

Session Six: Conflict Resolution

(Source: Balswick & Balswick)

Scriptures:

Eph 4:25-29

Matt 5:21-26

Matt 18:15-20

Questions:

- How did your families resolve conflicts in your homes?
- Do you have disagreements?
- How do you handle them?

Introduction:

Conflicts are normal parts of life. It can be both destructive or constructive, depending on the way it is handled and worked out. Conflict like adversity, is neutral, the result of which, to a large extent, depends on our response. Strong families do not result from the absence of conflict but the successful management and resolution of crisis.

Three possibilities in families where it is claimed that there are no conflicts:

1. They don't know each other well
2. They don't interact with each other very much, **OR**.
3. They don't tell the truth very often.

Conflict often results from a differences of opinions. Family conflicts can be individual or collective. Most conflicts in families are systemic, resulting from either the function of, or the change within the family system (p. 211). Conflicts intensify during times of formation or transition. Conflict may be primary (one individual having problems with another) or secondary (one individual having problems with another because of trouble with another).

Destructive ways of deal with conflicts:

1. Denial -- Who us? We don't have problems!!
2. Displacement -- Taking it out on someone or something else
3. Disengagement -- Side stepping sensitive and/or controversial issues
-- Anger and withdrawal
-- Discounting of one's anger reactions

Constructive ways to deal with conflicts:

1. Acknowledge that conflict exists
2. Decide how it will be handled

Three constructive approaches:

- 1) Fair fights
- 2) Conflict resolution . . . Can have the connotation that conflicts end

- 3) Conflict management.. Connotes that it is not completely resolved, but is continuously managed

Rules for a Fair Fight (p. 214ff):

1. Identify the issue
 - Often family conflicts would involve more than one issue. Define what they are and decide which you will address first.
2. Choose the right time
 - When they arise, cool of before you deal with it. Do not deal with it early in the morning or late at night.
3. Choose the right place.
 - Neutral territory
4. Begin with a positive stroke.
 - This assists in not taking personally
5. Stick to the issue
 - Issues can widen or be sidetracked. Furthermore, left-field issues can be injected. These should be declared as off limits.
6. Don't bring up the past
 - Being dumped on is devastating and negates progress toward constructive solutions and resolutions.
7. Don't hit below the belt.
 - - attacking in areas of personal sensitivity
8. Take the other person seriously.
 - There is no place for ridiculing or laughing at the person
9. Express anger non-abusively (cf. Eph 4:36)
 - Don't strike out verbally or physically
 - Unexpressed anger smoulders and may lead to resentment, hatred and revenge.
10. Don't play games.
 - Playing martyr, self-pity or self-flagellation
11. Don't be passively aggressive.
 - Indirect and devious ways sabotage fair fights.
 - Denying anger, while acting in an indirect manner
12. Avoid asking for explanation for behaviour.
 - Such questions are usually construed as attempting to place blame
13. Avoid labelling or name calling.
 - This usually antagonizes and destroys any chance of a reasonable discussion
14. Avoid triangles
 - It's not so. Ask
 - Isn't that so?

Conflict Management:

There are **four ways to manage conflict**: assertive, confrontational, caring and cooperating/reaching a creative compromise. All things being equal, the best way to deal with conflict is with a collaborative style. It must involve commitment, mutual forgiveness and empowering. Intimacy should be the final outcome of conflict management. The purpose of dealing with conflict is not to control the person but to control the problem

There are **four basic styles of managing conflicts**: 1) withdrawal; 2) win; 3) yield and 4) compromise. The situation should determine the style that is used. Conflict should be dealt with in such a way that everyone **wins** or feels like winners.

Jesus, at one time or another used all four styles in dealing with conflict.

The best style is usually situational, yet strategic:

1. Withdrawal (Matt 12:14 cf. Lu 22:39-41; Lu 5:15-16)

Withdrawal is necessary to think through the issue and to formulate solutions. It is necessary to **cool off**. Nevertheless, withdrawal as a dominant style can be destructive, evasive or send forth the signal that one does not care enough about the relationship to iron out the wrinkles.

2. Win (Matt 21:12-13)

There are times when one cannot afford to withdraw, yield or compromise. This is basically the posture one would adopt when principles or core values are at stake. It must be determined if the issue is worth fighting over. One also needs to be careful that he/she does not win the **battle** but lose the **war**.

3. Compromise (Matt 22:21)

This style is adopted when one does not have the time to work out a collaborative solution. It should not be used because it is the easy way out. Often by giving up something, we build up **chips** for the times when the real issues come up.

4. Yield (Matt 26:50-53)

This is done when an issue is far more important to one family member than it is to another and when the relationship is threatened. Yielding can be a form of self-giving. However, yielding is not appropriate when it is used as a tool to manipulate, done because of the fear of rejection, or done to the detriment of the one yielded to.

Family relationships are based on long-term commitment. Conflicts can be dealt with in collaborative ways, yielding maximum satisfaction to all, but at the high price of time, effort and emotional energy. Those who are verbally skilful must guard against the manipulation (even assassination) of others.

All the styles delineated above are valuable in their proper context. Because of differences

in temperament, styles and skills, some may tend to adopt one style as their predominant method of dealing with conflict. This should be guarded against. The situation, rather than personality or ability should dictate the style. Compromise and collaboration, flexibility and structure, separateness and connectedness, plus open communication should be taken into consideration when dealing with each situation.

Whatever we have said earlier, relative to **forgiveness, love and talking and listening** (communication) should be at the centre, when dealing with conflict. We need to extend the same care and courtesies that we would like extended to us; the Golden Rule, finds much practical application in this whole area of dealing with conflict.