

Embracing Conflict (Tim Miller, Gateway Fellowship, 8/3/2014)

Conflict is defined as a disagreement, a clash, an incompatibility, a dispute, a collision of some kind. From the Latin, "conflictus," which means, "a striking together."

How many of us have ever felt afraid of conflict? "If you find yourself avoiding situations or people or you feel uneasy for what you have to say and do because you think you will be challenged, receive pushback, get a negative reaction, or be disliked...then you are guilty of having fear of conflict." Ann Bernard

"I hate conflict." The Voice of Truth immediately responded: *"We don't. That's where all the transformative stuff happens."*

WE GET TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE SHORT TERM DISCOMFORT OF DEALING WITH THE ISSUES OR THE LONG TERM DISCOMFORT OF LIVING WITH THE PROBLEM.

Jesus often initiated conflict

- **Mark 2:8** "Why do you question this in your hearts?"
- **Mark 7:6** "You hypocrites!"
- **Mark 9:23** "What do you mean, 'If you can?'"
- **Mark 9:33** "What were you discussing along the road?"
- **Mark 10:17-27 The Rich Young Ruler.** Jesus confronts the issue. Doesn't placate. Doesn't soften. Doesn't pander. Then after the guy is leaving, sad, he doesn't enable, or compromise, manipulate, attack, or take responsibility for how the young man feels. He knows how to confront, and he understands the line separating his responsibility and the Rich Young Ruler's responsibility.
 - How differently might that scene look if you were in Jesus' shoes? How differently would that scene look if you responded to the Rich Young Ruler how you normally respond to a conflict situation?
- **Luke 4** They all spoke well of him. At first. Then he called them out. They tried to kill him

Jesus was killed because he spoke the truth to power. And power resented him for it. So they came up with justifications so that they could believe that their murderous actions were actually about loving others. "To save the people," they said, "he must die so the Romans don't come and take our land."

-Everybody experiences conflict

-Everybody has a default way to deal with conflict

Conflict Styles

1.) Competing - “I win, you lose.”

2.) Collaborating (problem solver) - “Let’s work together to get to a mutually satisfying conclusion.”

3.) Compromising - We both win a little and lose a little.

4.) Accommodating - “It isn’t worth the stress, we’ll just do it your way.”

5.) Avoiding - “If I ignore this, maybe it will go away.”

Why is this a big deal? Why should we purpose to get better at conflict?

- **Avoiding conflicts escalates tensions**
- **Avoiding conflicts ruins relationships.** Ever been around someone who is fearful, frustrated, angry, and embittered because they don’t talk productively to the person who they need to talk with?
- **Passive Aggressive:** Telling people what we think they want to hear, but doing something else.
- Unhealthy ways of dealing with conflict result in **inauthentic people who are emotionally repressed and ruled by fear.**
- It also results in...**people feeling betrayed by us later when our true feelings come out** and they realize we haven't been honest with them all along.
- **Matthew 18:15-17** - Jesus tells us to deal directly in relationships.
- **Kris Vallotton** - “Did you talk to them? Then why are you talking to me!”

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Conflict is not the same as “fights and quarrels.”

James 4:1-4 NLT What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don’t they come from the evil desires at war within you? You want what you don’t have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can’t get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don’t have what you want because you don’t ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don’t get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure. You adulterers! Don’t you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.

Why do we fear conflict?

- People fear that conflict will escalate into a fight or quarrel, that it will end in hurt feelings or possibly damaged relationships.
- Some people, when confronted, will play the victim card in order to distract from the real issue at hand. They will sulk. They will retreat or attack instead of taking responsibility and changing.
- Treating someone with respect does not mean sparing them from the truth about the consequences of their actions.
- **C-Situations** = conflict/criticism
- Some people go into COMBAT MODE in C-Situations. They become skilled at shutting others down by being aggressive or passive aggressive.

Q.) What is really going on with how emotionally charged conflict is for so many of us? A.) Negative Associations.

