

Monday:

As we begin this week, we want to bring awareness to how we engage in conflict in our relationships. During the message this past weekend, Paul asked, "What is your Conflict Code?" Please circle the phrase below that best describes how you may typically participate in conflict in your relationships. You may want to ask someone who knows you well for their thoughts too.

- I avoid conflict at all costs.
- I blame the other person with whom I am in conflict.
- I punish the other person with whom I am in conflict.
- I shame the other person with whom I am in conflict.
- I control the other person with whom I am in conflict.
- I make "peace" with the person with whom I am in conflict so I don't have to work through the problem.
- I listen to the person with whom I am in conflict and I work toward a healthy resolution.

To take steps toward having healthy conflict in our relationships, it is essential that we be honest about how we participate in conflict. This is the first step. Reflect on what you circled and why. Maybe you realize that you engage in conflict the way you do because you learned to do so from your family of origin. How did your family of origin participate in conflict? As you think about the legacy you want to leave in your relationships, what is good about what you learned? What would you like to change? The truth is, conflict is inevitable. Whether we want to have conflict or not, we will. For this reason, we want to learn how to have conflict in healthy ways so that we can deepen our relationships with one another. Look at some examples of how different people in the Bible engaged in conflict. Draw a line to the response they chose.

Daniel 3:10-15 (Nebuchadnezzar toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego)	I avoid conflict at all costs.
Matthew 12:13-15 (Pharisees toward Jesus)	I blame the other person with whom I am in conflict.
Genesis 37:18-27 (Joseph's Brother's toward Joseph)	I punish the other person with whom I am in conflict.
John 20:24-29 (Jesus toward Thomas)	I shame the other person with whom I am in conflict.
Genesis 20:1-11 (Abraham toward Abimelech)	I control the other person with whom I am in conflict.
John 8:1-11 (Pharisees toward Woman)	I make "peace" with the person with whom I am in conflict so I don't have to work through the problem.
2 Samuel 15:1-12 (David toward Absalom)	I listen to the person with whom I am in conflict and I work toward a healthy resolution.

As you end your time today, what do you realize about how you engage in conflict? Spend time in prayer. Ask God to give you the awareness you need so that you can begin to take steps toward healthy conflict in your relationships.

Thursday:

As we have learned this week, healthy relationships aren't effortless and conflict-free. This is especially true in marriage. In a recent article by Kelsey Borresen, she asked relationship experts to share what people in the healthiest relationships do regularly to keep their bond strong. Here is what they shared:

"Couples in healthy relationships talk positively about one another to friends, kids, relatives, even coworkers. This is the opposite of undermining behaviors that characterize less functional relationships. Just saying, 'My husband is handy,' or 'Mommy always makes the best dinners' can be a great way to maintain connection and closeness."

"People in healthy relationships have regular times in their day-to-day routine to connect with each other. I've seen couples do this by walking the dog together, talking after the kids go down, watching their favorite shows and praying together."

"My husband and I laugh *a lot*. To the point where it's difficult to be too upset for very long because one of us will usually do something to lighten things up. Topics can and should be serious when needed but having a sense of humor is a tremendous asset if you want to be in a healthy relationship. People that laugh a lot and generally don't take things too seriously, can more easily enjoy a healthy relationship."

"As a marriage counselor, I see couples on my couch who have a lot to complain about when it comes to their marriage. But for the most part, they have the same problems as just about every other couple. The healthiest couples don't focus on complaints. Instead, they look at the good things their spouse does and they make it a point to not hold back in their expressions of gratitude for each other."

"They practice empathy, regularly putting themselves in their partner's shoes. By doing this, couples are often able to overcome the misunderstandings that commonly occur in all relationships. This conflict management skill helps people in my office feel heard, understood and valued when their partner can genuinely say, 'I may not agree with you, but I understand you and can see how it felt that way.'"

"A frequent bone of contention in conflicted relationships is when one partner feels out of the loop or un-prioritized. A simple call or text to say when you'll be home from work etc. helps your relationship thrive and makes your partner feel secure."

"They keep their fights clean. This means no name-calling, labeling or disparaging remarks about your partner whether you're together or not. I often hear partners use sarcasm, biting comments or little put-downs with each other and then brush them off with a justification like, 'I was just joking.' Partners in healthy relationships practice being loving and respectful with each other always."

"A disagreement isn't followed by emotional distance. Both partners own their mistakes, apologize and move on. They actually have time to enjoy their lives together even if an hour earlier they were disagreeing about something."

These relationship instructions are important in marriage, but they are also tips we can use in all of our relationships. More than anything else, our best guide to healthy relationships

is to follow the “one another” verses in Scripture. **Write out a few of the verses we have referenced in this series:**

John 13:34-35

John 15:12-13

Romans 12:10

Romans 14:13

Romans 15:5

Ephesians 4:2-3

Philippians 2:3

Colossians 3:13

What do you feel God is asking of you as you read these verses and think about your relationships? For the verses most pertinent to your relationship conflicts at this time, write out the verse or verses on a notecard. Take time to pray the verse or verses throughout the day, asking God for the Holy Spirit to make the verse or verses true in you as you seek Him.

If you are in conflict with someone who does not follow Jesus as their Lord and Savior, pray for them. Ask God to not only bring the verses to life in you, but also that you would have an opportunity to share your faith through the conflict process. An amazing outcome of the conflict could be the person coming to Christ. If the person with whom you are in conflict refuses to move forward in health, continue to pray for them. As God works in you, you can find peace regardless of what the other person chooses to do. Thank God for the way He is working in your life.

