REDEMPTIVE CONFLICT AND CONFRONTATION

Acts 9:31 (ERV)
“The church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had a time of peace. And with the help of the Holy Spirit, these groups of believers became stronger in faith and showed their respect for the Lord by the way they lived. So the church everywhere grew in numbers.”

Wherever there are two people, there are two opinions, and where there are two or more opinions, there is opportunity for conflict.

The English word conflict comes from the Latin word conflictus. It means collision, and is literally translated to strike together. The Greek word for conflict is the root of the English word agony. It means a gathering, contest, struggle, or fight with some opposition.¹

Conflict arises when there is opposition, when there are differing viewpoints, when there is hostility. Conflicted situations can develop between individuals, in families, in churches, between ministry areas in a local congregation, between pastors and their consistory, or within a denomination.

Often, the seeds of conflict can be traced to a single source: one’s own desires and passions that are self-focused or reflect self-interest.

James 4:1 (NET Bible) lets us in on the details:

“Where do the conflicts and where do the quarrels among you come from? Is it not from this, from your passions that battle inside you?”

Proverbs 13:10 (TLB) tells us:

“Pride leads to arguments; be humble, take advice, and become wise.”

¹ Borrowed from Jim Van Yperen’s seminar at the 2006 Elders and Church Leaders Conference.
When we try to impose our thoughts, feelings, or opinions on others, or when they try to insist that their view or perspective should be implemented, hostility and opposition may arise, and conflict will follow.

Share honestly about a time when you tried to impose your view or decision on someone else, or a group of people, and it led to open hostility or conflict.

Share another example of a time when someone tried to foist his or her viewpoint upon you and the result was an escalation that brought conflict.

What were your learnings from these experiences?

How do you define conflict? In your experience, how has conflict helped you? How has conflict hurt you?

ENCOUNTER

Galatians 5:16-17 (PHILLIPS)
“Here is my advice. Live your whole life in the Spirit and you will not satisfy the desires of your lower nature. For the whole energy of the lower nature is set against the Spirit, while the whole power of the Spirit is contrary to the lower nature. Here is the conflict, and that is why you are not free to do what you want to do. But if you follow the leading of the Spirit, you stand clear of the Law.”

In his seminar at the 2006 Elders and Church Leaders Conference, Jim Van Yperen shared some of the myths of conflict:

Myth #1: **Conflict hurts, so all conflict is bad.**

The Truth is: Hurt is more often given for our good than bad. Proverbs tells us the wounds of a friend are faithful. There is good hurt.

Myth #2: **All conflict is from Satan.**

The Truth is: Most conflict is the result of human failure and sin, which, when unreconciled, Satan uses to confound and confuse.

Myth #3: **All sin is private.**

The Truth is: Sin reveals flawed character, not merely bad decisions. If the church is a body, then no sin is private—our habits of thinking and acting affect all.
Myth #4: **Reconciliation = Forgiveness.**  

_The Truth is:_ Reconciliation starts with forgiveness but requires restitution. Restitution is necessary for the sinner to reconstitute character and rebuild lost trust.

Myth #5: **Peace is the absence of conflict.**  

_The Truth is:_ Peace is the ability to be reconciled and to be healthy in the midst of conflict.

**How have these myths been true, according to your own experience?**

**Is there a myth that is missing, or some additional thoughts on conflict that would deepen or broaden these statements?**

**How might buying in to these myths cause problems or pain that could lead to greater conflict?**

**EXPRESSION**

In **Acts 15**, we have two examples of conflict.

When it was an issue of doctrinal importance (the extending of salvation to the gentiles), it required the Jerusalem Council (the Holy Spirit working in an assembly) to bring a united judgment:

- _It should not be difficult for gentiles to turn to God, and_

- _gentiles should abstain from food polluted by idols, the meat of strangled animals, and blood._

When it was an issue of personal preference (the inclusion of John Mark on the next missionary journey), it was a disagreement—a _sharp disagreement_—but one that could be dealt with at an individual level.

Both decisions brought encouragement and strengthening to the church, and the church continued to grow.
In *Management: A Biblical Approach*, Myron Rush provides three positive aspects of disagreement, recognizing that conflict involves hostility, but disagreement can occur without enmity.²

1. **Disagreement can lead to individual and organizational growth.**
   
   We can “grow, develop, and improve when we learn to work through disagreements using proper methods of confrontation.”

2. **Disagreement can reveal the need to change.**
   
   We can be forced to evaluate our own positions, perspectives, and beliefs, rather than become resentful or defensive when we are challenged. An immature leader “allows disagreements to erupt into conflicts.”

3. **Disagreement can help make us more tolerant of opposing views.**
   
   Learning to accept different viewpoints without developing hostile reactions is a mark of a mature leader. Growing our capacity to accept criticism without retaliation can be a far greater help than a hindrance.

*Proverbs 23:12 (TLB)*

“Don’t refuse to accept criticism; get all the help you can.”

When was a time you grew from a disagreement and didn’t allow it to escalate into conflict?

