

## Walking in Relationships part 3

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### - Tools for Healthy Conflict

- “If you consider yourself to be wise and one who understands the ways of God, advertise it with a beautiful, fruitful life guided by wisdom’s gentleness. Never brag or boast about what you’ve done and you’ll prove that you’re truly wise. But if there is bitter jealousy or competition hiding in your heart, then don’t deny it and try to compensate for it by boasting and being phony. For that has nothing to do with God’s heavenly wisdom but can best be described as the wisdom of this world, both selfish and devilish. So wherever jealousy and selfishness are uncovered, you will also find many troubles and every kind of meanness. But the wisdom from above is always pure, filled with peace, considerate and teachable. It is filled with love and never displays prejudice or hypocrisy in any form and it always bears the beautiful harvest of righteousness! Good seeds of wisdom’s fruit will be planted with peaceful acts by those who cherish making peace.” - James 3:13-18 TPT

- When we really dive into this scripture we see two different ways of handling relationships. (Marital or otherwise.)
  - The World’s Way vs God’s Way.
    - When we walk in the World’s way of handling relationships we find bitter jealousy, competition, boasting, phoniness and selfishness. And, when we walk in these things we experience “every kind of meanness.”
    - When we walk in God’s way of handling relationships we find purity, consideration, teachability, love and peace. We get to enjoy the fruits and harvest of righteousness!
- We are presented with these two totally different ways of handling relationships every time we encounter conflict.
  - Don’t believe the lie that “if we were a good Christian couple we would never experience conflict”.
    - Conflict can produce a deep sense of intimacy and connection when we deal with it God’s way.
    - It isn’t sinful to experience conflict. What can make conflict sinful is how we choose to handle it.

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- We need to dedicate ourselves to utilizing conflict and tension in our relationships as tools that guide us to greater unity and connection.
- We want to emphasize the truth that navigating conflict and tension within relationship is not limited to marriage.
  - This message applies to every relationship in life. Let's move beyond the surface level and cultivate meaningful deep connection within our community, friendships, families and work places.
  - So, no matter what the relationship we can all use the principles from James 3:17-18 to submit our tension and conflict to God!
- Now, you might be thinking, "but this scripture doesn't tell us HOW to walk in God's way!"
  - We live in a culture that wants the 5 easy steps to healthy conflict, but the Bible doesn't necessarily address every topic in that way. Why?
    - The Bible primarily focuses on principle and virtue, because principle and virtue transcend culture and time.
    - When we read a command to walk in a specific principle or virtue it is up to us to seek out tools and practices that help us to live by that principle or virtue.
    - So, what are some practices and tools that we can use to walk in purity, consideration, teachability, love and peace?
  - One of the primary ways that these principles and virtues find their voice is through conversation, let's dive into two practical tools that pertain to communication:
    - "I" Language
      - Even when we have the best of intentions, what we say to each other can escalate a simple conflict or tension into a full-blown fight that really wounds one another.
        - Our brains are programmed to assess potential threats. Even without our total awareness we take in tone, body language and what is being said to determine if we should engage, run or shut down.
        - This is why even a few seconds into a conversation we can experience elevated heart rates, heat, sweating, and physical fatigue.
      - Studies have shown when we use "I-language," we reduce the probability of a fight by taking responsibility for our emotions while honestly expressing how actions or words have affected us.

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- I-language is a way to hold each other accountable for actions, while sharing how those actions have affected us.
- In order to really understand I-language we need to understand its opposite, “you-language”.
- “You- language” shows no ownership of emotion, instead it places the responsibility of the emotion we are feeling on the other person.
- “You-language” accuses the other person without taking into account the fact that we are actually the ones who choose how we feel.
- How do we build “I-language”?
  - First, remember that the point of “I-language” is to express how we feel inside.
    - “I-language” starts by expressing the specific emotions of whoever is speaking.
      - This looks like beginning with the words “I feel...” joyful, excited, honored, seen, calm, anxious, sad, stressed, lonely, distrusted, resentful, angry, controlled, embarrassed, fearful, etc.
      - This is followed by the action that provided the opportunity for those emotions to be felt.
- It can be difficult to use “I-language” if you’re not used to it. Here are a few examples and comparisons to get a better feel for what this looks like in real time:
  - **“You made me feel stressed** when you didn’t tell me you were running late”.
  - **“I felt stressed** when you didn’t tell me you were running late.”
  
  - **“You make me feel nervous** about our finances because you spend money and never think about the budget”.
  - **“I feel nervous** about our finances when you seem to spend money without thinking about the budget.”
  
  - **“You made me feel embarrassed** when you made that comment about me in front of our friends.”
  - **“I felt embarrassed** when you made that comment about me in front of our friends.”
  
  - **“You make me angry** when you ignore every time I have told you to put your clothes in the hamper.”
  - **“I feel angry and hurt** when you leave your clothes on the floor because I thought I had communicated how important it was to me that you remember to put them in the laundry basket.”
  
  - **“You take me for granted** no matter what I do.
  - **“I feel taken for granted** when you don’t notice the things that I do.
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  - **“You make me feel rejected** because you avoid me when you’re tired.”

- “**I feel rejected** when you seem to avoid me when you’re really tired.”
- Be careful not to tack the words “I feel” in front of “you-language.”
  - For example, “I feel like you are taking me for granted.” That is just “you-language” in disguise.
- Also, tone is everything. There is big difference between:
  - I feel & **I FEEL!**
- I-language provides us the opportunity to share our hearts and emotions without assuming you know the intentions or motives of someone else’s heart.
- “**No one can know a person’s thoughts except that person’s own spirit...**” - 1 Corinthians 2:11 NLT
  - It doesn’t matter how perceptive or prophetic we are, and it doesn’t matter how long we’ve been with someone, we can never perfectly know someone’s heart or mind.
  - One of the biggest mistakes we can make in resolving conflict is deciding we already know how someone thinks and feels and that we know exactly why they did what they did.
    - This is why we desperately need this second tool:
- QUESTIONS:
  - Family, the all knowing God inserted Himself into the greatest conflict of all time with a question.
    - “**When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees. Then the Lord God called to the man, “**Where are you?**”** - Genesis 3:8-9 NLT
  - God in all His knowledge continually asks questions. Whereas, the devil is known as the accuser.
    - Questions with a pure motiveless are inherently Christlike.
    - Assumptions and accustations are inherently inspired by the accuser, Satan.
  - We need to ask ourselves, “Who am I aligning with in this moment?”
    - Do we approach conflict with questions, or with assumptive statements?
  - Questions remove the ambiguity of our own thoughts and allow who we are speaking with to tell us their heart and motive.
    - An assumptive statement uses limited information and perception as fact against someone.
  - Questions relieve the pressure to know it all, and provide opportunity to go directly to the root of potential conflict.

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- Assumptive statements sum up a persons actions while implying you know their motive and intention.
- When we use I-language or ask questions we need to make sure that our own motives and intentions are pure.
- A simple way to check the pulse of our motivation is by asking ourselves, “is the purpose of my words to make peace or punish?”
  - When we engage in tension and conflict God’s way we can say or discover the truth in a way that builds powerful connection and produces peace.