



The Art of Deescalation

Proverbs 17:9,14 He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends. ...Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.

- If you've ever seen Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*, one of the famous one-liners from that film takes place when the English and Scottish forces have drawn up their battle lines at Stirling and the opposing generals meet together to discuss terms of peace. Soon thereafter William Wallace (Gibson) and his warriors arrive covered in face paint. When asked what he intends to do next, he answers, "I'm going to pick a fight," and a fight is exactly what he got—a big bloody war of a fight. So too, if we go through life looking for things to offend us, searching for reasons to get upset, refusing to forgive and continually rehashing the wrongs of the past, we are looking for a fight, and that's exactly what we'll find with much blood and pain and enemies along the way.
- Yes, our culture glorifies and finds great glee in winning the argument and getting payback on one's enemies, but that is not the godly way. Our attitudes as Christians should not be that of warmongers but peace-makers, who turn the other cheek in order to show the love of Christ and sow the seeds of righteousness. Rather than being agitators in our public and private lives, God intends us to be de-escalators. Each of us is called to do all that we can to defuse a world gone haywire, gone hostile, without compromising the gospel or sacrificing the truth. That's not an easy task, especially not in a climate where every dial—emotional, social, racial, political—is being cranked up to 1000%. No it's not easy, in fact it's impossible without the Lord.
- When wronged or offended our natural inclination is to seek revenge, to make the other person hurt like we hurt, or at the very least to use that shame and guilt as leverage in the future. But the Lord shows us the better way. Imagine how awful it would be if our God would want to rub our noses in our past guilt and repeat offenses. Day after day we make the same dumb mistakes, and day after day he could drag us over to another big steaming pile of shame and say, "And what do you call that?!" But God knew that no amount of contrition or remorse on our part could ever atone for our wrongs, so rather than wage a war of wrath against humanity, he decided instead to show us undeserved love by covering up our offenses in the blood of his Son, by covering our shame in the robe of Christ's righteousness so that now we are legitimately called friends of God (cf. Rom. 3:21-26; John 15:15). And so as friends of God who have tasted his mercy, let's imitate him by giving up our "right" to be offended and defusing our desire to pick a fight with those who differ or disagree with us. Let's be de-escalators who live to bring the divided back together again on the common ground of God's love and grace and truth.

Prayer: Lord God, forgive me for my foolish pride that shows itself in my defensiveness and my desire to get instantly offended by every little slight or wrong that comes my way. Instead give me a heart like yours that is eager to forgive and quick to forget, that would rather be silent than start a fight. Amen.