

- Introduction
 - Teaser
 - Video: Conflict in the workplace (1min)
 - Recap

So this is week two of our Peace & Conflict series. We're looking at how God's plan for peace spills over into everyday life. God has made peace with us at the cross, but there is still conflict in our world. In our relationships. Last week we looked at Peace @ Home. And how flatmates and couples and siblings can pursue peace together. And we discovered the Bible has two kinds of wisdom for us on this.

General wisdom. Tips for how to deal with conflict. And we looked at a couple of tools like the Sparks, the Fuel, the Fire. A model for understanding where conflict comes from, and the damage it does to our relationships. And we looked at the Slippery Slope. How I tend to deal with conflict - fight or flight. Escape or attack. And it also opened up a whole bunch of responses in between. Peace-making responses. Good general wisdom from the Bible.

But we also talked about a whole other kind of wisdom. Gospel wisdom. And this is where the real power comes from to transform conflict. By putting Jesus at the centre of my conflict. His reconciling power that restores my relationship with God, and inspires and empowers me to respond to conflict in Christ-like ways.
 - Blurb

This week, we're shifting from home to the workplace. To peace @ work. Why are we doing this? Well we spend a large chunk of our lives in the workplace. If there's conflict there, it's going grind you down. Your financial security usually depends on your job, so workplace conflict can be very stressful. Our working relationships can become a very big part of our lives. And if you're a Christian, the workplace is where most of your daily witness happens. Your Christian character is on display in how you deal with conflict. So all kinds of reasons why we want to have peace at work.
- Body: The Gospel brings peace in the workplace
 - Where does conflict come from in the workplace?

So where does conflict come from at work? Well, if you were here last week you'll know I interviewed the NSW director of Peacewise, an organisation that does Christian conflict resolution and training. And I asked Wendy about the sources of conflict she sees in her workplace mediations.

 - **Wendy video of conflict sources in the workplace (1min)**

And again we can use our sparks/fuel/fire idea to break that down. The sparks of workplace conflict are our differences. One person will say, it's just a job, another person will say, it's my career, this is a stepping stone for me, another person will say, I love this company. This is my company. And they have 3 different ways of viewing the same workplace, and that can spark conflict. But the fuel for the conflict is exactly the same as in the home. It's the cravings. The out of control desires. The good thing that I've turned into a god thing. The salary. The share price. The career path. The job title. The respect. The corner office. The quality of work. Good things turned into god things. So James 4 again:

(Jam 4:1-2) What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.

And again the fire is the destructive effect on workplace relationships. When conflict takes over, you can get a really toxic work environment. Desires can get out of control and the workplace becomes all about the bonuses. All about the performance ranking. Many people hate their jobs not because of the work itself, but because of the politics. The stress of conflict.
 - How do we respond to conflict in the workplace?

Now how do we respond to conflict in the workplace? Where do you fall on the **slippery slope**? Well, sometimes we are totally different in the workplace to the home. Maybe at home you're meek and mild, but in the workplace you're aggressive, and outspoken. At home you escape and at work you attack. Or maybe it 's the opposite. At work you under the thumb, you have no power, you just try to avoid conflict. And then you get home and take it out on the family.

Either way, the Bible again opens up for us is a range of peace-making responses in between those extremes. So Proverbs has some great wisdom for the workplace. Here's our first reading:

14 From the fruit of their lips people are filled with good things, and the work of their hands brings them reward.

[The workplace can be a great environment, but it can go either way...]

15 The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.

16 Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult.

17 An honest witness tells the truth, but a false witness tells lies.

18 The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

19 Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.

20 Deceit is in the hearts of those who plot evil, but those who promote peace have joy.

Now what's interesting here is that it's all about the words. v14. Words are good. They bring good things, just like working hard brings good things. But words can also bring you into conflict. You can fail to listen. You can get annoyed straight away. You can lie. You can speak recklessly.

But when words are used well, they can resolve conflict. You can listen to advice. You can not listen to insults. You can speak the truth. Speak wisdom. And if you use words like that you can bring healing. You cannot promote peace.

