

### ***1. Introduction ...***

Review last week – conflict, happens, but peace needs to be made. The fire: there are sparks that trigger conflict - our natural God created differences, misunderstandings, and, our basic selfish attitudes. But for sparks to become a fire fuel is needed, and the fuel of conflict can include our cravings - desires that become demands or, the attitude of the world around us – the key to happiness is to get what you want when you want it! And these triggers, when enflamed by this fuel, can have a fiery destructive impact of destroying families, marriages, churches, workplaces, communities, alongside our hearts, souls, lives and faith.

But we also saw that God has revealed a hope and future for reconciled relationships and resolved conflict. A radically different vision of relationships to what we see in the world and so a witness to it: A vision of putting others first in moving forward, a vision not reliant on our strength to “give up”, but rooted deeply in God’s action to forgive us. The engine room of resolving conflict is not our strength and character, but the grace and glory of God seen in the gospel of Jesus. As summed up in Ephesians 4:32,

*“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, **just as in Christ God forgave you.**”*

What does that look like? You looked at a video clip of a conflict in a kitchen last week, triggers, fuel and destruction all over as the wife goes off to bed as the husband dismisses her with a flurry of his hand “I’m going to watch a movie!” and then sighs “Why does it have to be so hard!?” Let’s return to our kitchen and see what God’s radically different vision of relationship looks like before we delve into this new way of thinking.

*... play week 1 clip 2 ...*

What the Lord reveals in the Bible is remarkably practical and real isn’t it. It’s merely not

theorizing and theologizing. It speaks to how we relate to one another, use our tongues, think about issues of difference, and how to strengthen our hearts so we can yield at just the right moment to promote peace and grace. And we need it don't we because conflict just happens. Peace however needs to be made.

## ***2. Escape responses ...***

Our different responses to conflict can be simply illustrated by the diagram *The Slippery Slope*, one the bottom of page 7. Here it is on the screen. It's like a hill with two slopes where you can slide down. Our responses to conflict can slide down the slippery slope to escape, or running from conflict. Or, our responses might slither into the attack response where we try and win the conflict at any cost. Let's look at each briefly asking the question – which is my main way of responding to conflict?

The escape responses are fairly self-explanatory aren't they: avoid or run from conflict. Sweep it under the carpet. Pretend it's not there. Not peace-making, but peace-faking. Escaping can be seen in denying the conflict exists, and therefore refusing to do what we should to resolve it properly. Now this may seem to keep things peaceful, but it doesn't. It's a cover up and always comes back later in an explosion of conflict. Maybe the greatest public and humiliating example of this was on 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 1938 ...

*... play Neville Chamberlain clip ...*

A year later the peace was gone, the paper was worth nothing, and Germany and the UK was at war and soon the whole world.

Alternatively escape responses can be seen in actually running from the conflict!! Get away from the person – leave the family. Leave the job. Leave the church. Or if you don't actually leave, simply don't speak to them!! Avoid them, sit on the other side of the room, hide your face in your mobile phone or iPad. Go watch a DVD or surf the net. Sleep

on the other side of the bed – or in another room. Do anything I can to avoid the conflict. How often can we do this, but it never works. We might run from the problem, but inevitably it comes after us, if not with the original person, then in another relationship, broken because I haven't learnt how I contribute to conflict by resolving the first one.

### ***3. Attack responses ...***

The other side of the slippery slope is the attacking responses to conflict. Whereas the escaping ones are about running, this one is about winning!! We place as much pressure and force on the other party as is needed for them to agree with me!! Hence the conflict is over!! NOT!! One of the simplest way of attacking is by blaming someone else. We try to shift responsibility from ourselves to the other party, “well if you would just ...” or “but you did ...” Blame turns to gossip as I share my response to the conflict not in terms of what I am learning, but in terms of what they should learn!! We are trying to win, by getting others on our side, building a team of supporters for our point of view.

