

Growth Through Conflict

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Lorain Avenue Church of Christ (07-28-2024)

// Good morning. //

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Today ... Our lesson title is ... "Growth Through Conflict"

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Conflict is everywhere. Wherever you find two or more people.

In the workplace. In the neighborhood.

In the home.

Parents and their children.

Even in the church. We can be angry with one another.

Sometimes it's a rather small irritation with someone, like having a sliver in your finger.

Other times it's a monumental fight, or one that has gone on for a long time, like having a chronic illness.

Husbands and wives wish they could say they've never argued or raised their voice. But we know that's not very likely.

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Remember that now-famous line ... by Jim Lovell ... the astronaut commander of the Apollo 13 mission? "Houston ... we've had a problem!" Probably one of the greatest understatements ever.

In the movie about Apollo 13 ... the Houston Flight director ... Gene Kranz (played by Ed Harris) ... is credited with saying, about their efforts to bring the astronauts safely back home after the explosion ...

"Gentlemen ... failure is not an option ... this will be our finest hour."

Actually, he never spoke those exact words ... but they would be typical of the real Gene Kranz.

He's written a book called ... "Tough and Competent." In it ... there is an account of how he addressed his team after the three astronauts were killed in the Apollo 1 capsule fire on the launch pad.

"'Tough' (he said) ... means we are accountable for what we do or what we fail to do. We will never again compromise our responsibilities.

'Competent' means we will never take anything for granted. We will never be found short in our knowledge and in our skills. Mission Control will be perfect.

When you leave this meeting today you will go to your office and the first thing you will do there is to write "Tough and Competent" on your blackboards. It will never be erased. Each day when

you enter the room these words will remind you of the price paid by Grissom, White, and Chaffee. These words are the price of admission to the ranks of Mission Control.”

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Apollo 13 fared much better than Apollo 1 ... even though there was an explosion on board as they made their way to the moon.

Apollo 13 is called ... “A successful failure.” It was a successful ordeal. No lives were lost.

In the same manner, I hope to encourage each of us to regard the challenge of resolving conflict as a blessing. As an opportunity to grow closer to God ... closer to our fellow Christians. And especially closer together as husbands and wives.

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Most of us ... aren’t thrilled with conflict. We’re skilled in finding ways to avoid it. And if we can’t avoid it ... we know lots of ways to down-play it ... and smooth it over.

Even the word itself ... “conflict” ... carries a lot of negative baggage.

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But conflict doesn’t have to be a negative thing. When treated properly ... it can be a great positive thing.

Conflict occurs when we try to fit two things together ... two things that don’t want to fit together.

The greater the lack of fit ... the greater the conflict.

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In the Apollo 13 mission ... the outcome of returning safely to earth ... didn’t look as if it was going to fit at all ... with the reality of an exploded command module.

But the team worked ... and worked ... until the two fit together.

It was hard work. It was scary ... nail-biting ... emotionally charged.

But the team was tough. They were competent. They refused to lose the life ... of even just one more astronaut. “It will be our finest hour.”

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Many times, in our own lives ... two people come to a point ... where the ideas and desires of one ... don’t mesh well at all ... with the ideas and desires of the other. There appears to be no fit.

If it’s important to fit the two positions together ... and very often it IS important ... then we have a conflict that must be resolved.

Conflict resolution ... is the process of getting two sets ... of seemingly different ideas and desires ... to fit well together.

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What are some of the conflicts recorded in the Bible?

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The herdsmen of Lot ... were fighting with the herdsman of Abraham ... over grazing rights.

In **Gen 14:8-9** ... we read that ... "Abram said to Lot, 'Let's not allow this conflict to come between us or our herdsmen ... Take your choice of any section of the land.'"

Resolving conflict takes initiative. Someone needs to make the first move. Abram gave Lot the first choice, putting family peace above personal desires.

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When Isaac and the Ishmaelites argued over who owned a new water well that Isaac's people had dug ... (**Gen 16:21-22**) ... Isaac moved on and dug another well. Again, there was a dispute over the water. So, Isaac moved on again and dug another well. This time ... there was no dispute. Isaac gave the well a name which meant ... "God has given us room to flourish."

Resolving conflict takes humility, a desire to see peace more than personal victory.