The New Testament has the same advice: it's all about the words. James say this:

(Jam 3:2-6) 2 Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check... [but] the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.

6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

If want to deal with workplace conflict, rein in your tongue? But how do you do that. Not just by will-power. Not by force of habit, or just improving your communication skills. Our 2nd reading says to hold your tongue you need to trust that God is in control. You need to trust that you don't have say everything you could. Because God will have the last word:

Romans 12:18 - as far as possible, live at peace with everyone. Don't take revenge, because that's God's job. Not yours. Don't give people what they deserve. Give them what they don't deserve. Give them what they need. If they're hungry, feed them. If they're thirsty, give them something to drink. If they're desperate for respect, give them credit for something they did well. If they're desperate for promotion, send them on a training course. Sometimes we say, I'm just telling it like it is. Maybe. But do you really want God to tell it like is for you? Do you want him to point out every flaw and failing in your life, your character? Gospel wisdom says Jesus has injected grace and hope and peace into your relationship with God. So inject some grace and hope and peace into your workplace. Break the cycle. You don't have to be locked into their way of dealing with conflict. Subvert the corporate culture. Subvert it with grace.

- Tool #1 - Get the log out

How can I do that? Well, again, I have just one tool for you today from the Resolving Everyday Conflict course. And it's about using your tongue wisely. Using your tongue to put out the fire, not to heap fuel on it. And this one is about owning my contribution to conflict. It's called get the log out. Based on Matthew 7:

3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

So Jesus is saying that we're usually much quicker to point out the other person's fault. When our first instinct should be to own our contribution to the conflict.

Now what this is not saying is that you need to take all the blame. And that is the danger of using this tool, if you're an escaper - you get out of conflict by just taking all the blame. And you definitely should not use this tool if there's been any kind of abuse. Then you need outside help. This tool isn't about taking the blame.

This is just getting real and say, how have I contributed to this conflict: either by what I did, or by how I responded to what they did. Even if my contribution is only 2%, I am 100% responsible for that 2%. Most of the time our contribution is more than 2%, but we focus on them. You didn't do the numbers. But you didn't send me the spreadsheet. We both try to make the other person 100% responsible. And so the conflict gets stuck.

And the most powerful tool to break a deadlock is a confession. When someone volunteers a confession, makes the first move, it disarms the other person. It demonstrates good faith. It shows you're not trying to make them 100% responsible. And what usually happens is, Romans 12, it dumps hot coals on their head. It makes them ashamed for trying to make you 100% responsible. And often they respond with a confession. And the deadlock breaks.

I used to work for a small software company at Circular Quay. And I was the leader of a programming team. And I came in to work one day after a terrible night. I got stuck in traffic in a taxi for an hour and a half, I had to pay them a million dollars, and then I left my wallet in the taxi. So I was in a pretty bad mood, and when I got to work I discovered a manager from another team had given somebody in my team a list of tasks to complete. And I snatched the list out of his hand and screwed it up and threw it in the bin, and then I marched over to the manager and said what do you think you're doing giving my team-member giving work to do. And then I sat down and stewed at my desk for a while. But then the gospel wisdom started to flow. Here is wonderful opportunity to be humble, to be at peace. And I went over to the manager and I apologised for going off at him and asked if he would forgive me. And he did not know what to do. But pretty

soon he apologised for going behind my back. And when I left that company he says that day really stuck with him. Not because I was perfect, I was grumpy and rude. No it stuck with him because I'd apologised. Everyone is grumpy and rude sometimes at work. But no-one in that workplace ever apologised.

So if you've reflected. And you've owned your contribution to the conflict. If you've decided to trust God and confess your part. What do you do? Well, you line up a time, and you use the 7 A's of confession:

1. Address everyone involved - make sure you deal with everyone affected. There might be one main person, but if there are other people in your team, you might have to line up a separate confession with them, so acknowledge how your conflict has spilled over and affected them as well. After I apologised to that manager, I had to go back to my team-member and apologise for snatching the piece of paper out of his hand.