Friday:

When we see someone with whom we are in relationship taking steps away from God, in humility we want to go to them. In love we want to share our concerns. If this person also follows Christ as their Lord and Savior, Scripture gives us **Matthew 18:15-17** as a guide.

Open your Bible to these verses. As you read them, write out the three steps of instruction:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Ultimately, following Christ is all about deepening relationship with Him. As He works in us, there will be times His Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin on our own. There will be times He asks us to lovingly share His truths with someone we see walking in ways that are not consistent with His truths because for some reason at that time they are not looking to Him for direction. There will also be times God will send someone to you to share with you how you may be taking steps away from Him. Read 2 Samuel 12:1-15 for an example of this type of situation. As Nathan exposed David’s sin, in humility David admitted his guilt. In conflict situations, we want to be people who also admit our sin and guilt as we seek to move closer to God. We hope for the same for those with whom we are in relationship. As we pray, God will work in us and in our relationships for His glory. Pray for any conflict situations you are in.

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Tuesday:

During this series we have been learning that the three keys to leaving a healthy legacy in our relationships are awareness, intentionality and integration. Yesterday we began to have awareness of how we do conflict in our relationships. Today we want to focus on the second key to leaving a healthy legacy through conflict in our relationships: Intentionality.

Open your Bible to Ephesians chapter 4. To begin, read verses 1-3. In verse 3, we see the intentionality of engaging in healthy conflict in that we become people eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace in our relationships. Our eagerness shows our intentionality. Maintaining the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace does not mean we should avoid conflict. On the contrary, we engage in healthy conflict so that we can work through the issues that are hindering our relationships. We do so for the health of our relationships. We work through the issues together, having unity of the Spirit because we are in prayer and are staying focused on a healthy resolution. Peace comes because the relationship is important to us and we want to grow stronger in God and to one another as we work through the difficulties in a healthy way.

We see this further in **Ephesians chapter 4 in verses 15, 25-27, and 29-32.**

Take time to write out the instructions we receive through all of the verses we have looked up in today's devotion. List out what you have learned here:

It is important to understand that to be intentional does not mean we do this on our own or without discernment. It means we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit. We look to God and we ask Him to work these changes in us. We trust Jesus for His help and we believe the Holy Spirit will begin to work the changes in us as we seek Him.

As you look over what you have written, what is most difficult for you? Humility?

Gentleness? Patience? Maybe you struggle with the desire to take control in conflict? It could be that speaking truth in love is the most difficult for you because you are a person who either avoids conflict at all costs or makes "peace" rather than working through the difficulty to find real peace. Perhaps in conflict you become angry and today you realize you sometimes or often use words that shame or punish the person with whom you are in conflict. Awareness of what we do and then the intentionality to learn a new way in God, will bring about the changes we seek over time.

What excites you most about integrating healthy conflict in your life? What are you most afraid of?

Spend time in prayer. Talk to God about all you are feeling. Ask Him to help you learn how to step out of your Conflict Code and into a life of health and growth in Him. What step do you believe He is asking you to take? How can you begin to be intentional about what He is showing you?

Wednesday:

As you begin to think about integrating healthy conflict into your relationships, it is possible that there are lies you have believed regarding conflict. For example, have you believed that engaging in healthy conflict will take too much time? Have you believed that engaging in healthy conflict is unproductive and ineffective? Maybe you fear what the other person will think about you. What lies or internal messages have kept you from engaging in healthy conflict?

The lies you believe regarding conflict may flush out as you think about what you do when you are confronted with conflict. If you tend to blame the other person, maybe you realize that healthy conflict involves you taking more responsibility. This may seem overwhelming and it might seem easier to continue to take the path of blame, but the path of blame only distances you from your relationships. Though it may seem easier at first, in the end the path of blame leaves you lonely and devoid of deep relationships.

If you are a person who tends to punish, shame, or control in conflict, maybe you have fooled yourself into thinking this path will lead you to respect and admiration. The people you steamroll over in conflict may shy away from you in the moment, but it is not out of respect or admiration. Realize the truth of what you believe. Those people with whom you are in conflict most likely feel the opposite of what you have led yourself to think. Read James 4:6 as well as 1 Peter 5:5. If you steamroll over people in conflict, understand that eventually this lie of pride will bring relational disaster.

Read Proverbs 11:2, 16:18, 21:24, and 29:23.

If you are a person who avoids conflict or tries to make "peace" by not dealing with the problem, remember that healthy conflict is good, right and beneficial for our relationships. The peace we may have in the moment by ignoring the problem isn't true peace. True peace comes after we have been honest, forthright and loving toward the other person.

Read Zechariah 8:15-17

"¹⁵ so again have I purposed in these days to bring good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear not. ¹⁶ These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; ¹⁷ do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the Lord."

We want to integrate healthy conflict into our lives so it can produce good fruit in our relationships. Healthy conflict brings trust and a deeper bond. It teaches us to communicate in love. It brings us closer to one another as we seek God for His will, purpose and ways. It provides grounds for unity and understanding. It is hard in the moment, but in the end, true peace far outweighs the momentary trouble of getting to it. What beliefs do you have about healthy conflict that may be contrary to the idea of it being productive?

Spend time in prayer. Ask God to reveal to you the lies you may have believed about

conflict in your relationships. Ask Him to show you His next step for you.