You may notice a pattern here. When Godly people resolve conflicts in a Godly manner ... they trust God to make it all work out.

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Joseph was abused by his brothers. After time had passed ... after the conflict was given space for reflection ... Joseph forgave his brothers. And the brothers took responsibility for their behavior.

Over the years ... they all had seen God in action ... and realized that they were part of a Divine plan ... orchestrated by God.

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King Saul abused David and attempted to kill him. David fled and hid ... but did not retaliate. He refused to dishonor the King. (A God-given lesson we'd all do well to emulate in today's political environment.)

God had chosen David to eventually replace Saul. David waited for God's time. David did not shun Saul's family and was kind and open to friendship with Saul's son, Jonathan.

Resolving conflict involves compromise, finding common ground that is bigger than your differences. If neither side is willing to take the initiative or show the necessary humility to seek common ground, conflict will result in a broken relationship or even war.

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Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses because he had married a Cushite woman. They said, "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Hasn't he spoken through us, too?"

Resolving conflict requires that we focus on the real issue. We must focus only on resolving the problem, not attacking the person.

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The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to counsel Philemon ... to accept the runaway slave Onesimus when he returned.

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On Paul's first missionary journey, John Mark bailed out on Paul and Barnabas early on in their travels. When it came time for the second missionary journey, Paul was sharply against taking John Mark along with them. So far apart were Paul and Barnabas on the issue ... that Paul took Silas with him ... while Barnabas and John Mark partnered up.

They resolved the conflict by going their own different ways ... both working for God. No grudges were held. The heat of the moment passed with time. Both Barnabas and John Mark were instrumental in the spread of the Gospel.

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Resolving conflict is a form of suffering. Not suffering as the world might view it, but suffering as the Bible presents it. When we resolve conflict in a Godly fashion ... we patiently and hopefully endure it.

We learn and grow ... when we resolve conflict. When we avoid conflict ... we don't learn a single thing about our own self ... or about the other.

When we smooth it over ... we just set ourselves up to repeat it again with even more at stake. This is the opposite of growth. We regress in our development and relationships. The only thing learned ... when two people avoid conflict ... is how to get better at avoiding it.

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Jesus suffered ... never wavering ... always keeping the faith ... remaining hopeful and constructive. We must follow His example. The Hebrew writer says (**Heb 5:8**) ... that by His suffering ... Jesus learned obedience to The Father. And qualified Himself to become our eternal High Priest.

In **1 Pet 2:20-21** ... Peter says ... "If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

James writes ... in **Jas 5:10-11** ... that when we suffer in patience ... we follow the example of the prophets of old ... who spoke in the name of the Lord. James also makes reference to Job's perseverance ... and the blessings the Lord finally brought about to him..

James reminds us that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Two people at odds need to remember this when conflict arises.

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When we handle conflict poorly ... Satan has our ear and heart. Peter cautions us in **1 Pet 5:8-10** ... "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." "After you have suffered a little while, God will restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

As we often say ... and just as often forget ... "This too shall pass."

In the Roman letter ... **Rom 5:2-5** ... Paul says ... "We rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance produces character; and character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint us."

Paul further reminds us in **Rom 8:18** ... that "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

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One more scripture ... one which is pretty important ... in **1 Cor 12:26** ... Paul says ... “If one part [of the body] suffers ... every part suffers with it. If one part is honored ... every part rejoices with it.”

Every member of a congregation rejoices... when conflicts are suffered and resolved in a Godly manner.

The same is true in our friendships ... in our families ... and in our marriages. Especially ... in our marriages.

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To suffer ... means to remain engaged while working through differences ... even though the process may be stressful and emotionally painful. It means to stay with it until a mutually agreeable solution is achieved.

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One must never assume that they are the one in the know ... and the other is ignorant.

One must be careful NOT to react. Instead, we must respond after consideration. Listen and think before speaking. (When I was in 6th grade ... I had a sign that said “Be sure your brain is engaged before putting your mouth into gear.”)

We must avoid reaching an agreement ... just to lease the other.

DO NOT try to “fix” the other person. Instead, be willing to make changes within you own self ... when and where needed.

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Sometimes, conflict has to do with style preferences or personality clashes ... more so than it has to do with facts, or reality. We would do well to check our own motives, and avoid selfish ambition or vanity.