Or the attack responses can move to outright assault where we seek to intimidate or farce the other party. Yes physical assault is a clear example of this, however it can also be seen in financial assault in how we withhold funds from someone, or emotional or verbal assault as we argue them into the ground. Hmmmmmm this is getting a little close for my comfort. Talk to Robyn about what it's like to be married to a lawyer – or Kathy Darwin perhaps!! The whole western legal system is based on an adversarial approach to finding the truth – if the plaintiff and the defendant argue their case well enough then the truth will become evident!! Unfortunately it's not always as simple as that: the different qualities of lawyers impacts that, so does how much money a party has!! Yes litigation is a form of an attacking response; “I'll see you in court!” Is it little wonder that 1 Corinthians 6 strongly encourages Christians not to take each other to court!!

Where do you fit on the slippery slope? What is your natural response to conflict? Where is your conflict taking you? Have ever heard, or used, any of these phrases?

*... play "Where is your conflict taking you" clip ...*

### ***4. Peacemaking responses ...***

As we have said last week- there is another way on the top of the slope: peacemaking responses summed up in four G's so they are easy to remember!! How do we promote peacemaking? Remember the 4 G's!! We will spend the heart of this series going through each of these in more detail however let me introduce them today in a little NT letter. One of the wonders of the Bible is how real it is. It's not merely a theological tome to study to get degrees to show how good a student you have been!! It is fundamentally a story of life and how God engages with our lives. So it's no surprise that we find conflict all over the Bible. In fact, this little NT letter came about it seems, because of a conflict!! A letter the pronunciation of the name of which we still debate: Philemon.

Paul writes a letter to Philemon, requesting he would embrace a man named Onesimus that Paul is sending back to him. Very briefly, it seems Onesimus, Philemon's slave, had a disagreement with Philemon, and he wanted Paul to help resolve it. This was more than possible in first century Roman times. Vivianus, a Roman jurist of the late 1st and early 2nd century A.D. wrote,

*"If a slave leaves his master and comes back to his master, the question whether he be a fugitive is one for consideration; if he so fled to conceal himself and not to return to his master, he is a fugitive; but he is no fugitive if he seeks that some wrongdoing of his may be better extenuated by his mother's entreaties."*

A parent could plead on behalf of her slave son or daughter. And Paul describes himself as Onesimus' "father" twice in Philemon.

### **(a) Go to higher ground (1-7) ...**

Paul begins his letter, as he does with all his letters – reminding Philemon of Who is most important, and best for Philemon himself. Look at his prayer in verses 4-7

*“<sup>4</sup>I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, <sup>5</sup> because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the **sake of Christ**. <sup>7</sup> Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord’s people.”*

Immediately Paul takes Philemon’s eyes upward – to the Lord Jesus. He takes him to higher ground, reminds him of what life is all about: not just himself and his needs, but God and his glory, as 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, <sup>31</sup> *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.* Paul immediately puts the conflict in its utmost perspective – God’s glory. The new way of thinking about conflict, the peace-making approach, begins with reminding myself what is my highest value? What am I here for? For someone who follows Jesus as Lord and Saviour that is all about God’s glory.

### **(b) Get real about yourself (16, 17-19) ...**

Then Paul takes Philemon’s eyes to the horizontal, but not first, as is normal for us, to Onesimus and the hurt that he has brought into the conflict. No, Paul calls Philemon to look at himself. To get real about himself and to look into his own heart,

*“<sup>15</sup>Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that **you might have him back forever**— <sup>16</sup> no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, **as a dear brother**.” ... “He is very dear to me **but even dearer to you**, ...”*

And then this from verse 19, *“... not to mention that you owe me your very self.”* Paul calls Philemon to consider himself and his situation before launching into a judgment on Onesimus – remember you owe me he says, this is not a threat, but a reminder of the

reality of who Philemon is, a rebel and sinner against God as Paul is, and Onesimus. And a forgiven one at that, as Paul and now Onesimus are. Here Paul reflects the words and heart of the Lord Jesus when the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 7:3-5,

*“<sup>3</sup>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? <sup>4</sup>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? <sup>5</sup>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.”*

I can imagine Paul praying Philemon would reflect on his own attitudes and actions, perhaps even a thorough and humble confession, as he is reunited with Onesimus.