2. Avoid ifs and buts - ok, this is going to change the way you hear apologies. In fact, it's going to make you realise that most of the apologies you hear aren't apologies at all. For example, a couple of years ago some of the cast members from a school musical TV show called Glee did a risque photo-shoot. And there was an outcry because they were dressed in school uniforms. Here's the apology from the actress Dianna Agron. But listen out for the "ifs and buts":

"I am sorry if you're hurt or these photos make you uncomfortable, it was never our intention. And if your 8-year-old has a copy of our GQ cover in hand, again I am sorry. But I would have to ask, how on earth did it get there?"

The word if means it's not an apology. "If" makes it all about your reaction. If you feel hurt, it's because you're oversensitive. I'm not sorry for my action, I'm sorry for your re-action. It's not my fault.

The word but means everything I just said doesn't matter. I am sorry, but it's really your fault. And you hear it every time a footballer apologises. A politician apologises. A radio-DJ apologises. They say I'm sorry if you feel hurt, but here's the reason I'm not really to blame. That's not an apology. If you're really confessing, avoid if and but. See how the tongue is so powerful here?

3. Admit specifically. Make them see that you understand exactly what you did wrong. If you generalise, it says it wasn't worth thinking about. You don't really know what they're on about. "I'm sorry for whatever it was I did wrong." That's not an apology. "I'm sorry that I didn't get the report in so you had to stay back to print it out." That's an apology.

4. Acknowledge the hurt. This is because it's not just about the conflict. It's about the people. We're not just resolving conflicts, we're reconciling relationships. So actually, "I'm sorry you had to stay back late", that's not a full apology. "I'm sorry you had to stay back and that made you feel stressed and angry because I know you like to get home in time to put your kids to bed." That's an apology.

5. Accept the consequences. This is where it gets scary. Because it's not just about the words. It's owning the consequences of my contribution to the conflict. "I know this means we won't fill our quota this month. I'd like to work back a couple of nights next week to help us catch up." "I know this means you probably won't be able to trust me to do that job again. That's fair." You have to show you understand the effects of the conflict, what it's done to the company, what it's done to the relationship.

6. Alter your behavior. Again, it's not just about the words. Words are backed up with actions. So you might need to commit to a course of action. "I'm going to speak to the people in my team to make sure that doesn't happen again." I know that outburst was unacceptable, I'm going to start seeing a counsellor to work on the anger."

7. Ask for forgiveness. And finally, depending on how big the conflict is, you need to put it all on the line and ask if they're willing to forgive you. If it's a big thing, you might not want to do this A. Because it puts pressure on them. It's not fair. You might have to say, "Look I know it's too soon to ask you to forgive me, but I'm hoping that down the track you might feel able to forgive me, and until then, I'm going to try to make good on all the damage I caused."

So I want to finish today again with a positive vision of conflict. How conflict is a chance to bring biblical wisdom to bear on the workplace. So here's that same video from the start, but with a little peace-making thrown in....

<VIDEO>

But to confess, you have to trust God. You have to risk them not responding well. If you only do it because you're expecting them to do the same, then eventually you'll get burnt and you'll give up trying. The only way you do it is by remembering that in my conflict with God, it was 100% my contribution. And 0% God. But Jesus

shouldered my 100% on the cross. So I'm in no position to try to force 100% blame on someone else. I can't ask for grace from God, and refuse grace to someone else. Jesus says:

if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

Doesn't matter if my contribution is more than 50% or less than 50%. If I know they have *something* against me, I can't just continue my prayer-life with God as if nothing is wrong. It's going to hinder my prayers. That's what the Lord's Supper service says examine yourself. That's a good moment to say actually, I'm out of relationship with that person. How can I eat and drink and trust in God's grace, but deny God's grace to that person. If that's on your conscience, hold off on the Lord's Supper this week. Work on the conflict and then enjoy the Lord's Supper all the more next time.