

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

BY JOHN HANNA

Conflict is not something that can be controlled. It has to be managed. The reason for this is because conflict happens between autonomous human beings, who have volition and can choose whether or not to escalate conflict, run away from conflict, or seek to resolve conflict.

Conflict can enter our life at any moment and it can be completely out of our control. However, we are not helpless victims and we must choose how to respond to conflict.

Jesus praises those who resolve conflict. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Matthew 5:9)

Key Principles of Conflict Management

- Conflict started in heaven and came to earth with the rebellion of some angels, including Satan. Because of the fall of mankind, conflict is part of our world and will remain part of our world until Jesus Christ returns and makes all things right.
- Conflict is an opportunity for growth - leading us to be more perfect and complete (James 1:2-4)
- Proverbs 27:6 states that the wounds of a friend are faithful. It is better to say necessary hard things, with a spirit of love, than to falsely speak nice things.
- Our relationship to each other directly impacts our relationship to God. Matthew 5:23-24 warns against coming to worship God if we are not reconciled with someone else. All of our life is connected and related.
- The goal of conflict management is not just resolution but rather reconciliation. In some conflicts, reconciliation is not always possible but it should be the goal.
- Resolving conflict will actually strengthen and deepen relationships.

Healthy Conflict Management

We handle conflict between us quickly and honestly by going to the person, owning our part, and practicing forgiveness.

Healthy Conflict is greater than Artificial Harmony.

It's true every time. Artificial harmony is created when we say, "I don't want to hurt his feelings..." or "It's probably not a big deal, I'm sure I'll be fine..." But unaddressed conflict always has unintended consequences.

In Matthew 18:15-19, Jesus gives us clear direction on how to handle our conflict, and it's summed up quickly in the italicized statement above. We believe it's essential for us to handle conflict well, especially as leaders. We will set the tone in our groups. If we are quick to resolve conflict, our group will be more likely to follow.

Jesus' words are not new words from God's nature in the Old Testament. Jesus is God in the flesh and so his words and teachings reflect God's nature. Most definitely they are hard words to live out. In our own strength and power, they are impossible to live out. But with the indwelling of God's Spirit, living within all of us who follow Jesus, this kind of lifestyle is possible. Followers of Jesus have a helper, a teacher, even the Spirit of Truth enabling us to live this kind of world confounding lifestyle. It is the Holy Spirit that enables believers to turn the other cheek, give our tunic with our coat, love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. The Holy Spirit is the one who will help us know when to speak and when to listen, so that reconciliation is possible.