### **(c) Gently engage others (8-20) ...**

But taking responsibility for your own contribution is followed by respectfully and graciously helping others see how they have contributed to the conflict. And Paul does this here as he graciously calls Philemon to certain behaviours and responses. Verses 8-9,

*“<sup>8</sup>Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, <sup>9</sup>yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love.*

And 14, *“<sup>14</sup>But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favour you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary.”*

And we even see this in verse 17 as he calls Philemon to welcome Onesimus as if he was Paul *“<sup>17</sup>So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.”*

### **(d) Get together on lasting solutions (16, 17-20) ...**

“Go to higher ground”, or “Glorify God”; “Get real about yourself”, or “Get the log out of your own eye”; “Gently engage others”, or “Gently restore”; and the fourth G is “Get together on lasting solutions” or “Go and be reconciled”. Here we are called to focus on preserving and restoring the relationship through forgiveness that leads to a lasting

solution that resolves both material AND personal issues. Here we see peace-making is not just about resolution of an issue between two people, and reconciling the relationship between them. Paul reflecting the principle of Ephesians 4:32 we read last week, *“Forgive as the Lord forgave you”* writes to Philemon in verses 15-16

*“<sup>15</sup>... you might have him back forever— <sup>16</sup>no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.”*

And Paul notes, forgiveness is not cheap, it costs, something or someone has to pay, bring restitution, for forgiveness to be real, *“<sup>18</sup>If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. <sup>19</sup>I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back”*.

How important is this step? Fundamental!! The Lord Jesus put it this way in Matt 5:23-24

*<sup>23</sup> “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there in front of the altar.*

*First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”*

Is there someone here who has something against you? Hmmm Listen up!!!

### **5. A great first step: overlooking it (Proverbs 19:11) ...**

So there are the four G's of peacemaking. We will look at them in more detail in the weeks ahead, but before we finish let me outline one more practice that if done well, might mean you may never get to the 4 G's: the principle of overlooking on page 9.

Overlooking asks questions such as *“is this really worth fighting for?” “Is this issue really worth raising and arguing over?”* When someone offends you it is a really good first question to ask yourself, *“Can I overlook this?”* Many conflicts can be quickly resolved if we are willing to overlook – to extinguish a fire even before it starts. This reflects biblical principles. We read in Proverbs 19:11, *A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his*

*glory to overlook an offence!"* We must learn to put our conflicts in the broader conflict of our lives. Will the fact that the boys leave the lights on again mean a great deal if I have to turn them off? Is it worth me shouting at them? Or when one of the boys hops in the car and changes the music without asking? Can I overlook the offence and have a relaxed conversation about asking, rather than shouting "You do this every time!!! Can't you learn!!!" I love the comment on page 10, "*We are thin-skinned with how others treat us (we take offense easily) while we are thick-skinned in how we treat them (we want them to toughen up, man up, take a chill pill!!)*". Parents in particular could take note here. Now be careful not to use overlooking as a way of justifying a slide into the escape responses on the slippery slope, overlooking is not avoiding or denying conflict, it is a form of preemptive forgiveness: I forgive you, even without raising the offence! So not all conflicts can be overlooked, perhaps overlooking is appropriate in three circumstances,

1. No wall has been created between you and the other person or have you feel differently toward them for more than a short period.
2. There is no serious harm (to God's reputation, to others, or to the offender) and,
3. The offence is not part of a destructive pattern of behaviours that must be graciously challenged and considered

## ***6. Conclusion ...***

If there is anything you walk away with this Sunday, may it be Proverbs 19:11 and the call to consider overlooking an offence. If there was a bit more appropriate overlooking, then perhaps we would have less conflict and more peace. What would happen if we asked the question "*is this really worth fighting over*" more often? What are we praying might be the result of examining the four G's together through this series? Let's return to our rain music video, maybe it would questions like this instead of what we saw earlier ...