

ABF Teachers and Leaders Training Topic:

Facing Conflict Biblically

Conflict is an opportunity to glorify God!

Before moving on...take a few minutes to ponder that profound statement. Is conflict really an opportunity? If you're like me the only opportunity I think of when there's conflict is to run away from it! But, as believers, we're called to another standard. As Christ followers...we are to imitate Him. Talk about the narrow path! But the reality is, conflict often makes us run in the other direction or we become like a caged animal and attack those who disagree with us! Maybe we don't attack physically, but what about our thoughts or worse...our words? If you think not, consider the wild fires of gossip!

Conflict...it's one of those grueling experiences in life we'd like to avoid, but we face conflict almost every day—whether with loved ones, or at work, in church or in the news. Conflict has been around since Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In fact, God is the one who gave notice that conflict would be part of life! See Genesis 3!

The good news for us is that Jesus humbly entered our world of conflict, first as a baby in the manger then to the cross!

As teachers and leaders we are to follow Christ's example. Christ chose the path of humility, the path of peace. Romans 12:18 says it this way, “If it is possible, **as far as it depends on you**, live at peace with everyone. And from the Message Bible, Hebrews 12:14; “Work at getting along with each other and with God. Otherwise you'll never get so much as a glimpse of God.”

The NIV puts it this way, Make every effort to live in **peace with all men** and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

When we're in conflict, we can become so blinded by our own desires that we lose focus on the Christ of peace. We don't see the Lord, all we see is how we want to get even, to win or to run away from the conflict!

Several years ago my friend gave me a beautiful cross on a gold chain. I treasure it, not only because of the beauty of the necklace, but what it symbolizes. The chain is very delicate and has become tangled, occasionally a knot just seems to happen. How did that get there? I can't wear the chain with the knot—it's too expensive to throw away, plus, I value the gift and truly enjoy beauty of the cross.

Relationships are like a gold chain...delicate, beautiful, treasured and valued. Sometimes the “knot” of conflict causes the value of relationships to be hindered and damaged or destroyed completely.

So, why do we have conflicts anyway? Why these “knots” in the beautiful gold of our relationships that too often ends up in divorce court, split families and ruining businesses

and churches? Conflicts that run so deep people involved in them can end up suicidal or with murderous intentions... “wars and rumors of wars”.

Why? James 4:1 from The Message Bible explains— “Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves.”

God values relationships above all else. Because of His great love for us He sent Jesus to live among us. He made this sacrifice of love because He desires to restore the broken knotted relationships that are caused by our sin. The cross of Christ is the beautiful reconciliation displayed at the end of the gold chain. Christ settled our conflict issues. “And being found in appearance as a man, he **humbled himself** and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!” Philippians 2:8

As teachers and leaders how do we imitate Him when we face conflict? How can we live in such a way that when we face conflict we’ll glorify God above all else? How do we humbly follow Christ on this narrow path?

After attending Peacemaker’s Training several years ago, I discovered the following principles taught by Ken Sande in his book, *The Peacemaker*. I went to the training to learn how to deal with conflict better – within my family and in ministry. I knew the verses from Matthew 18, but for some reason, my resolving conflict skills fell desperately short from being like Christ. I knew there had to be more.

Matthew 5:9 reminds us, “Blessed are the **peacemakers**, for they will be called sons of God.” This is the way I wanted to be identified as a wife, mother, sister, daughter and leader. It’s a process and journey we’re all invited to become part of. Peacemaking can be our way of life. It was for Jesus. Actually, it’s the most excellent way.

There are four key components of becoming a peacemaker that I’d like to share with you. The 4 G’s of Peacemaking – from *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande

1. *Glorify God* –Ask yourself, “How can I glorify God in this situation?”

Glorifying God is a choice. Instead of focusing on my own desire or on what the other person has done or may do, I can choose to rejoice in the Lord and focus on Him and His goodness. Conflict really provides an opportunity to get to know Christ better, in a deeper more profound way! Is my focus on getting even, getting my own way or on Christ? Instead of reacting we can learn to respond to the Spirit’s leading in our lives by depending on His forgiveness, wisdom, power and love. We can initiate loving responses because He first loved us. Obedience is the choice we make to follow Him.

2. *Get the Log Out of Your Eye*—Ask yourself, “How have I contributed to this conflict?” I don’t know about you, but it’s very difficult to look at myself when I’m in a conflict. I can clearly see the other person’s wrongdoing, what I don’t like about him/her, or how they’ve hurt me. It’s very difficult to extend mercy because I’m so blinded by the offense. But, we’re called to trust God’s mercy and to take responsibility for our own part

in the conflict. Because we've been given mercy and grace we can ask God to help us change our attitudes and habits that may have contributed to the conflict.

3. Gently Restore—Ask yourself, “How can I breathe grace in this conflict?”

Why pretend? If the conflict is there—face it, with God's help! So often we pretend it doesn't exist and put on our pleasant “church face”, or we talk about others behind their backs or worse! Judgment may be the first thing on our mind. Gently restore – maybe it's as simple as overlooking an offense. If you're stewing about the offense more than 3 days go talk with the person privately and graciously. It's a great time to seek restoration of the relationship instead of running away or condemning them. If you can't resolve it privately then you may need to ask others in the body of Christ to come alongside to help settle the situation in a biblical manner.

4. Go and Be Reconciled—Ask yourself, “How does Christ want me to forgive in this situation?”

We've been given the ministry of reconciliation. It's such a high calling and one we can't do apart from the Spirit of God working in our lives. Our goal in any conflict is reconciliation. Since Christ reconciled us to God our goal now is to follow His example. We don't want to reconcile prematurely or compromise by allowing relationships to fall apart, but we do want to pursue genuine peace with others. We are the reputation of Christ. We can forgive others for Christ's sake because He has first forgiven us.

At our recent Christmas concerts the theme was “God's Glory...*change happens when God's glory and His Son shine into our lives.*” Becoming a peacemaker changes us because God's love shines into our lives and His love spills over into the lives of others. We can get to the place that in “whatever we do we do all for the glory of God,” 1 Cor. 10:31

We're all on a learning curve when it comes to conflict. Our very nature holds tightly to the fact that there's a “knot in the gold” and we don't want to wear this anymore!

I wish I could say I've perfected the process of biblical peacemaking in my own life and ministry, but I can't. But I have come to realize that conflict IS an opportunity to Glorify God. Love **is** the most excellent way. It's the cross at the end of the gold chain! But, it's my choice to wear it because of what it symbolizes.

Eph. 5:2 Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.

If you're interested in learning more of the peacemaking principles please contact me; Gail Benn at gail.benn@the-chapel.org or our ministry manager Gene Nofsinger at Nofsinger7e@sbcglobal.net