

Life on Life 301 – Dealing with Resistance
Class 12 // July 25, 2021

I. Dealing with Resistance

A. What is resistance?

Resistance is one of various forms of “push-back” a person might receive when trying to help someone face issues biblically. It especially happens when you try to talk about something that might shame them or require them to make a life change. It takes many forms including not responding, deceit, changing the subject, shifting the blame, angry resentment, or even humorous redirection.

1. **The first example of resistance in the Bible** is in Genesis 3:8-13 immediately after Adam sinned. Adam and Eve first covered themselves (3:7 / resistance 1), then hid (3:8 / resistance 2), then Adam shifted the blame towards Eve and even God (3:12 / resistance 3). Cain does the same thing in Genesis 4:9 when God asks where his brother is and Cain lies and makes an excuse.
2. **Another example of resistance to conviction and exposure** is Peter in the courtyard of the high priest when asked if he was with Jesus and he denies it three times in Matthew 26:69-75.
3. **Another is Saphira when asked if her husband Ananias sold** the property for such-and-such an amount of money in Acts 5. The Holy Spirit was inducing her to tell the truth but she resisted.
4. An example **when resistance did not occur** but could have was David when confronted by Nathan. Nathan’s “parable” of the owner with one ewe vs. the man with many ewes (2 Samuel 12) was a way to overcome the resistance that might have naturally occurred in a confrontation, especially of a leader (see, for example, Ecclesiastes 4:13).

B. When will you encounter resistance?

1. You will often encounter it when you prod a person to look at the “*why under the what*” (**motives**). A husband who looks at his motives is likely to see that “getting what I want” was more important than loving his wife. That is harder to see about yourself than “I was a little frustrated.”
2. You will get it when you prod a person **to be specific about what they actually did or said** rather than being “general” in their description. A wife would rather say, “*It sometimes upsets me when he says, “I need a break and don’t want to mess with finances,”* than to say, “Well, he was watching baseball on TV and I said ‘You are not doing anything. Would you come balance the checkbook for once?’ He said this is not the time for me; I am tired. I yelled at him and it woke our six year old.”

C. What is the purpose of resistance? What motivates and reinforces resistance?
Resistance seeks to “hold onto one’s life.” It is a means of not seeing our neediness or sinfulness which forces us to either depend on Christ or harden our heart. It is a way we keep other people from seeing parts of us that we sense we might be judged for. It is reinforced by pride and fear and the attempt to keep others from finding fault. Resistance is often reduced by grace (think of the woman taken in adultery or Titus 2:11-14).

D. Remember whose life it is. We as Christian friends do not have the right to pressure and force them to obey. Sometimes that attitude on our part creates conflict with those we try to help. If this was your life and you were deceived about something you believed was essential to life, how would you want them to relate with you?

You are a 39-year old husband whose wife frequently points out your shortcomings. You tend to pull away from her to get her off your back or yell at her.

You are a 40-year old wife whose husband is very “to himself” and not very helpful and rather selfish. You tend to either pressure him or give him a cold treatment.

If the two of you decided to get some counseling help, would the man want the guy helping him to tell him to suck it up, quit griping and become a servant to her? Would the woman want the woman helping her to tell her to get over herself, to trust God and to be a helper rather than a scornful woman?

In reality, there is some truth in those pieces of counsel. But if we are in a hurry to get them to “shape up” and are not helping them grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, not helping them see how the Lord can be there for them, we will actually intensify the natural resistance that exists in all of us.

Let’s look at a few verses that inform this area of resistance:

1. Proverbs 16:25 – people really think their way is right
2. Isaiah 55:7-9 – people have to forsake their wicked way and unrighteous thoughts (repentance), we can’t do it for them
3. Matthew 16:25 – we all have a tendency to hold onto our own lives
4. Jeremiah 2:10-13 – we think what we do brings “water” but it leaks and we do not naturally see that in doing so, we are actually neglecting God
5. Isaiah 55:1-2 – help them see that God doesn’t fault them for being thirsty; in fact, He applauds it and offers to satisfy us

E. No man fails to look for life. It is just that he is deceived and twisted and foolish (see Romans 3:10-18 also) as to where to find it. He longs for something more and that’s OK – it’s a way to see our need for God. But he’s going bad directions for life and that produces death and calls for repentance in the one who is convicted and who believes in God’s grace.

E. Prod gently

It is right to help them see their resistance, but do it in love. Sometimes, it takes gentleness and patience.

1. Matthew 23:37 – Jesus weeps over the stubborn people of Jerusalem, showing God’s heart for us. Help the resistant see this.
2. I Thess. 2:7-8 – Notice how Paul, even as he teaches and encourages and exhorts (see verse 11), maintains the tender heart of a mother.
3. 2 Tim. 2:24-26 – When we get frustrated at the resistant person we are trying to help, we do well to remember a) that we are not to be quarrelsome and b) that we will be wronged when we try to help (v. 24)
4. Jeremiah 2:5-8 – We can actually help the resistant when we ask them to articulate how God has failed them or how He has been unfaithful. We do so because we know He hasn’t and isn’t and we want them to wrestle with the reality that is often under their resistance to conviction (namely, “I deserve better,” or “I’m not all that bad”).