What were some of the key decisions or actions you took that diffused the situation?

Can any of these become a template for how you respond in the future?

*In what ways?*

**IMPACT**

It is often easier to control our own reaction than another person’s action. Our response to a potentially conflictive condition can be the difference between a disagreement and an openly hostile situation.

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We can either respond with compliance, aggression, or withdrawal. It is the choice of submission, fight, or flight.

Both our wiring and our choices influence our response when confronted with conflict. In *Making Peace: A Guide to Overcoming Church Conflict*, Jim Van Yperen\(^3\) identifies the following ways we respond to conflict:

**Evasive**
- Run away from conflict
- Minimize the problem
- Shift the burden

**Passive**
- Keep silent to maintain peace
- Deny there are problems
- Fear to speak out
- Take a victim role

**Defensive**
- Put people down to build up oneself
- Build coalitions around oneself
- Blame others
- Make excuses

**Aggressive**
- Attack or threaten others
- Shame others to gain influence
- Threaten legal action
- Win at all costs

Which of these four responses best describes your reaction to conflict?

Where is your place of growth in handling conflict and confrontation more effectively?

How can you look to the model of Jesus for help and direction in dealing with conflict in your life, your leadership, and your ministry? How did his actions and reactions give us an effective example to follow?

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REFLECTION

Whether you have been sinned against, whether injustice has been done, and whether restoration or reconciliation is necessary, our response as leaders becomes important in times of conflict and confrontation.

The values and guidelines we use to navigate situations and relationships with the potential for conflict help us to overcome hostility, frustration, and anger. Those values can then help us move to a place of reconciliation, restoration, and redemption.

You might ask yourself the following four questions when you are going through conflict or are assessing the need to confront. They are able to provide you with discernment and wisdom that may help you ensure a greater degree of peace and unity.

1. **Will my intentions or actions bring glory to God?**

   If I am to glorify God in everything I do, how does that happen in the midst of conflict? How can I take a step back and assess how my response may or may not please and honor God in this situation?

2. **See clearly: Is the log in my eye keeping me from having a proper perspective on the situation?**

   Impediments to seeing clearly can include our attitude, our heart, our speech, or our actions. Ask yourself, “What kind of self-examination is necessary before I confront or enter into conflict?”

   **Matthew 7:5 (NIV)**

   “You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”

3. **Seek restoration: How can my response bring restoration to a situation or relationship?**

   The purpose of confrontation is not to point out people’s sin or show them where on the list of wrongs their actions fall. It is to bring restoration, not condemnation. Correction should come with gentleness, humility, and kindness, rather than hostility and anger.

   **Galatians 6:1-3 (MSG)**

   “Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be
needing forgiveness before the day's out. Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ’s law. If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived.”

4. **Pursue reconciliation: How can I extend the forgiveness I have received from God toward others?**

Even though we have personally experienced the greatest forgiveness in the world, we can forget and fail to extend that forgiveness to others. Scripture calls us to a place of forgiveness and reconciliation in our relationships as we live in biblical community.

The love and forgiveness we have received from God provide the foundation out of which we respond to others with genuine reconciliation and restoration. We are to love one another—freely and fully.

**Colossians 3:12-14 (TLB)**

“Since you have been chosen by God who has given you this new kind of life, and because of his deep love and concern for you, you should practice tenderhearted mercy and kindness to others. Don’t worry about making a good impression on them, but be ready to suffer quietly and patiently. Be gentle and ready to forgive; never hold grudges. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Most of all, let love guide your life, for then the whole church will stay together in perfect harmony.”

Which of these four questions challenges you the most as you respond to conflict and confrontation? Why?

How does your church, ministry environment, or workplace need to become a place of restoration and reconciliation? What steps do you need to take to help create it?

What is your greatest learning or reflection about conflict or confrontation as a result of this coaching conversation?
SUPPLEMENTAL TOOLS

1. Examining Your Heart & Speech

A worksheet from Metanoia Ministries to help you examine your heart condition and what you say in responding to conflict, providing an exercise for prayer and reconciliation:

static1.squarespace.com/static/5380cbf3e4b06d57f251ff54/t/5463badde4b0e78fa46c3793/1415822045810/Examine+Speech+Form.pdf

2. Examining Your Attitudes & Action

A worksheet from Metanoia Ministries to help you examine your attitudes and actions in responding to conflict, providing an exercise for prayer and reconciliation:

static1.squarespace.com/static/5380cbf3e4b06d57f251ff54/t/5463bb7be4b003f5aa8e7176/1415822203383/Examine+Actions+Form.pdf

3. Preparing for a Confrontation

An outline from Metanoia Ministries for thinking through how to confront someone gently and humbly:

static1.squarespace.com/static/5380cbf3e4b06d57f251ff54/t/53fc9127e4b0f4c52b6d57a6/1409061159321/Preparing+for+Confrontation.pdf

4. Seven A’s of Confession

A process of personal peacemaking and confession, from Peacemaker Ministries:

peacemaker.net/project/seven-as-of-confession/