Realize that when two people have exactly the same information available to them, they may see it differently ... and derive different meanings from it.

Value the other person in humility. As Paul wrote in **Phil 2:3-4** ... “Look to the interests of others rather than to your own interests.

Maintain good, ongoing communication. Be respectfully honest about what you see and what you make of it. Ask the same of the other person. Never, ever weaponize your speech.

One big reason why conflict resolution is so difficult ... is that we hesitate to put ourselves in uncomfortable situations. We can be unwilling to admit that we might be wrong ... or to do what might be necessary to make amends.

Never hesitate to be grateful toward the other.

Never hesitate to forgive ... or ask for forgiveness. This is extremely important to God (**Matt 5:23–24**).

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Fighting is not always about sin. Less often about sin than about differences of opinion.

The longer two people know one another, the more likely they will conflict. Hopefully this tendency is offset by increasing wisdom and self-control.

In marriage ... the work of growing together and becoming one-flesh ... requires serious effort to fit both spouses together.

The closer you are to another, the more emotionally charged the conflict can be. Brothers and sisters in Christ can hurt (or be hurt by) one another more deeply than by someone they don't know well.

A husband or wife can hurt (or be hurt by) their spouse more deeply than by anyone else. The passions and heat can run deep and flare up fast. Be aware of this and be ready to slow things down and pray. Keep your temper on a short leash. Count to 20 instead of 10. Count to 30 if need be. Take control your tongue.

Great care must be taken to avoid lose-lose conflicts that result in deeper entrenchment.

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When dealing with conflicts in marriage, spouses will do well to treat one another as the most precious thing they could ever be permitted to hold. In reality, they hold each other's heart in their bare hands. Please be ever so careful with what God has allowed you to hold.

Pay attention to timing. There are better and worse times to say what needs to be said. And be sure what you say really needs to be said.

They say there are five things in life you cannot recover. A stone after it's thrown. A word after it's said. An occasion after it's missed. The time after it's gone. A person after they die.

God warns husbands to treat the wives of their youth with enduring love and respect.

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When conflicts arise, deal with them quickly. The longer you wait, the harder they are to resolve.

Talk together face to face. Set aside enough time so as not to be rushed. As I heard someone say ... "Face to face," not "Facebook to Facebook" or "X to X," or "Tik to Tik and Toc to Toc."

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Pay attention. Consider whether you may have unresolved conflict in your life. "How would I know that?" you ask.

Is there someone you don't want to talk to ... or look in the eye? Is there someone ... who, when you hear their name, you have an emotional reaction? And it's not a happy one?

Is there someone you avoid thinking about ... because thoughts that you're not proud of begin to surface?

God is the God of peace. In His Son, He has shown us the way to have contented hearts, and to be about the business of building each other up.

There is much more to say on the subject. We've talked through just a portion of it.

Yet, consider this: There are three ways to respond to conflict.

Escape, attack, or make peace. Which one ... is the only one approved by God?

Making peace!

Making peace is the only path which will bring glory to God.

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Matt 5:9 is a short verse. But boy, is it ever powerful.

Powerful in what it commands. And even more powerful in what it promises.

“Blessed are the peacemakers ... for they shall be called sons of God.”

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Why not take a page from Apollo Mission Control.

And apply it to our marriages. That’s a great starting place.

When you get home, make a sign ... and put it on the door of your fridge.

Let it read ... “Tough and Competent.” Leave it there. Look at it every day.

“Tough” means we are accountable, in our marriages, for what we do or what we fail to do. We will never again compromise our responsibilities.

“Competent” means we will never take anything in our marriage for granted. We will study so as to never be found short in our knowledge and in our skills. With God’s help, our marriages will be as perfect as we can make them.

As you begin each day, let the sign remind you of the cost of a failed marriage. These words are the price of admission to the divine union that God instituted in the beginning.

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Some of you may know. Some may not. That awful fire in that Apollo 1 space capsule on the pad was the result of being in a hurry ... taking success for granted ... not thinking things through carefully ... and a dose of arrogance. Gene Kranz vowed to never let those attitudes through the door ever again.

Can we then ... vow to never let those attitudes into our marriages or into our service to Christ?

Can we vow to grow closer together through resolving our differences ... and not farther apart?

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Thank you!

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Invitation