

Session #7

Fight Cleanly

Pre-Reading

The Motivation for Fighting Cleanly Glorify God

Conflict always provides an opportunity to glorify God, that is, to bring him praise and honor by showing who he is, what he is like, and what he is doing. The best way to glorify God in the midst of conflict is to depend on and draw attention to his grace, that is, the undeserved love, mercy, forgiveness, strength, and wisdom he gives to us through Jesus Christ. You can do this in several ways.

First, you can trust God. Instead of relying on your own ideas and abilities as you respond to people who oppose you, ask God to give you grace to depend on him and follow his ways, even if they are completely opposite to what you feel like doing (Prov. 3:5–7). Above all, hold on tightly to the liberating promises of the gospel. Trust that Jesus has forgiven your sins, and confess them freely. Believe that he is using the pressures of conflict to help you to grow, and cooperate with him. Depend on his assurance that he is always watching over you, and stop fearing what others might do to you. Know that he delights to display his sanctifying power in your life, and attempt to do things that you could never accomplish in your own strength, such as forgiving someone who has hurt you deeply. As you trust the Lord in these “unnatural” ways, people will have the opportunity to see that God is real and praise him for his work in your life (see Acts 16:22–31).

Second, you can obey God. One of the most powerful ways to glorify God is to do what he commands (Matt. 5:16; John 17:4; Phil. 1:9–10). As Jesus said, “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8). Obeying God’s commands without compromise honors him by showing that his ways are absolutely good, wise, and dependable. Our obedience also demonstrates that he is worthy of our deepest love and devotion. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey what I command. . . . Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. . . . If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. . . . He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. . . . the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me” (John 14:15–31; cf. 1 John 5:3 and 2 John 5–6). This repetition makes a life-changing point: If you want to honor Jesus and show that he is worthy to be loved more than anything in the world, learn his ways and obey his commands.

Third, you can imitate God. When the believers in Ephesus were struggling with conflict, the apostle Paul gave them this timeless advice: “Be imitators of God,

therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:1–2; see 1 John 2:6). As Paul knew, imitating Jesus in the midst of conflict is the surest path to restoring peace and unity with those who oppose us (see Eph. 4:1–3). More importantly, when we live out the gospel in our lives and mirror Jesus’ humility, mercy, forgiveness, and loving correction, we surprise the world and give concrete evidence of the Lord’s presence and power in our lives (see Phil. 1:9–11; 1 Peter 2:12). Fourth, you can acknowledge God. As God gives you grace to respond to conflict in unusual and effective ways, other people will often take notice and wonder how you do it. If you are silent, they may give you credit for the remarkable things you have done, which would rob God of his glory. Instead, use these special opportunities to breathe grace to other people by telling them that it is God who has been working in you to do things you could never do on your own (Phil. 2:13; 1 Peter 3:14–16). Then go on to share the gospel, telling them of Jesus’ love for them, his saving work on the cross, and his offer to forgive their sins and free them from the attitudes and actions that lead to conflict. You may have their attention only for a moment. Make the most of it by pointing straight at Jesus and giving him all the glory.

Every time you encounter a conflict, you will inevitably show what you really think of God. If you want to show that you love him “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37), then ask him to help you trust, obey, imitate, and acknowledge him, especially when it is difficult to do so. This behavior honors God and shows others how worthy he is of your devotion and praise.

This principle was powerfully illustrated in the apostle Peter’s life. Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, he warned Peter that he would be executed for his faith. In John 21:19 we are told that “Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.” How would Peter glorify God by dying? He would show that God is so excellent and trustworthy and his ways are so perfect that it is better to die than to turn away from him or disobey his commands (cf. Dan. 3:1–30; 6:1–28; Acts 5:17–42; 6:8–7:60). Peter was willing to pay the highest price possible, his very life, to show how much he loved and trusted God.

Glorifying God will benefit you as well, especially when you are involved in a conflict. Many disputes begin or grow worse because one or both sides give in to their emotions and say or do things they later regret. When you focus on trusting, obeying, imitating, and acknowledging God, you will be less inclined to stumble in these ways. As Psalm 37:31 says, “The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip.” The other benefit of a God-centered approach to conflict resolution is that it makes you less dependent on results. Even if others refuse to respond positively to your efforts to make peace, you can find comfort in the knowledge that God is pleased with your obedience. That knowledge can help you to persevere in difficult situations.

It is important to realize that if you do not glorify God when you are involved in a conflict, you will inevitably glorify someone or something else. By your actions you will show either that you have a big God or that you have a big self and big problems. To put it another way, if you do not focus on God, you will inevitably focus on yourself and your will, or on other people and the threat of their wills.