- F. Trust your hunch but be open.
This is really important but a bit hard to teach. It means that your “gut” will often alert you to when someone is resisting. Sometimes it is obvious on its face. But sometimes it is more of a hunch. You notice they are general and not specific. You notice that they are not hearing anything from the Lord in their homework. You notice they change the subject to how their circumstances are determining their life.
The reason I say “be open,” is that I need to be open to something I can’t see or am not aware of. For example, I think they are resisting God’s conviction about something when in reality, they are resisting the pressure they feel from me or they do not feel like I am for them as much as they feel I am trying to make something happen. In that case, I may be right that there is something they are resisting, and it may include the Lord, but I might be in the way, too.

II. Processing: Using the "Here and Now"

- A. What is processing and why do we use it?
Processing is using the way that your interaction with that person right now makes you feel. It is using your gut to help you identify places of possible resistance in them, and to determine where you may want to go with them. If one of your teenagers stands in front of a closed door and you ask what is going on in there and he or she stammers, “Uh, nothing, uh, no one...” you are very likely getting resistance. Processing might be using your gut instinct to ask, “Barry, why do I feel like you’re not telling me everything?”
(By the way, an important side note on parenting, especially as your kids get older. Some parents think the main point is to “catch them” and to get the truth. It isn’t. The main point is to do what you do to help them engage their heart with truth. Jesus invites people to see truth, but doesn’t force it – even when He knows it. He invites them to be convicted and to repent, but He doesn’t force them. Remember: What goes on between them and God is way more important than what goes on between you and them. It is not about you.)
- B. What is significant about "here and now"?
- People live in the present and replicate what is in their hearts. They are not even aware they do it. But if they are defensive when confronted by a spouse, they generally will be defensive with you. If they are manipulative and smooth with a spouse, they generally will be the same with you. If they control elsewhere, they generally will with you, too. What they do in the here and now generally reflects their strategy which reflects what is going on in their hearts.
- C. What results from processing?
- It often gives you access to something they would not have said directly, but which they were living out. It can often get to motivations and fears and anger when direct questions do not.

III. Working With Someone Who Shuts Down When Confronted

- A. Fairly common issue. Probably a number of different principles we can consider in responding to this problem, but here are some suggestions.
- B. Help them see God's idea of receiving admonition and the contrast between that and the way they feel about admonition.
 - 1. Step One: Meet alone with them. Goal: reduce level of defensiveness and sense of "attack" when addressing this topic. Sometimes means stopping marital counseling awhile.
 - 2. Step Two: Read/discuss with them *On Receiving Admonition* and many of the Proverbs which address the topic of receiving correction (Proverbs 1:7, 1:8, 1:20-27, 1:28-30, 2:1-7, 3:1-2, 3:11-12, 4:1-8, 9:7-12, 10:17, 12:1, 15, 13:1, 13:14, 14:6, 7, 12, 15:1-5, 15:31-33, 17:10, 18:13, 19:20, 25, 27, 22:17, 29:1). Goal is to get them to at least begin to love correction as they see the Word address it.
 - 3. Step Three: Ask about the "confrontation situation" when we saw that responding to "admonition" was hard for them.
 - a. Ask them to describe what that was like for them, how often it happens with that person, how they normally respond... basically, draw it out for them.... Listen, don't correct. Listen for the words they use to describe it.
 - b. Ask if it happens elsewhere. When else has correction/ admonition been an issue? Most of the time, people with a hard time being corrected are not real convicted about it. They often justify it based on the other person's behavior.
 - c. Recognize that often a fleshly response of self-protection from correction (a "besetting or entangling" sin according to Hebrews 12:1) can be a response to harmful treatment by others in the past (an "encumbrance" of Hebrews 12:1). Doesn't mean that they shouldn't deal with that through repentance and trust, but does help us understand we may need to be especially gentle and patient with them (See 2 Tim. 2:24-26).
 - 4. Step Four: Summarize the obvious: God's perspective and theirs on receiving correction is different. Process that and pray about it, as well as make assignments for next time. If they can see they need to be more open to input, then this exercise has been profitable. Think of something they can do to deepen this new conviction and give it as homework.
- C. If you need a few more sessions, using homework and instruction,
 - 1. Study idolatry if that applies (usually does) (James 4:1-10).
 - 2. Study Heb. 12:1-2 (usually applies) – important to get that.
 - 3. Study Welch's *When People Are Big and God is Small*.
 - 4. Study the issue of the gospel and the grace of God if they misunderstand our hope. Many people who are defensive really forget or don't fully grasp the fact of Galatians 6:14 that our only boast is in the cross of Christ. They are still trying to avoid seeing their weakness when it is our weakness that shows our need for Christ (Mt. 9:12, Mt. 5:3, John 12:24, 2 Cor. 12:7-10)

IV. Small group "Process" practice

A. You started off very well with this counselee. S/he was warm and open and eager in the first three sessions. S/he did all the homework and seemed hopeful. The past two sessions, s/he has been much quieter and the homework has been less "inspiring." Today s/he was ten minutes late where always before, s/he arrived a little early. **Process.**

B. You and your spouse are meeting with a couple from your community group. You have developed a friendship over the past year and a half, but they have asked for prayer for their relationship for a while and it has led to you inviting them over for coffee, dessert and to talk about it.

This is the fourth time you have been with them. But when you ask her questions, you notice that she often looks at him before she speaks, and you notice he doesn't make much eye contact. You realize that this "HALO" data (please review the class last fall on Gathering Data) has been going on for awhile, and even shows up in Community Group. **Process.**