Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

Adult Conflict Resolution
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I. Biblical References

A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense (Prov. 19:11).

Even if …(someone) wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, forgive him (Luke 17:4).

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone (Rom. 12:18).

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord (Rom. 12:19).

If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:20-21).

II. Introduction

Conflict is a natural part of life. Where there is more than one person, conflict will happen from time to time. When two dance together, they occasionally step on each other's toes. This is partially due to clumsiness, and partially because one wanted to go left when their partner chose to go right. Marriage is sometimes described as a "dance." By the time a couple has been married for 10 or 20 years, they have discovered several areas in which their spouse consistently wishes to go left when one wishes to go right.

Much of conflict can be reduced to two issues: Self-will, and power. These themes will be tracked throughout this chapter. In the end we will disover that conflict resolution is, perhaps more than anything else, a spiritual issue. However before developing that point, this chapter will seek to provide a deeper understanding of the roots of conflict. Techniques from the field of psychology will be presented. The chapter will then end with a short review of scriptural insight regarding conflict resolution.

It would be nice if it were possible to avoid all conflict. However, we live in a broken and sinful world so that's not realistic. There are many ways that people, and family systems attempt to

deal with conflict. Some of them work well ~ some fail miserably. One thing we know pretty much for certain: That which family systems practice, they tend to pass along to their children and grand children.

It can be informative to study how other people have attempted to resolve conflict. There's much to be learned from the mistakes of other. This chapter begins with a short study of five biblical characters who attempted to resolve their conflicts in ways that today we would call, "dysfunctional."

III. Five Examples Of Dysfunctional Conflict Resolution

A. Elisha ~ Overpowering the other party

In the ancient book of Second Kings, there was a moment when several bratty children "dissed" a prophet of God. They insulted him and called him names. So he used the power that God had given him to summon two bears from the woods, and the bears mauled the children. Does this sound crazy? Here's the story.

"Elisha left Jericho and went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, a group of boys from the town began mocking and making fun of him. "Go away, you baldhead!" they chanted. "Go away, you baldhead!" 24 Elisha turned around and looked at them, and he cursed them in the name of the LORD. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of them. 25 From there Elisha went to Mount Carmel and finally returned to Samaria" (2 Kings 2:23-25 ~ NLT).

Not exactly a glowing example of how to handle conflict in a wise, gentle manner, but how many times have you wished that you could make something happen, perhaps engineer some big event in the lives of people with whom you're having conflict, in order to teach them a lesson? Perhaps you've even done something to ratchet up the ante. When we ratched up the ante, it's usually out of a sense of wounded pride, and it usually involves power. That's what Elisha did.

Of course, the children's parents probably wished they could get even with Elisha. And one wouldn't be surprised if Elisha's reputation in that part of the world took a hit as people whispered behind their hands, "He used bears to attack children because they hurt his pride ~ and he really doesn't have much hair does he…."

Obvious problems with using power to solve conflict in marriage include:
- It tends to come across as arrogant and uncaring.
- It tends to create disrespect.
- It tends to create adversarial relationships, and enemies.
- It tends to make people want to get even ~ builds resentment.
- It establishes a dysfunctional pattern between the powerful person and those with less power ~ like a heavy kid on a teeter-totter holding a light kid in the air.
- It keeps those with less power from making a contribution to solving the conflict.
- It tends to demoralize the less powerful person.
- It damages trust and builds barriers.

- On a very practical level, when husbands play the power card, sexual drive in their wives is frequently diminished.

Yet don't we all sometimes wish we had enough power to crush someone into agreeing….