You ask and do not receive, **because you ask with wrong motives**, so that you may spend it on your pleasures" (emphasis ours).*

Key Ideas:

Conflict begins with my desires.
Idols are revealed by my demands.

"When a desire is elevated to the level of a demand, an idol is talking." Attributed to C.S. Lewis

Let's stop for a moment and think about "heart idolatry".

Definition: *An idol is any unmet desire that I demand.*

- Something you will sin to obtain or sin if it's denied
- Anything I need more than God
- Anything I trust more than God
- Anything I consider more holy/ right/ beautiful than God

Principle

How badly I want something is a sanctification issue. Desires can rob Christians of God's best, and they miss His grace.

Jonah 2:6 *"Those who cling to worthless idols
forfeit the grace that could be theirs."*

Idols are revealed by:

- Fear – Proverbs 29:25; Proverbs 28:14
- Pride – Proverbs 11:2; Proverbs 16:18
- Unresolved anger – Proverbs 12:16; Proverbs 19:19
- Misplaced trust – Proverbs 3:5-6

Negative impacts of idolatry:

- Keeps my focus on your speck – Matt 7:1-5
- Places blame outside my heart/desires – James 4:1
- Thinks forgiveness is earned – Col 3: 13; Eph 4:32
- Believes sin should not be forgiven – 1 John 1:7

Hebrews 12:14 ***"Pursue peace with all men and the sanctification*** without which no one will see the Lord."

Definition of sanctification

- God's present work in the life of a Christian
- Becoming more like Jesus...

Pause for Thought:

What are some of the things in your family or church life that can become idols?

#3 – Conflict is unresolved when grace is not experienced.

Hebrews 12: 15 *“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.”*

Conflict resolution comes through God’s grace. His grace provides the path to His peace. While walking that path we discover the remedy to the bitterness that results from unforgiveness. Without the grace of God we would all fall into bitterness and its devastating results.

Principle

Grace is necessary to resolve any conflict. It is intended to flow from each person to the other and to result in the sanctification of each person involved.

A Pastoral Exhortation:

Many of the conflicts in local churches are exacerbated by allowing unforgiveness in relationships. This is exposed when Christians refuse to forgive others. While every Christian has these feelings from time to time, it can become the norm, which defies Scripture. (See Col 3:13)

Instead of a godly culture where ‘no one falls short of the grace of God’ (Hebrews 12:15), Christian leaders and church members accept the presence of unconfessed and unforgiven sins. This is not relationally wise, since sin is harmful to our hearts and relationships. It is an aberration of what Christ came to produce for His church. His peace (John 14:27) is forfeited, replaced by troubled or idolatrous hearts.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.” John 14:27

Fear is one of the motivations (idols) that fuel this culture. Bitterness, pride, and greed (wanting something that God doesn’t want) are other motivators.

If Christians can discover a new way to respond, a culture of peace, aligned with biblical reality, can become the norm. It is our hope that a personal study of *Relational Wisdom* and *Pursuing Peace Together* will result in active peacemaking becoming a dominant characteristic in our churches, families, and lives.

– Paul Cornwell

#4 – Unresolved conflict results in a sense of hopelessness.

Hebrews 12:15 “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be **defiled.**” (emphasis ours)

Principle: Unresolved conflict will become bigger than you intend!

“Defiled” means:

- Contaminated or polluted
- Useless

Destructive Effects of Conflict

- Families are shattered and marriages broken by divorce.
- Parents and children are estranged.
- Christians are left feeling hopeless and alone.
- Anger ravages otherwise healthy relationships.
- Churches are divided and many split.
- Pastors leave the ministry, 1500 a month, many of them never to return.
- Shepherding leaders experience “serious conflicts” without the skill set to overcome them.
- Gossip, complaining and other verbal sins become normal.
- Judging, unforgiveness, other heart sins keep Christians in idolatrous behaviors.

Pause for Thought

- When you’re in conflict, how often do you focus on making sure the other person experiences God’s grace? What would it look like for them to experience His grace?
- How often is the sanctification of the other person your concern?
- What would happen if you intentionally made it your concern?

Reporting: Give a one-word or one-sentence response.

Application: Hebrews 12:14-15 provides a goal and a purpose to adopt as well as a reality to understand and practice. The writer chooses Esau as an example of the costs to us when we fail to adopt these goals and practice repentance.

My Goal: No bitterness in me or you

God’s Purpose: To reduce trouble and create usefulness

Our Reality: Repentance is required

For Deeper Study: How much like Esau are you?

Remember, it is never just you! And it is never simply a matter of who is right and who is wrong!

Hebrews 12:16-17 *“...that there be **no immoral or godless person like Esau**, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears”* (emphasis ours).

Focus: “No immoral person”

- Esau elevated a present need to an improper level.
- He made a God-less decision instead of trusting God to meet his need or considering that God would walk with him through an unmet need.
- He did not care what his choice would cost him.
- Esau diminished grace by devaluing God’s gift, his birthright.
- He missed his own heart for what he actually wanted and needed.
- Tears = a recognition of desire for repentance.
- And a clear indication that repentance is crucial.

Journal your responses:

1. What does it mean that you have a birthright? (See I Corinthians 6:19-20; Galatians 2:20)
2. What examples of “selling your birthright” have you seen?
3. What would happen if you or someone you know “sought for repentance” and could not find it? (See Hebrews 3)