One of the best ways to keep your focus on the Lord is to continually ask yourself these questions: How can I please and honor God in this situation? In particular, how can I bring praise to Jesus by showing that he has saved me and is changing me? Seeking to please and honor God is a powerful compass for life, especially when we are faced with difficult challenges. Jesus himself was guided by these goals. He said, "I seek not to please myself but him who sent me" (John 5:30). "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him" (John 8:29). "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). King David showed the same desire when he wrote: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Ps. 19:14).

When displaying the riches of God's love and pleasing him is more important than holding onto worldly things and pleasing yourself, it becomes increasingly natural to respond to conflict graciously, wisely, and with self-control. This approach brings glory to God and sets the stage for effective peacemaking.

-The Peacemaker, by Ken Sande, pages 31-34

Daily Office

Introduction

When Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9, most people jump to the conclusion that we are pacifiers and appeasers. In our church Mennonite Heritage, we have a stance of love and non-resistance. We want to do everything possible to resolve situations peacefully between people. This does not mean doing nothing or pacifying so violence does not erupt. This means engaging in healthy conflict or fighting cleanly so that both parties are valued honored and can see a way forward.

Conflict was part of the mission of Jesus. What he did was disrupt the false peace of those around him. Why? We can't have the true peace of Christ's kingdom with lies and pretense. True peace will never come through pretending that what is wrong is right. Lies must be exposed to the light and replaced with the truth. The real problem, however, is not the conflict itself but in how we process and negotiate our differences.

Growing Connected

Handbook to Renewal Day by Day Debrief: What obstacles, difficulties, or success did you experience in meeting with God this week using the daily resource?

In one word or two but no more, describe how conflict was typically handled in your home growing up (e.g., avoidance, yelling, sarcasm, the silent treatment).

Bible Study

After the fall of Jerusalem, Daniel, a young man at the time, was carried off to Babylon together with other Israelites. He was placed in the king's "university" to be trained for leadership. Part of the training involved a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table.

Read Daniel 1:8-17

"But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead. To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds."

To these four individuals God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. Daniel was given the ability to understand visions and dreams. Eating the royal food and wine was something that Daniel could not do. What steps did he take to resolve his conflict with those in authority over him?

What might you have done if you were in Daniel's position?

What is the end result of Daniel's negotiation with the guard?

Teaching

Purpose: To resolve conflict maturely by eliminating “dirty fighting” tactics and by taking responsibility for a difficult issue.

Jesus’ model of true peacemaking

- He brought disruption in order to bring true peace
- He did not avoid conflict or appease people
- He did not ignore tensions or differences

Key principle: True peace will never come by pretending that what is wrong is right.

Individual Activity

Circle the dirty fighting tactics that apply to you.

Silent treatment	Complaining	Anger/Rage	Lecturing
Denying	Passive-aggressive	Blaming/Attacking	Walking away
Condescension	Placating	Lying	Threatening gestures
Avoiding	Hitting/Violence	Name-calling	Shouting
Criticizing	Using “always” and “never”	Sarcasm	Showing contempt

Teaching

A clean fight is about breaking negative generational patterns through the Spirit of God.

Key principle: The person who asks for the clean fight is acknowledging he/she is the one with the issue.

Steps to a Clean Fight

SPEAKER: Ask permission to do a clean fight.

LISTENER: Remember to reflect back what you hear the Speaker saying by paraphrasing after each sentence stem.

SPEAKER

1. State the problem. "I notice..."
2. State why it is important to you. "I value..."
3. Fill in the following sentence: "When you... I feel ..."
4. State clearly, respectfully and specifically your request. (Specifically means to include details such as time and dates.)

LISTENER

5. Consider the request. Briefly share your perspective on it. (Are you willing to do all of it, part of it, or none of it?)

SPEAKER

6. Agree on request OR offer an alternative. (go back and forth not more than 3 times)
7. Together, write out your agreement and plan to review it in a few weeks.
Speaker: My understanding of the agreement is:

Listener: My understanding of the agreement is:

8. Review the agreement in 2-4 weeks.

Group Activity

What was most helpful about the clean fight process? What was most difficult?

Jesus says: “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9). What blessings might there be on the other side of learning this very important skill—in your personal life, relationships, work, or church?

Closing

Personal Action Step

During the next week, practice the fight cleanly skill around another issue, repeating the same process you learned in this session. (If you need to see the fight cleanly example the video will be in the training for week 7)

Handbook to Renewal Day by Day: Use days 31-36