- **Negative Associations trigger feelings, which trigger our usual responses.** C-situations almost seem to “do it to us.” **We react.** And don’t always understand why. But it is our responsibility to explore our feelings and reactions to conflict, rather than throwing all responsibility off on the person who criticized us, or who frustrated us, or who sinned against us, or who...whatever the issue is. We need to examine our negative associations.
- Negative associations are the PAST hijacking our PRESENT by making us fearful of the FUTURE.
- **Do you associate disagreement with not being liked or with being rejected?** If so, then you might automatically begin to feel resentment when there is disagreement, and lash out.
- **How was conflict handled in your childhood environment?** Was disagreement considered displeasing? If so, then disagreement might trigger feelings of woundedness, and make us feel threatened.
- **Unhelpful Rules.** With these negative associations in place, people live with **RULES** like, “You are either for me or against me. Honest disagreement will be treated as hostility or disloyalty. I will interpret it as rejection, and either lash out at you or crumble under it submissively.”
- **Defensiveness** is usually the result of painful associations from past conflict. If the pattern was...
 - conflict
 - explosive reactions
 - silence
 - pretending it didn’t happen

- somebody gets cut off
- ...then the slightest conflict might trigger your **pleaser tendencies**, designed to nip rejection in the bud.

Things to remember in the midst of conflict

- **Disagreement is normal.** Differences of opinion are welcome. “Embrace differences” is on our list of Miller family rules.
- **Feelings aren’t facts, they are just feelings.** Emotions stem from our associations and interpretation of what things MEAN, which may be wildly inaccurate.
- Awareness of negative associations can help to form new interpretations of what’s happening, which lead to new feelings, and better responses.
- **Change the association - change the meaning - change the feeling - change the response.**

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When Confronting Someone

- 1.) **Stick to the facts.** Don’t make judgments or assertions about their character or motivations. Only the actions or words that are at issue.
- 2.) **Don’t attack. Share vulnerably.** Avoid using “You,” instead use, “I” statements. Avoid allness language like the plague (“You always, you never”). Allness language is not accurate, and it will likely lead to defensiveness so that they cannot hear you. Stick to the facts of what was said or done. Use I statements to share how it impacted you.
- 3.) **Don’t take responsibility for their feelings.** That’s their job. Keep yourself out of the enabling game of changing who you are and what you believe in order to keep them feeling good. Respect the boundary line between who you are and who they are.
- 4.) **Stay Calm.** No matter how they respond. If they get loud or aggressive or press in physically, just move back, and stay calm and respectful. If you need to walk away, walk away. If their manipulative diversion provokes an attack response from you then it will be their justification for not hearing what you originally brought up. **Don’t just prepare and visualize what you need to say, visualize how you will stay calm.**
- 5.) **Don’t try to win them over.** Inform, don’t control.

When being confronted, try to remember...

- **Stay calm and don't react right away.** You will likely need time to sort through your negative associations
- **It is very common to associate conflict and criticism with rejection,** but it is likely that it is not happening in the here and now. Remind yourself that these feelings are likely out of touch with reality.
- **Receptivity to criticism is not about people-pleasing.** It is about listening for truth about something I can improve.
- **Criticism is not the same as personal rejection.**
- **C-situations aren't a sign that a relationship is troubled.** The absence of any such things is probably a bigger signal that something is amiss. Intimacy REQUIRES emotional expression.
- **Feedback is to be considered, not obeyed.** It may be inaccurate. It may not. It needs to be sifted and filtered.
- **People often project** their own motives onto you, be aware of this. They are not the voice of truth regarding your motives.
- **Intent vs Impact: We need to be able to appreciate the impact our actions have on others even if our intent may be good.** We also need to learn to communicate the impact other's behavior had on us without jumping to the conclusion that their intent was evil.
- **Own your right to disagree and express your opinion.** Own their right to do the same.

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Let's make it our goal to get really good at conflict. May the Lord grant us the power, love, and wisdom to do so, that Jesus might get glory from our lives. Amen.

Other Resources

- conflict style assessment:
<http://www.buildingpeace.org/act-build-peace/learn/conflict-styles>
- Conflict Style Handout
<http://www.bedisciples.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Handout-Conflict-Management-Styles.pdf>